

Memory, Nostalgia and Changing Dynamics of “being” and “becoming”: A Comparative Study of Adib Khan’s *Spiral Road* and Manju Kapur’s *The Immigrant*

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Abstract

Memory studies have emerged as a new literary genre in recent times. It works as a tool to remember one’s past by going back in time. Memories can be related to one’s home and the time spent with one’s family and loved ones. Breaking away from one’s past and moving towards one’s present is impossible. One’s memories keep haunting us, even if one is busy assimilating into their new life. On the other hand, Nostalgia is a feeling of alienation and longing that a person feels when they are far away from their home. It mostly occurs when one realises that they belong neither to their native land nor to their foreign land. The fundamental cause of their desire and sorrow for the lost home is that they tend to create shattered identities. The shifting dynamics of "being" and "becoming" remain an important part of one's existence since they are so important to those who live abroad. The sense of "being" is founded on memories of a certain location, nation, population, ethnic group, culture, etc. The sensation of "becoming" refers to one's current situation in any foreign or alien country and using all the amenities provided by their new home. This paper will show how memory and nostalgia are the key factors to consider when immigrants are physically and emotionally away from home. Through these novels, both authors continue to capture the sentiments of alienation and desire successfully. These emotions are the result of immigrants' non-acceptance and hostility in their chosen country.

Keywords: Memory, Home, Being, Migration, Immigrant.

Memory is a pre-existing written form of expression in literature. Many times, one sees that memories are created not just from historical events but also from social, political, and other occurrences in the lives of literary characters. Three major types still exist in texts that employ memory as a phenomenon. On the one hand, it determines the validity and significance of a text based on the reputation of ancient authors. Second, memory imbues a text with a sense of nostalgia. Thirdly, it positions itself as a means of creating a personal and cultural identity. Particularly in the literature of the English Middle Ages and the romantic movement of the early 19th century, the earliest development of memory as a topic was pervasive. While American and British authors exploited the second construction of memory amid the sociopolitical changes

brought on by World Wars 1st and 2nd in the 20th century, the third construction of memory, which permeates all literary works, deals with personal or societal difficulties; as a result, it serves as the primary focus in the classics. *The Iliad* by Homer and *The Aeneid* by Virgil are two of the oldest written epics that make memory a major literary topic. By blending mythical elements with accounts of great leaders, valiant wars, and historical events, they both strive to highlight the philosophy and character of the Greek and Roman countries. Through this, it is possible to present the works realistically while also referencing them to genuine historical names and locations through the use of catalogues and the names of significant historical personalities. These pieces give fiction a dash of historical memory. Homer establishes his opinion of the national identity of ancient Greece by demonstrating Achilles' bravery and courage throughout the Trojan War. Even in today's society, this viewpoint is popular.

Virgil gives individual memory the top priority in his writings to include both individual and community memory. To establish the topic of memory as having the utmost importance in and of itself, mediaeval writers who were more devoted to conventional methods sought arguments based on sacred texts. Catalogues were made based on ancient Greek and Roman models to popularise the use of memory as a subject, and religious writers also built the memory tradition of thinking and cultural identity via their works. In his book, *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer gives a great illustration of this. Through this work, he depicts the pilgrims who visit Thomas Beckett's shrine.

Chaucer demonstrates how the British of his day felt about different social, political, and religious matters. His creative output becomes the ideal illustration of how to use memory to create a shared memory. The British romantics revolutionized how memories are used in writing. Many of their works are based on traditional forms and themes, which they used to expound on the notions of personal nostalgia and the search for identity. Most people agree that William Wordsworth's poem "Lines Composed A Few Limes Above Tintern Abbey" is still considered to be a part of the romantic movement or revival. One can observe from this poem that the narrator returns to the location he had visited, but he is astonished to find the changes in the abbey. At the same time, he enjoys the countryside's natural surroundings, which used to fascinate him. As we can see in the example of Abbey, it is a sort of collective memory when a person's memories manifest as nostalgia. The feelings and memories connected to the abbey never change, even though objects and surroundings may have altered. It is something that one cannot escape. Memory is a key component of authority formation in the modern world, as well as the formation of individual and societal identity.

The most discussed and studied aspect of memory is immigrant memory, which is always a topic of discussion. If one wishes to discuss the sensation of nostalgia, immigrant memory is crucial. When one speaks of immigrant memory, one usually refers to feelings and recollections of one's home country. As an illustration, a medical student studying Swiss mercenaries in the 17th century came to the idea that people might simply experience nostalgia or even homesickness after moving to a new place. In the place where one migrates, this nostalgia or love for the

country has created a new cultural group. In this sense, it is clear that nostalgia plays a significant part in one's immigrant identity. Although closely tied to memory, nostalgia also has ties to one's past and becomes a significant source of pride and inspiration for people. The notion of absence or alienation has radically altered because of modern technology and internet connectivity, which makes it easier for immigrants to connect with or contact their countries of origin. The term "nostalgia" can also refer to immigrant groups or diasporas that forge their own identities in a new country. Conversely, diasporic memory has a distinct meaning when compared to the sentiment of nostalgia. An immigrant strives in a new nation to forge their own identity. Typically, they are regarded as foreign nationals who move to another country for a job or profession. They thus experience a sense of estrangement and rejection from the inhabitants of their new home. Additionally, their new home does not absorb any memories of their ancestral place. Additionally, the state authorities are crucial to immigrants' integration into the culture of their new country (Kaprans 2).

Many diasporic authors have strong links with their native countries, which remains a characteristic of the modern "diasporic" since they travel there physically or virtually through their writings. Salman Rushdie discussed this position about the diaspora while nostalgically describing the painful loss of not being able to "restore the past (India) to himself" in his essay "Imaginary Homelands" (11). One cannot choose between their past and present. Because the past continually interferes with the present, the past cannot be separated from the present. The vectors of "similarity" and "continuity," as well as the vectors of "difference" and "rupture," are the other two vectors that theorists like Stuart Hall use to describe diasporic identity. The diasporic 'being' may reside in their birthplace or remain a part of it. The 'becoming' focuses on an immigrant's present situation in a foreign country and the experiences one has there. He cannot accurately discuss one experience or identity for a very long in the new country without mentioning the opposite side—the rifts and discontinuities of the diasporic experience. When living in a foreign country, "he cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about one experience, one identity, without acknowledging the other side—the ruptures and discontinuities of the diasporic experience." Because of this, diasporic cultural identity is typically future-focused and not based on the idea of an absolute, integrated self—"some full closed narrative of the self." The novel *Spiral Road* by Adib Khan refers to this philosophy of "being" and "becoming" (Lakuge 49).

Adib Khan is an Australian novelist of Bangladeshi descent. Born in Bangladesh's capital city of Dhaka, he remained there up till 1973. In 1973, he made his way to Australia. He is a renowned Australian-Bangladeshi author who has garnered several accolades for his writing. *Seasonal Adjustments*, his debut book, earned the New South Wales Literary Award, the Australian Book of the Year, and the fiction category of the Christina Stead Prize. The book was also shortlisted for the 1994 Age Book of the Year award and went on to win the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1995. His other novels are *Solitude of Illusions*, *The Storyteller*, *Homecoming*, and *Spiral Road*. In his books, he discussed how an immigrant's existence is split between two vectors of "being" and "becoming," of which both the hometown and the adapted land are a part. The main

protagonist of the novel *Spiral Road* is Masud Alam, an immigrant who landed in Melbourne, Australia. After being severely impacted by the 1971 Pakistan-Bangladesh massacre, he escaped Bangladesh. He was even classified as a terrorist or rebel when he took part in the conflict with Pakistan. Thirty years after Masud left Bangladesh and twelve years after his final trip home, the narrative begins. He must see his father out of obligation as a son, so he returns to Bangladesh against his choice. His father has just been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Consequently, he wants to look after his father throughout this time (49).

From his most recent trip home to when he goes back to Bangladesh to when he returns to Melbourne, Masud experiences suffering throughout the novel. Masud struggles to accept that his existence in Melbourne is rootless. As the postcolonial thinker Avtah Brah explains, "diasporic trips are about establishing roots elsewhere" (182), just as diasporic existence is about keeping physical links with one's native place. Because he has few friends in Melbourne, Masud's "inconspicuous" personal life and unappealing career as a librarian do not appear to be able to provide him with a sense of purpose in life. His relationship with Amelia, a single mother from Melbourne, is likewise unhappy, although he continues to act as a modest but distant man to her adolescent kids. He keeps trying to get back to Melbourne when life in Bangladesh starts to scare him because he wants to get away from the traumatic memories of Bangladesh. He does not, however, seek a life of migration. His relocation to Melbourne is a step away from his past and towards a promising future. Then, contrasts are drawn between Masud's beautiful past, that era in the centre of the extended family that was devoid of gloom, and the present of his "becoming" in Melbourne, where he appears to have degraded into a defeated being (Lakuge 50).

His sentiments, which were suppressed in Melbourne, progressively reveal both his true life and his turbulent connection with his family as the plot develops. He also starts to open up again as the novel goes on. He learned about buried realities about his family as well as about himself by reestablishing contact with them. Finally, Masud chooses to forgo his trip back to Melbourne. He discovers a new side of himself when he is in Bangladesh, a side of himself he had long attempted to suppress. His connection to his family and his sense of belonging as a Bangladeshi is more significant than his soulless existence in Melbourne. In the end, it appears that his "being" is more impressive than his "becoming."

In Indian English literature, Manju Kapur is a well-known contemporary author. She teaches English literature at Delhi University's Miranda House. Up to this point, she has released five books and one collection. Her well-known books are *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, *The Immigrant*, *Custody*, and *Brothers*. She covers various topics in her books, including feminism, the diaspora, and social and economic factors. *The Immigrant* is a novel about feeling unwelcome and banished in a strange country. The story focuses on the lives of immigrants who are divided between two worlds and two very different cultures. However, immigrants come up with a variety of strategies to maintain some sort of connection to their home country. One might ease the ache of loneliness and melancholy in a foreign location by reflecting on one's past. It is

also true that an immigrant cannot find a place to belong. He does not belong in either his country of origin or the alien country.

The Immigrant is a story of Nina and Ananda, who immigrated to Canada following their marriage. Nina is a girl with a good education and a stable job. At Miranda House, she teaches English literature. Her parents want her to get married and move overseas because she comes from an orthodox, traditional household. While women of her age were established in life, enjoying parenthood, and living happily ever after in marriage by the time they were thirty, she did not get married until then. Ananda, however, is resolved to move overseas and acquire Canadian citizenship. However, moving to a foreign country might appear like a rebirth since one may experience a new environment and culture. Ananda has been working as a dentist in Dehradun and has never considered leaving India. Her uncle persuaded him to immigrate to Canada after her parents died in a car accident. Twenty years ago, his uncle moved to Halifax. Ananda finds it difficult to cope with losing his parents, so he decides it would be best to move to a new location. He does it to ease the agony of losing his parents (Bajaj 2).

Ananda arrives in Canada and discovers empty spaces or fractured selves everywhere. After some time in Canada, he begins to differentiate things in his adoptive country from those in his native country. He is used to the crowdedness and activity of India, but he cannot find those things in Canada. People in this place are so reserved that they barely talk to their neighbours. Ananda disapproves of such actions. Everywhere they travel, immigrants bring a piece of their culture and morals, thus making them inseparable from their native home. Even though his uncle had urged him to embrace his new life in Canada, his immigrant psychology could not be forgotten. Even in a new country, they feel nostalgic for things they left behind. They therefore struggle to fit in at their alien home. Immigrants gradually begin to embrace and enjoy their new lives. Ananda defied all the taboos associated with his Indian identity when he excelled in the dentistry college and used alcohol for the first time. Under the effect of his new persona, he begins to feel like he is changing. He now has a new position, new responsibilities, and new tasks to do. When one is embarking on a new life, change is necessary (Devi 2-3).

Through this novel, Kapur also explores NRI marriages, in which both partners choose to leave behind their familiar surroundings and settle in a foreign country. As a result, both experience disappointment, astonishment, and longing. Both appear to be looking for the lost parts of themselves that formerly made up who they were. All immigrants desire a higher quality of life, but they have realised that east is west and west is east, and the two can never truly converge. Like other immigrants, Nina, Ananda's wife, feels lonely because she left her family and even a well-paying career to marry an NRI. She cries, "I miss home- I miss a job- I miss doing things, I feel like a shadow what am I but your wife" (*Immigrant* 23). She travels alone to Halifax after married to Ananda, but she has an unpleasant first experience there. The immigration woman has questioned her, which she felt was completely pointless. She starts communicating with people and makes peace with her new life as the narrative progresses. She used to be a professor before being married to Ananda, and she is self-sufficient. There is no need for her to rely on anyone.

The situation is very different in Canada compared to her own country. Because she is no longer recognised for her uniqueness, she is acknowledged as someone's wife. Kapur concludes this novel with Nina's statement:

Perhaps that was the ultimate immigrant experience. Not that any one thing was steady enough for the rest of your life, but that you find different ways to belong, ways not necessarily lasting, but ones that make your journey less lonely for a while. When something failed it was a signal to move on. For an immigrant, there was no going back. When one was reinventing oneself, anywhere could be home. Pull up your shallow roots and move. Find a new place, new friends, a new family. It has been possible once, it would be possible again (334).

One might infer from the above quotation that immigrants do not have their own homes. There is no other alternative for them if they decide to reside in a location that is not their own. They can either adopt a new identity or reject their old one. Because they do not stay alone and are uninterested for very long, one may also see that immigrants find various methods to fit in. One could have trouble adjusting to a new environment if one maintains their current mindset of refusing to integrate into a different country. Additionally, it is asserted that change is crucial when relocating to a new country. It is also evident that some immigrants succeed in doing so, whilst others struggle. If one does not cope with transient conditions, it is a clue for them to leave the memories of their home behind and strive to adjust to their new home. Additionally, one might try to establish a connection with the persons of other races. One's life in a new environment gets simpler when they meet new friends and people. If they are successful in doing so once, their lives will be more convenient and pleasant. Once they do it, there is no turning back.

By examining both works, one finds that immigrants still have a sense of nostalgia even after becoming fully immersed in a new identity, culture and way of life. If one travels to any location in the globe, memories of home are still present. Someone might indeed alter their manners when they are influenced by their foreign environment since their new existence offers them a life full of many chances. Their new surroundings might reveal a completely new world that is distinct from their homeland. One must embrace the customs and traditions of a new place to thrive there. Their native identity continues getting in the way of valuing their adoptive identity, which prevents them from assimilating into their new home. However, we also see that when immigrants return to their home country, they do not see the same landmarks that they saw when they initially immigrated to a distant country. Devastated, they begin to believe they have nowhere to turn. They are not a part of their native land or adopted country. They thus feel trapped between the two places and identities. It is also important to remember that even when one is living abroad, a connection to their own country still exists. It is difficult to sever one's ties to one's country, much like an umbilical cord. One's cultural identity and values are ingrained in who they are, thus it is unclear how someone could afford to abandon them.

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