

Dislocation, Alienation and Dilemma: The Making and re-making of Transcultural Negotiations in Adib Khan's Select Novels

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Abstract

The diasporic literary oeuvre always embodies idiosyncrasies of “in between” expatriate subjects, living in the metropolis, simultaneously thinking the “locale”. Their “glocalized” attitude necessitates a propensity to produce a “return home” ethos among them that is mostly informed by memory and nostalgia. As a matter of fact, in diaspora studies, the dynamics of “root” and “route” has become increasingly an all-engrossing concept during the past decades. Consequently, in both postcolonial theory and literary texts, exile, expatriation, and migration have been productively and extensively explored as the various forms of dislocations. Thus, diaspora studies as a field of postcolonial cultural theory has a special interest in the affective dimensions of migration and diaspora—homesickness, memory, nostalgia and melancholy. The tension between home land and host land with its consequent idiosyncrasies is mitigated by the phenomenon of memory— it opens up a new avenue of recuperation of the past, at the same time imaginatively hones the vista of future potentiality. Therefore, their desire to entoute in the root materializes in the mental terrain nostalgically that substantially makes them sick of the both lands. The diasporic subject, being de-territorialized from homeland reminiscences the “root” through memory to re-territorialize it in metropolitan centre. The dynamics of past and future is greatly agglutinated to unleash a ‘present’, heavily underpinned by memory. Thus, memory in diasporic contour acts as recuperative performative as well as liberating potentials. The expatriate migrants in host land enjoin the both of these functions of memory to construe a “self-constituted identity” wherein they envision formulating an essentialized rediscovered identity anchored in historical root. The present paper, under the rubric of ethos explicated above, explores how Adib Khan’s two novels—*Seasonal Adjustment* and *Solitude of Illusions* portray the disquiet despondency and sense of alienation in the diasporic figures due to their home sickness and rootlessness in contemporary spatio-temporal reality; and how memory plays a formidable role to cop up with such predicament of expatriate subject in between the two polarities.

Keywords: Diaspora, Home, Memory, Host land. Multi-culturalism

Typical to other diaspora writers, Adib Khan's *Seasonal Adjustment* (1994) and *Solitude of Illusions* (1996) depict the idiosyncrasies of the migrant figures underpinned by the dichotomy of host land and homeland. Since Khan has firsthand experience about the plight and suffering of the migrants in Australia, his works mirror the issues of migrant people, their identity, integration and their relation with the people of the mainstream society. They often oscillate between past and present hoping for inner peace of mind which seems to be unattainable to them. The ongoing paper will re-read two major novels of Adib Khan with a view to scrutinizing how the conflicting values unite his oeuvre on both the spatial and temporal grounds. It will focus on the themes of anxiety and insecurity of the deracinated individuals or groups and their interaction with the mainstream society against the backdrop of globalization.

The protagonist of *Seasonal Adjustment*, Iqbal Chaudhary has been living in Australia for 18 years as a librarian. His displacement from home land substantially makes him deracinated being ontologically, and de-territorialized figure geographically. In order to see his ailing father, he has come to Bangladesh, and develops a cynical scepticism of distant onlookers. Nevertheless, he grows a nostalgic empathy with his mother land, but only to be frustrated by the gulf exist between the two polarities—“I regret my exposure to the diversity of cultural radiation which bleached my individuality” (SA 9). The phrase “diversity of cultural radiation” is loaded one indeed. It immediately arrests our attention to the present individual identity of the speaker that has been shaped by his “exposure” to multi-culturalism. It will be examined in details later on. However, his next novel *Solitude of Illusions* (1996) moves between Kolkata and Australia and deals with the same issues like migration, nostalgia and idiosyncrasies of diaspora subject. Khalid Sharif, an elderly character, suffers from a terminal illness and visits to Australia wherein his son Javed lives as a transnational being. Khalid Sharif now, living in Australia broods over the rich tapestry of subcontinent: its landscapes and cultural artifacts through the lens of memory. The tension between father and son becomes conspicuous in terms of traditional values and cosmopolitan modernity. The former halts after his identity in nostalgia and letter embodies the ethos of multiculturalism.

Memory is one of the most contentious terms in the politics of cultural identity and spatial belongingness. The tension between home land and host land with its consequent idiosyncrasies is mitigated by the phenomenon of memory— it opens up a new avenue of recuperation of the past, at the same time imaginatively hones the vista of future potentiality. The dynamics of past and future is greatly agglutinize to unleash a “present”, heavily underpinned by memory. M.G. Vassanji in describing the predicament of diasporic writer endorses the similar views “The reclamation of the past is the first serious act of writing. Having claimed it, having given himself a history, he liberates himself to write about the present” (63). Thus, memory in diasporic contour acts as a recuperative performative as well as liberating potentials. The expatriate migrants in host land enjoin the both of these functions of memory to construed a “self-constituted identity” wherein they envision to formulate an essentialized rediscovered identity anchored in historical root. The novels under discussion here do uphold the same maxim of memory through its character portrayal and their resultant mental dilemma.

Having under gone a sense of unfamiliarity in host land and experiencing a disillusionment regarding so called multiculturalism in their place of residence, the diasporic figure tries to reclaim their past, at least psychologically, if not physically. As Roland Robertson rightly opines— “In fact this is much to suggest that the sense of home and

locality are contingent upon alienation from home and/or locale” (480). Such sense of alienation continues to haunt Iqbal constantly— “I allow myself to feel lonely again” (SA179). Under such contingency, it is imperative to perceive homeliness in the mental terrain, not in the temporal reality. In such a juncture memory plays a great role as a liberating force to recuperate the images of home land through nostalgia. — “I am at home in an empirical world of sense impressions” (SA 7). Thus, their de-territorialization from the home land always makes them keen to re-territorialize in the metropolis. But the disquiet in the metropolitan centre in turn, pushes them to return to their native territory—either physically or mentally. Thus, to re-territorialize the native space in metropolitan centre “memory struggles sluggishly” (SA 4). Therefore, Iqbal plans to go “home” in summer holidays after 18 years of staying away from home. He broods— “English years is a very long time; long enough to realize that for a migrant the word *home* is fraught with ambiguities” (SA61).

The disquiet in host land is largely informed by the cultural difference of the subject concerned—as Iqbal confesses —“Like most first -generation migrants I was sensitive about the uncertainty of my place in the community” (SA 85). But unlike traditional nationalistic phase of diaspora writings; Adib Khan never glorifies the homeland, rather he depicted the wretched reality of the home land— “Everything appears to be dilapidated. Old. Dirty” (SA 40). Mere physical return to homeland does not necessarily satisfy the homing desire craved for long time. Rather its bleakness sometimes blurs the idealization of past memory— resulting only personal disquiet— “It is the forlorn cry of the wretched homeless belched out into the open by an uncaring and overstuffed city” (SA 102). And such gulf is only mitigated by memory and its nostalgic recuperation of the past— that tries to consolidate the sense of belonging – “the desire to cling to a past may be an admission of an inability to change, or it could indicate a wish to escape unhappiness by reverting to a world we once knew” (SA 116).

Though the reclamation of memory is not fully realized in the dislocated mental scape, the memory tries to provide a rooting comfort to the vexed mind of culturally fractured diasporic subjects who can invoke memory as “The memory; oh, the memory!” (SA 121). While he is received in home land with bitter scepticism and blatant cynicism, Iqbal comes to realize the horrific predicament of a diasporic figure— “A lost soul forever adrift in search of a tarnished dream? You live in a perpetual state of conflict, torn between what was and what should have been, there is a consciousness of a permanent loss” (SA 143). The loss of belonging is to be compensated through memory— “that would reclaim the bygone days in home land. Thus, Iqbal is caught between “the emotional claims of irreconcilable worlds” (SA 161)—worlds of homeland and host land.

Nadira, another character who spent a substantial part of her life in metropolitan centre, also suffers from same compulsion of home coming. She justifies her act of returning back from first world country to Bangladesh is worth mentioning— “There were many disadvantages about coming home. But the compensatory factor was the comfort of belonging” (SA 153). It indicates the point that though returning to “home” does not accompany the material affluences of the metropolitan centre, it nevertheless brings a mental /psychic stability— a firm sense of belongingness in one’s own world. She believes her days in alien land is thing of past to be conceived through memory, now the present is endowed with blissful “home”— “I no longer had to call the past my home” (SA 153).

In the same vein, for Nadine the true “home” lies in Australia. Bangladesh for her is a land of adoption, not an original home land at all; therefore, she always craves for returning to Australia— “I want to go home!” (SA 173). While talking to her mother Michelle over

telephone, she again pines for her homesickness— “Mum, miss you! I want to come home!” (SA 178). Though Iqbal confesses, “I become part of the family again” (SA 185), he could not cop up with the larger society that claims him to be assimilated in traditional nativist cultures. Therefore, he is “imprisoned in our private memories of the way we were” (SA 186). Thus, memory provides an alternative escape root for the irreconcilable cleavages between home land and host land.

After returning, he experiences the bitter truth— his family members treat him as an alien figure— “I was like an untrustworthy distant cousin the family preferred not to know” (SA 196). Abba is still convinced about the notion that Australia is not Iqbal’s permanent place of residence, for he believes his son’s actual home lies in Bangladesh— “You have had your years of flirtation with the West...you should be thinking of coming home” (SA 232). Iqbal envisions, or rather ponders his past days through memory lane—he envisions every nook and cranes of home land: may it be Ed-ul Azha, or liberation war, first school days in childhood; his primordial infatuation in teenage and his moments spent with fellow compatriot in Mukti Bahini. He concludes— “the past cannot be rearranged for my convenience. May be that is a fair retribution for me. Every time I look back, these will be measure of guilt and regret arising from the debris I can never sweep away from memory” (SA 274). Accordingly, Iqbal’s mental agony, estrangement, alienation and frustration occasioned by the claims of two opposites— can only be neutralized through the aid of memory. Since, it provides a soothing space to be tranquil amid the vexes of being a deracinated human being—As he confesses “Memory can operate with the dexterity of a skilled surgeon. It removes the warts, smooths the bumps and covers the blemishes. What emerges can sometimes be far removed from the experienced reality” (SA 278).

The novel *Solitude of Illusions* also depicts the same idiosyncrasies of Khalid Sharif, an elderly protagonist whose terminal illness compels him to live with his son Javed in Australia. The narrative of this novel flickers between Calcutta along with its rural village Modhunagar and Australia. Now living in Australia Khalid Sharif’s nostalgic memory of “home” in Calcutta produces in him a home sickness. His longing for home through memory sometimes makes him a sick in the host land— “He felt a sudden longing for the sticky, oppressive heat of Calcutta and its broken footpaths crowded with the agony of a destitute humanity. He missed its amplified heartbeat and its blackened, monumental soul” (SI 18). The narrative of this novel employs a stream of consciousness technique with its brooding over past through memory— “Memories thrashed in the shadows of the past” (SI 14). Though memory never always grasp the past as it is for “the past rarely appeared as a coherent sequence” (SI 13).

Khalid Sharif’s homing desire drives him to cajole over the cultural artifacts of the home land. He greatly ruminates over the act of storytelling that is peculiar to Asian culture, the stories of the Arabian Nights, and landscape of Simla, Darjeeling Hilltop and Kashmir etc. Memory in this regard sustains a “supra national kinship”³, or what Anderson more politically terms as “imagined community”⁴ among the dispossessed subjects, as Clifford opines— “Memory becomes a crucial element in the maintenance of a sense of integrity – memory which is always constructive” (1992,115). Dislocation of Angela, an Australian neighbor of Khalid Sharif is also compensated through memory. Whereas Khalid’s memory provides him some solace and it re-territorializes his “home land” in metropolitan space, Angela’s reminiscences on the contrary, hinges her to the painful events of her days in British India. Thus— “the memory of her father in his retirement scraped he scars that were permanent reminders of the torment she had endured” (SI 40). Now in the verge of his life

Khalid's only preoccupation is his memory— “now his only responsibility, he claims, is to his memories” (SI 43). Ultimately Khalid stoically accepts the fact that diaspora subject experiences homely comfort in the mental terrain, not in geographical temporality. As Khalid confesses— “I am settled and very comfortable in my mind. That is where I now live” (SI 51). Actually, characters of both of these novels endorse the statement of Rosemary Marangoly George wherein he says— “Home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography” (11).

Khalid Sharif's “resolution not to accept a rationed enjoyment of the cultural ethos of an unfamiliar city” (SI 66) makes him an estranged figure in the metropolitan host land that substantially hones his desire to rout into his root in home land— “He spent his time recreating the past as it should have been without the monumental regret of the most significant year of his life” (SI 94). And the “past” is replete with the happenings of his home in native land. Even, Angela gives preference over reality as it suits her presupposed belief about sub-continent. As “she had no wish to have her memories of the city modified” (SI 97). His home sickness as an expatriate subject becomes conspicuous every now and then in the course of the narrative, sometimes, while spending time in Australia his gloomy mood denotes a craving for returning to his original home in Calcutta. Thus, Angela senses— “He was thinking of going home” (SI 102). Khalid Sharif's craving for Indian landscape that provide him a sense of belonging always haunts him in Australia. He broods over places like Puri or Darjeeling Hilltops that he used to enjoy in these days. In fact, Khalid Sharif embodies the dynamic tension of diasporic individuals who live “here” and think “there”; entangled with the adopted land yet sustains a memory of “home”.

Among the things that Khalid Sharif nostalgically recuperates most is his days in *Khus Manzil*, a courtesan house situated in Calcutta of British India, where he was assigned to Tabassum Begum to teach etiquette and manners— “Khalid Sharif's curiosity and periodic yearnings to return to Khus Manzil for a discrete look from the outside. The desire... older”(SI240). It at this place where Khalid Sharif develops a romantic relationship with one of the courtesans—Nazli, that haunts for the remaining days of his life— “His persistently aching memories of Nazli made it impossible to brush it aside as an episode of little consequence in his life” (SI 185). If Rushdie claims “past is home”, Khalid Sharif thinks his responsibility lies in the past only: “Now my responsibility is to the past” (SI 159).

The gulf created between father and son is mostly underpinned by spatio-temporal irreconciliation. As “Javed felt the helplessness of distance. They were so far apart ... they stood on opposite shores of the same river, with no means of crossing” (SI 223). Therefore, Khalid is firmly resolute to return to his homeland in India— “He has already said he wants to go back” (SI227). Whereas Javed never thinks of returning back to Calcutta for “life is very hard there” (SI 232), and proposes his father to quite India permanently to live with them there. Khalid never endorses their consideration, as he always tries to find the meaning of living in his original home— “your offer is kind and generous, but it would be mistake for me to come to live here” (SI233). Javed repeatedly tried to convince his father about the facility of Australia for the elder people, but Khalid Sharif retort— “There is a finishing line for all of us” (SI 233). For, the old ages “cling to the husk with an instinctive tenacity” (Italics in original, SI 234). And Khalid Sharif desires to get back is mostly underpinned by his inability to merge with the Australian culture. His distinct cultural identity is the key factor that makes him estranged figure in the host land. Thus, Vijay Mishra's opinion seems pertinent— “The fantasy of homeland is then linked, in the case of diaspora, to that recollected moment when diaspora subjects feel they were wrenched from their mother (father) land” (448). Typical to

diasporic figure, he also suffers from impermanent predicament— “there is nothing permanent in my life now” (SI253). For, he realizes, “Memory teased and then betrayed” (SI 245). Thus, the predicament of both the protagonist substantiate what Vijoy Agnew puts in the following words— “Memory ignites our imaginations and enable us to vividly recreate our collections of home as a heaven filled with nostalgia, longing, and desire; or they compel us, as witnesses and co-witness, to construct home as a site and space of vulnerability, danger, and violent trauma. Memory can be nostalgically evocative of imaginary homelands and places of birth and origins as well as an antidote to the struggle of the present” (10). Memory and imagination maintain an inalienable relationship. In fact, the act of memorization is itself an imaginative enterprise. Adib Khan in his essay “Diasporic Home”, claims the same reclamation – “It is my private place which I guard with the utmost jealousy, a creation of memory and imagination” (9). Furthermore, memory with the aids of imagination doesn’t merely create a utopian nostalgic reality; it sometimes unearths the bitter reality the homeland is stricken with at present. And in so doing, it evolves as a critic-creative phenomenon in diasporic contour. Similarly, Iqbal and Khalid Sharif of these two novels exacerbate the similar temperament. Though they de-glorify their respective homelands but neither entirely disown the past and its accompanying sense of belonging — “Our irrevocable connection with what may eventually be considered to be a foreign past is through memory. It cannot be obliterated and nor can it be forgotten” (SI 10). Thus, both Iqbal and Khalid Sharif celebrate the “third space” between home land and host land. As Jane Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur opine— “The migratory spaces traversed by migrants or refugees in a few decades marks diasporic zones that de-territorialize and reterritorialize the increasingly blurred borders of nation and nation-states” (17). Owing to rapid globalization, the transnational subjects can no longer retain the stiff notion of national boundary. They are in apposition to reconceive the “idea of home”⁴ in homeless contingency instead of “home” proper.

It is interesting that both Iqbal and Khalid are keen to leave the place only when they develop a bit of intimacy with the land to be left immediately. Even, at the closing of the novel, Iqbal becomes too nostalgic that he thinks of ending his life in native land, that would ensure his posthumous identity. Truly, he conceives a sense of belonging among the burial of his preceding generation— “This is our place. The earth-breathes our spirit here” (SA 292). On the other hand, Khalid’s formidable stable relationship with Angela, informed by their interdependence stays only for a while—for, “he is going home to...” (SI255). If Iqbal’s thinking of permanently staying in home land is quite impossible, so is the plight of Khalid Sharif in host land. To them home becomes what Radhakrishna opines in the following words— “Home” to diaspora becomes “a mode of interpretative in-between, as a form of accountability to more than one location” (Radhakrishnan 1996, xiii-xiv). For in diasporic trajectories, none can to go back to the home physically, can only visit / hover through nostalgically through memory lane. Whereas, once, the trans like reverie gets over, Iqbal awakes to the reality that compels him to go back to the place of adoption in host land; it is through the reverie that Khalid Sharif re-territorialize the homeland in diasporic space. Consequently, Iqbal lets his brother know— “We are going back next Thursday” (SA 297); and Khalid Sharif finally returns to Nazli through reverie. Their lives are now, nothing “but a restless wandering in the winter chill of memories?” (SI 263) who “homebodied”⁵ their respective place of residence. Thus, Brah’s opinion in this regard is upheld— “home” is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as place of “origin”. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality” (188-189).

Thus, the protagonists of these novels of Adib Khan stand as a de-territorialized men in the diasporic sojourn who uphold the “change by fusion” and “change by conjoining” ethos. And Adib Khan’s novels portray this reality with rare visionary commitment. Amid national and cultural boundaries, the protagonists of the novels find themselves in the irremediable gape of “ideogram”, where unselfconscious coherence of community is receding in the farthest. Different cultures of “home” and abroad try to entangle an individual with utter disregard to one’s innate “being”. The proposition of this paper aims to explore the enigmatic situation of diasporic subjects in terms of home land and host land and their subsequent suturing through the memory and nostalgia as portrayed in the two novels concerned. Being immigrants, Adib Khan’s protagonists, in the words of Stuart Hall, are upshot of two vectors, “the vector of similarity and continuity” and “the vector of difference and rupture”. Here Adib Khan portrays Indian subcontinent recollected from his nostalgic memory which is in the words of Salman Rushdie “broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (11). Thus, Adib Khan’s fictional narrative provides us with an entrepot for diverse subjectivities that are connected by history of uprootedness and calibrated by social desires.

Both the protagonists of *Seasonal Adjustment* and *Solitude and Illusions*, therefore, pine for “home” to recuperate their original comfort zone which has once been relegated to the periphery. For the expatriate subjects, it is quite natural that they, even after living a substantial period of time in metropolitan centre, sustain a propensity to return to their home land and its native artifacts. Iqbal Chaudhary and Khalid Sharif who often times feel a “return home” impulse and subsequently accomplish his sojourn to the homeland. But their physical return does not guarantee them the psychological comfort they claim for. Indeed, home is lost forever for a diasporic being. As Rushdie opines— “It’s my present that is foreign and that the past is home, albeit a lost home in lost city in the mist of lost time” (9). The sense of displacement and uprootedness in diasporic situation that Rushdie accentuates here defines the predicament of Adib Khan’s protagonists. Consequently, they ultimately come to the bitter realization and “feel the sadness of a futile journey” (SA 4). Thus, their home sickness substantially makes them sick of the home and homeland.

William Safran in his seminal essay “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myth of Homeland and Return” postulates six characteristics of a diaspora community, wherein he contends that member of such community “retains a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland— its physical location, history, and achievement”, though, he continues, “They believe that they are not –and perhaps cannot be–fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it ”(83). Safran’s envisioning of diasporic predicament is aptly applicable to the Adib Khan’s protagonists here. And their subsequent return back to the metropolitan centre just accentuates what Iain Chambers eloquently expresses in the following words:

We can never go Home, return to the primal scene, to the forgotten moment of our beginnings and “authenticity,” for there is always something else between. We cannot return to a bygone unity, for we can only know the past, memory, the unconscious through its effects, that is when it is brought into language and from there embark on an (interminable) analysis. (104)

Thus, diaspora subjects’ endeavour to yoking together the home and the abroad remains a psychic enterprise that often, if not always reminds them the futility of their craving to be reconciled through “associational identification” to the pristine “root”. For, to conclude in the

words of Stuart Hall, “they are happy to be home. But history has somehow irrevocably intervened” (1991, 208). Their displaced entity, therefore, marks an ever widening dilemma shrouded by estrangement and alienations. But in diasporic discourse, such idiosyncrasies are to be celebrated in terms of cultural negotiation and multicultural possibility. Adib Khan’s novels concerned here speaks volume on such cosmopolitan cultural mooring, vividly and vociferously.

Notes:

1. These lines appear in the poem “Home-Thoughts, from Abroad”, by Robert Browning. These lines were written in 1845 when Browning stayed in Italy and evocatively reminiscence English countryside.
2. This phrase becomes current after coming out of Said’s books titled *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-determination, 1969-1994*, published in 1994. The phrase bears a politically loaded connotation to contemporary global politics.
3. It signifies a post-national ethereal recuperation of original root and identification of the diasporic subject, mostly underpinned by common cultural artifacts and bygone heritage.
4. Idea of home is quite distinct from actual home. Whereas home is physical entity, idea of home perpetuates a homeliness, may be in in geographically distorted location.
5. Anderson conceives nationalist communitarian bonding as imagined entity. Because, even in the smallest nation, fellow members do not know or see each other. They sustain their fellow feeling only through some assumed transcendental values presumed to be their common property. In postcolonial trajectory, the notion becomes heavily significant as the displaced subjects of diasporic temporality try to envision their transnational comradeship through such imaginative faculty.
6. Literally, it means a person who is always keen to stay at home. In diaspora studies it connotes the inner penchant of expatriate figure to derive homely feeling staying in host land while at the same time chimes for the return to the native place.

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