



REMEMBERING HOME: MEMORY, NOSTALGIA, AND DIASPORA SPACE IN A PROMISED LAND

Author

Anjali Barad

M.A.-M.Ed.

anjaliбарad21@gmail.com

Centre of Education

Indian Institute of Teacher Education, Gandhinagar

ABSTRACT

This study examines how nostalgia and memory shape diasporic identity in *A Promised Land*, which takes place during the Indian subcontinent's partition. The book portrays displacement as an ongoing emotional and psychological experience that impacts people long after migration, rather than just a physical relocation across borders. This study explores how characters maintain a strong connection to their past through recollection, using concepts from memory studies and Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space. It emphasizes how places like the ancestral home and courtyard are more than just physical places; they have deep cultural and emotional significance that helps shape identity. The study also demonstrates how nostalgia works in a complicated way, providing solace while also intensifying emotions of loss and alienation from the past. According to the study, memory becomes a crucial survival strategy through close textual reading, assisting people in preserving continuity in the face of social and cultural upheaval. The paper concludes by arguing that because belonging in diasporic contexts is constantly shaped by the tension between remembered pasts and present realities, it is never stable or complete.

Index Terms- *Memory, Nostalgia, Diaspora Space, Displacement, Identity, Partition Literature*

INTRODUCTION

One of the largest forced migrations in modern history occurred as a result of the Indian subcontinent's 1947 partition, which caused extensive displacement, loss, and long-term psychological anguish. Millions of people were forced to rebuild their lives in strange social and cultural settings after being uprooted from their homes (Butalia 3). In literary depictions of Partition, displacement encompasses not only physical migration but also emotional and psychological spheres where personal identity and experience are still shaped by memory and nostalgia. *A Promised Land*, which was first written in Urdu by Khadija Mastur and then translated into English by Daisy Rockwell, offers a complex depiction of these experiences by emphasizing the daily lives of displaced people and their continuous struggle with the past.

How memory and nostalgia affect the development of diasporic identity in the setting of displacement is the main issue this research attempts to explore. While violence and migration have received a lot of emphasis in Partition literature, the ways that remembered landscapes and emotional ties continue to influence the lives of displaced people have received comparatively less attention. The purpose of this study is to investigate how memory functions as a dynamic force that links the past and present, causing people to concurrently occupy several temporal and emotional locations. The study aims to examine how the novel depicts

the relationship between memory, identity, and belonging by utilizing viewpoints from memory studies and Avtar Brah's idea of diaspora space (Brah 181).

This study is significant because it attempts to change the focus from displacement as a discrete historical event to displacement as a continuous experience condition influenced by nostalgia and memory. It emphasizes how places like the house, courtyard, and neighborhood serve as emotional geographies that shape identity even after relocation. By doing this, the study adds to more general conversations in diaspora studies and partition studies, providing a better understanding of how people negotiate belonging in situations characterized by transition and loss.

This paper has been organized into multiple sections. After the introduction, the paper summarizes the theoretical framework based on diaspora space and memory studies and provides a brief review of the relevant literature. A close textual study of the book with a particular focus on memory, nostalgia, and emotional space makes up the main part of the paper. A discussion that links the analysis to the theoretical framework comes next. The paper concludes with a summary of the main conclusions and a discussion of the study's significance for comprehending diasporic identity and belonging.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Themes of trauma, displacement, gender, and identity have frequently been emphasized in scholarly engagement with Partition literature; however, more in-depth investigation is needed to fully understand the function of memory and its connection to diasporic belonging. Studies that already exist offer important insights into gendered experiences, sociopolitical turmoil, and narrative depictions of Partition; nevertheless, they frequently place a higher priority on historical violence and migration than on the ongoing psychological processes influenced by nostalgia and memory.

Using a feminist critical discourse perspective Saman Shakeel and Umara Shaheen analyze Khadija Mastur's writings emphasizing how language both reflects and subverts patriarchal power structures during the Partition era. They illustrate how Mastur's tales portray women's resistance against oppressive norms and their attempts to regain agency within constrictive social institutions using Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis and Fairclough's model (Shakeel and Shaheen 149–170). By highlighting gendered power dynamics and discursive practices their research makes a substantial contribution to feminist interpretations of Partition literature. Their argument however does not fully address how memory and emotional attachment to place create identity outside of immediate socio-political frameworks even as it emphasizes agency and resistance.

Similar to this Khalid Mahmood Sanjarani, Aziza Saeed and Muhammad Asim Khan examine how trauma, migration and identity are portrayed in post-Partition Urdu novels placing these stories in the larger historical framework of violence and displacement. Their research demonstrates how literary texts capture the psychological and cultural fallout from Partition including identity disintegration, communal strife and loss of motherland (Sanjarani et al. 1625–34). The writers highlight the long-lasting effects of Partition on communal memory by utilizing trauma and migration theories. However their methodology is still mostly descriptive and thematic with little attention paid to how memory functions as a continuous and active force that shapes diasporic consciousness.

Dinesh Kumar highlights the disproportionate suffering of women throughout this historical upheaval in his feminist analysis of Partition literature. His research highlights problems including sexual assault, displacement, and the breakdown of societal institutions, contending that female authors like Khadija Mastur offer important perspectives on women's real-life experiences (Kumar 10–14). Kumar also emphasizes how patriarchal power and emotional suffering are portrayed in books like *A Promised Land*. Although gendered suffering and resiliency are successfully highlighted in this study, the spatial and mnemonic aspects of relocation are not extensively explored, and these experiences are mostly placed within a feminist framework.

Scholars like Urvashi Butalia have highlighted the long-term effects of displacement and the silencing of personal narratives, especially those of underprivileged communities, in the larger subject of Partition studies. Butalia's research demonstrates how memory is an essential location for uncovering repressed memories and comprehending the effects of Partition on people (Butalia 3). Similarly, Avtar Brah's idea of "diaspora space" offers a crucial theoretical framework for examining how memory, identity, and place intersect, arguing that diasporic identities are created by the interaction of the past and present in shared social spaces (Brah 181). Although these theoretical stances are crucial for comprehending displacement outside of its historical context, there is still a lack of development in their application to particular literary texts, especially when it comes to emotional geography.

There is a noticeable lack of research on how memory and nostalgia play a crucial role in forming diasporic identity in literary narratives despite the significant corpus of work on Partition trauma and gender. The majority of research frequently ignores how recalled spaces like the home courtyard and community continue to impact identity formation and the sense of belonging following migration instead concentrating on historical violence or gendered oppression. Moreover assessments of Partition literature have not adequately incorporated the idea of emotional geography which connects space with affect and memory.

By combining diaspora theory with memory studies to investigate how memory functions in *A Promised Land*, this study aims to close these gaps. The study conceptualizes displacement as a state in which people simultaneously inhabit numerous temporal and emotional locales by utilizing Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space. It offers a conceptual framework that views belonging as a continual and negotiated process rather than a fixed state, with memory, nostalgia, and emotional space interacting to construct diasporic identity. By focusing on the psychological, spatial, and affective aspects of displacement, the study advances a more comprehensive understanding of Partition literature.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design rooted in literary analysis to investigate how memory and nostalgia shape diasporic identity in *A Promised Land*. Employing an interpretive methodology the research focuses on a close reading of the primary text specifically Daisy Rockwell's English translation to explore themes of displacement memory and belonging. Unlike

quantitative studies this research emphasizes textual interpretation and theoretical application to uncover underlying meanings ingrained in the narrative. The primary source material is supplemented by secondary resources including academic papers critical essays and theoretical works on Partition literature and diaspora studies which provide a necessary scholarly context and a framework for interpretation.

The analytical foundation of this study is built upon key concepts from memory studies and Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space. Using this framework the research examines how characters simultaneously engage with the past and present to form a complex sense of self. Close textual analysis is utilized to identify recurrent symbols and narrative patterns especially those pertaining to domestic settings like the house and courtyard which function as sites of emotional and cultural significance. Rather than using quantifiable variables the study treats memory nostalgia and displacement as conceptual units of analysis. This methodological approach allows for a nuanced exploration of the connection between identity and geography providing a thorough understanding of how diasporic experiences are portrayed in literary narratives.

ANALYSIS

According to the analysis of *A Promised Land*, nostalgia and memory play a major role in influencing the diasporic experiences of displaced people, turning displacement from a completed historical event into a continuous psychological condition. The novel depicts memory as a way for characters to stay in touch with their abandoned homes, fostering an ongoing exchange between the past and present. Avtar Brah's idea of diaspora space, where various temporal and geographical realities coexist, is consistent with this interaction (Brah 181).

The analysis's portrayal of the house as an emotional and symbolic environment is among its most significant findings. Domestic settings like the courtyard and ancestral home are not just physical places in the novel; they are also spaces where memories and identities are formed. The characters' frequent memories of these areas show how deeply embedded they are in their subconscious minds. For instance, the narrative recalls that Sajidah's mother had "planted a motiya jasmine shrub outside her palace and trained a chameli vine up the wall" (Mastur 16). This portrayal shows how memory turns real-world locations into emotional landscapes that affect the protagonists' sense of identity even after they are relocated. These recalled locations serve as emotional geographies where affective attachments rather than physical presence define identity.

The study also reveals that the lived reality of displaced people is defined by a continual tension between the past and present. The protagonists' memories keep bringing them back to their lost homeland even as they try to adjust to new surroundings. The story illustrates this dual existence by showing how Sajidah maintains a mental attachment to the structural familiarity of her former house even though she is physically present in the chaotic setting of a refugee camp: "In her mind's eye, she saw the threshold of her house, and the rooms, and the courtyard, and the roof" (Mastur 13). These instances demonstrate how displacement results in a fractured sense of identity, as people simultaneously inhabit the uncertain present and the remembered past.

Another important facet of the diasporic experience in the book is nostalgia. The study shows how nostalgia functions in a nuanced and conflicted way. On the one hand, it gives characters emotional solace by letting them relive stable and joyful times from the past. However, because the remembered spaces are no longer reachable in reality, it heightens the sense of loss. This dual aspect of nostalgia is demonstrated in passages that highlight how recollection may both uplift and disturb a person by contrasting the comfort of the past with the severity of the present: "She felt as though she'd brought a whole world of memories with her. They were like a heap of jewels that she'd spread out before her, and she was looking at them one by one" (Mastur 15). Thus, nostalgia becomes a psychological response that reflects both longing and irreversibility.

The function of memory as a strategy for surviving in circumstances of dislocation is another significant discovery. The text implies that despite the disruption brought about by migration, characters are able to preserve an emotion of continuity by recalling the past. In displaced groups, storytelling in particular becomes an important method for sharing and preserving memories. This is shown when the characters find solace in narrating the past, using stories to mask their current suffering: "Amma began to tell stories of the elders, and of their ancestors. In the retelling, they forgot their hunger and their thirst, and the fear that stalked them" (Mastur 42). By doing this, memory is transformed into a collective resource that aids people in overcoming trauma and reestablishing their sense of self in unfamiliar surroundings.

DISCUSSION

By focusing on the ongoing psychological and emotional aspects of displacement rather than the documenting of violence and migration, the results of this study support and expand on previous research on Partition literature. The current approach emphasizes memory and nostalgia as key factors that actively construct diasporic identity, whereas previous research has mostly focused on trauma, gender, and socio-political disruption. In this way, the research advances and expands upon the work of academics like Shakeel and Shaheen, whose feminist discourse analysis emphasizes women's resistance within patriarchal structures but falls short in addressing the spatial and mnemonic aspects of identity formation (Shakeel and Shaheen 149–170). Similar to this, Sanjarani et al.'s trauma-centered approach successfully conveys the extent of suffering and displacement in post-Partition narratives; however, it frequently treats memory as a lingering consequence of trauma rather than as an ongoing, active process that shapes lived experience (Sanjarani et al. 1625–34).

The focus of the current study on memory as a continuous and dynamic force is more in line with theoretical stances in memory and diaspora studies. Understanding how the protagonists in *A Promised Land* simultaneously inhabit several temporal and physical locales while negotiating their identities between the past and present is made easier by Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space (Brah 181). Furthermore, Urvashi Butalia's observations about the function of memory in reconstructing personal histories lend additional credence to the claim that memory serves as an essential tool for maintaining identity following displacement (Butalia 3). This study shows that memory is not only retrospective but actively creates emotional landscapes that determine belonging by applying these frameworks to a close textual analysis.

This study has two implications. First, by emphasizing the affective and spatial aspects of displacement, it advances Partition studies and provides a more complex understanding of how people perceive and negotiate belonging across time. Second, it broadens the scope of diaspora studies by demonstrating how literary texts can depict diaspora geography through the persistence of memory and emotional attachment in addition to physical movement. The study does have some drawbacks, though. Its findings may not be as applicable to a wider variety of Partition narratives because it is limited to a particular book and mostly uses a qualitative interpretive technique. Furthermore, additional important variables like political ideology or economic circumstances may be underrepresented by the emphasis on memory and nostalgia.

By conducting comparative studies of several Partition tales to investigate how various authors depict memory and diasporic identity, future research can build on this study. In order to delve deeper into the relationship between memory, trauma, and narrative representation, future research may potentially use interdisciplinary techniques by fusing literary analysis with ideas from cultural studies, psychology, or oral history. These methods would help us comprehend displacement as a complicated and multidimensional human experience.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how nostalgia and memory shape diasporic identity in *A Promised Land*, showing that displacement is a continuous emotional and psychological experience rather than just a historical occurrence. According to the inquiry, memory serves as an essential conduit between the past and present, enabling displaced people to preserve continuity in the face of loss and disruption. Simultaneously, nostalgia emerges as a multifaceted reaction that emphasizes the consciousness of irreversible loss while offering emotional comfort. Through the representation of domestic spaces such as the home and courtyard, the novel constructs what can be understood as emotional geographies, where identity is influenced not only by physical location but also by remembered settings and affective attachments.

The study emphasizes the significance of Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space in understanding these processes, demonstrating how individuals constantly inhabit several temporal and spatial realities. By using this approach, the research contributes to a more sophisticated understanding of how belonging is negotiated in diasporic environments, where the past continues to actively influence present identities. By focusing on the lasting impact of memory and emotional experience rather than violence and migration, the study expands on previous research on Partition literature.

In terms of its contribution to the field, this study offers an integrated perspective on displacement by combining concepts from memory studies and diaspora theory. It highlights how literary works capture the inner lives of individuals as they deal with loss, identity, and belonging in addition to documenting historical events. However, the study acknowledges its shortcomings, especially its emphasis on a single text and its reliance on qualitative interpretation.

Future research may broaden this investigation by conducting comparative analyses of various Partition narratives or by utilizing interdisciplinary methodologies that investigate the connections between memory, trauma, and cultural identity. Such research will greatly enhance the comprehension of displacement as a complicated and dynamic human experience. Overall, this paper highlights that remembering is a constant process through which people make sense of the present and negotiate their position within changing historical and cultural contexts rather than just being an act of looking back.

REFERENCE

- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge, 1996.
- Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Penguin Books, 1998.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 1989, no. 1, 1989, pp. 139-167.
- Fairclough, Norman. *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Longman, 1995.
- Kumar, Dinesh. "Feminist Dimensions in Partition Literature: A Study of Select Novels." *International Journal of English and Literature*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2020, pp. 10-14.
- Lazar, Michelle M. *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Ideology and Organization*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Mastur, Khadija. *A Promised Land*. Translated by Daisy Rockwell, Penguin Books, 2019.
- Sanjarani, Khalid Mahmood, et al. "Trauma, Migration and Identity in Post-Partition Urdu Novels." *Journal of Talent Development and Excellence*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1625-34.
- Shakeel, Saman, and Umara Shaheen. "Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Khadija Mastur's Stories." *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 25, no. 8, 2020, pp. 149-170.