



Research Paper

Recalling the Past: A study of Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine

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The feeling of nostalgia among the diasporic community plays an important role in today's global world. When an individual feels nostalgic, he desires to return to the homeland and this nostalgic feeling gives him some solace in the host land. The immigrants carry with them the baggage of memories, cultural and traditional values, and when they do not find the environment favoring them then they feel nostalgic and long for past time. The term nostalgia is derived from the Greek roots 'nostos' meaning 'to return' and 'algos' meaning 'pain'. According to Boym nostalgia from the Greek, *nostos*- return home, and *algia*- longing, is a 'longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy'. Mills and Coleman (1994) define nostalgia as "the bittersweet recall of emotional past events. Nostalgia is a type of autobiographical memory. Ralph Harper alludes to the inherent contradictions in nostalgia:

Nostalgia combines bitterness and sweetness, the lost and the found, the far and the near, the new and the familiar, absence and presence. The past which is over and gone, from which we have been or are being removed, by some magic becomes present again for a short while. But its realness seems even more familiar, because renewed, than it ever was, more enchanting and more lovely.

Davis notes that words such as history, remembrance, recollection, reminiscence, and recall are all words that "denote the mental state of sentiment being looking back in time". The *New Oxford Dictionary of English* defines nostalgia as "a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations". Nostalgia is not static or permanent it keeps on returning. Nostalgia can be felt directly, indirectly, socially or culturally, individually or collectively. Nostalgia is both a cultural phenomenon and a personally subjective experience. Nostalgia operates in both a public and private domain. Nostalgia is like any emotion a natural response to the situation and circumstances. The medium to feel nostalgic can be any like books, songs or just sitting alone. Nostalgia facilitates continuity between past and present selves. Through nostalgia past is kept alive, it does not die. Nostalgia brings positivity and adds meaning to one's life. Nostalgia motivates, adds spark and inspires an individual. Nostalgia does not mean a yearning to return home rather it is a longing to return to a time, a happy past. The evidences of the past play an important role in the structuring of the nostalgic imagination today. The immigrants understand that what is being recalled and remembered now was in their hands in the past. Nostalgia is "between the head and the heart"; as it is the mind, the head what is to be recalled when and the heart feels comfort with those recalling.

The native land is not just a piece of land or geographical territory but it evokes feelings of nostalgia among the immigrants. The immigrants are unable to completely break away from their native land and they transfer their nostalgia through the stories and memories to their children about their native land. Diaspora fictions focus on alienation, nostalgia, displacement, loneliness, assimilation, acculturation, and quest of identity, it also deals issues related to existential rootlessness or disintegration of cultures. An individual has to relocate himself afresh on migration for which he has to go through atonement such as readjustment, adaptation, participation. When an individual migrate from one place to another, from one country to another, the borders change and the identity of an individual takes a new shape. A person who has migrated always desires to return to what has been left behind. When an individual enters into an unknown world, he is removed from an amiable and cherished world, and this dislocation brings in a sense of nostalgia and the individual becomes prey of nostalgia.

Bharati Mukherjee's 'Jasmine' is also not free from nostalgia. Jasmine is an open minded lady and she makes decision with mind and does not flow in emotions. She likes to move on. She refuses to live life as a

widow after the death of her husband, Parkash. She wants to rise in life, she migrates to America. She faces a lot of troubles but these hindrances are unable to cut her zeal. She always takes a new identity as per the circumstances, she herself says, "I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane, Half-Face for Kali." (J47)

Bharati Mukherjee affirms that transformations not only affect the individual but it also affects the national cultural identity, "A culture is supposed to be something that one should be proud of. Bharati Mukherjee has invested in the present and not the past." Jasmine lives a life which she thinks that will give comfort to her. She crosses the boundaries of race, gender, and nation.

She feels nostalgic about her native land but she is not caught in the web of past incidents. Instead of making her past a hindrance in her growth she makes her past her strength in her growth. She is not the type of character who keeps on oscillating between the past and the present. But it does not mean that she totally breaks herself from her past. Her past always remains with her. While living in Baden with Bud, she thinks about the condition of women in India. "In Hasnapur may be old at twenty-two I think of Vimla, a girl I envied because she lived in a two-story brick house with real windows. Our hut was mud. Her marriage was the fanciest the village had ever seen. Her father gave away a zipsy red Maruti and a refrigerator in the dowry. (J15)

Jasmine is not against assimilation and adapting the culture of the host nation, but her past always keeps on lurking in her present. Her taking of new identity is also an example that evokes her past. She keeps her past with herself in her mind while taking a new identity. She creates a new world which consists of new views, ideas and values which keeps on unmasking her past. Jasmine dwindles between the past and the present in an attempt to deal with the two worlds, that is the native world and the host world.

A lot of families migrate from Pakistan to India and from India to Pakistan after the partition between the two nations. Her family is also one among them who are forced to move to India after partition. Her father always feels nostalgic about Pakistan particularly about Lahore and he is unable to give up the memories of his past. She considers the partition as the cruelty of god on people. She talks about her past and nostalgically remembers. "They had owned farmlands, shops. An alley had been named after a great-uncle. In our family lore Lahore was magic and Lahore was chaos. (J41)

Her father has deep attachment with Lahore and his past. He always talks about his past life in Lahore. He listens Pakistani programs on Radio. This shows his deep rooted nostalgia for his past. He keeps on comparing India with Pakistan, Punjab with Lahore. He feels happy living with the memories of past. He finds peace and solace in his past. Her father never recovers from his physical and mental displacement from Lahore to India. He completely rejects his present and finds happiness in his past and he lives in nostalgia.

He would tune in to the Pakistan radio broadcasts from Lahore, and listen for their Punjab language shows. The names of those singers and actors from the Pakistan side were more familiar to me, growing up, than their Indian counterparts. Otherwise, he detested Urdu and Muslims, which he naturally associated with the loss of our fortune. He refused to speak Hindi as well, considering it the language of Gandhi, the man who had approved the partition to Punjab and the slaughter of millions. After fleeing Lahore, Pitaji had been cast adrift in an uncaring, tasteless, corrupt, coarse, ignorant world. (J42)

After getting married with Prakash, they started living in Jullunder, Prakash is busy with his exams and wants to go abroad and wants to start a new life. Jasmine is also very happy and hopeful about her future. She remembers the old man's prediction under the Banyan tree, who had foretold her early widowhood. "I thought of the old man under the banyan tree. If we could just get away from India, then all fates would be canceled". She thinks that after going away from this nation her fate will change and she will live a happy life.

After the death of Parkash, she decides to migrate to the USA to fulfill her husband's dream. She migrates as an illegal immigrant. There she falls in the hands of Half-face on the ship. Half face raped her time and again. He takes her to a lonely motel, "No tourist would ever stay at the Seamingo court". (J10) While crossing the landscape she compares it with the monsoon season in Punjab. "With fields of swamp grass between us and the wall of leggy trees. The landscape was not unfamiliar: monsoon season in Punjab. (J110)

Half face keeps on sexually exploiting Jasmine. She is unable to come out of the jaw of that wild man. During her rape she remembers Prakash and thinks about their happy time to get some solace from this unfavorable condition. "I remembered Prakash, sitting cross-legged on our bed under the fan as he repaired Mrs. Jagtiani's VCR and Mr. Jagtiani's old German shaver. His hand on mine, directing the tweezers, "There! Perfect!" and sighing, "That blood sucker Sindhi is destroying my spirit. (J113) Jasmine pleaded to half face and says, "My husband was killed, " I said, "Please don't do anything to me." (115) She further tries to pacify him, "He died in my arms." (115) She compares Half Face with Prakash, how much Prakash cares for her and how he is ill-treating her. "Half-Face stood, totally naked. He was monstrously erect. Prakash had always been so concerned for me. He was afraid of youthful pregnancy, of children bearing children." (J115-16)

After murdering Half-Face she collected all her belonging and "stuffed the suitcase with my dishonored old clothes." (J119) and this incident reminds her the day when Prakash was murdered and how she was investigated. Again her past creeps in her present.

And then I remembered something that surprises me to this day: I remembered the hateful police inspector in Jullundhar, his reports to us of fingerprint evidence on the bomb fragments. I'd been impressed, and now I remembered. I went back to the bathroom and wiped the sink and shower tap. (J120)

She meets a lady, "My name is Lillian Gordon," she said". (J130) Mrs. Gordon helps her and "took me home with her." (130) She gave her the room of her daughter to live in. She saw her pictures framed and, "The pictures brought back such memories of Hasanpur, I wept." (J131) She feels nostalgia about her family and now missing the warmth of her mother, sisters and brothers. Mrs. Gordon helps her to recover; she calls a doctor to sew her tongue. She meet Kanjobal women in that home. Jasmine learnt a lesson from Mrs. Gordon that past must not over take you. It should not make you weak rather one must learn and must become more strong by looking at the past.

She forbade all discussion of it. She had a low tolerance for reminiscence, bitterness or nostalgia. Let the past make you wary, by all means. But do not let it deform you. Had I said, "I murdered a man last night," she might have said, "I am sure you had an excellent reason. (J131)

The image of pitcher is very prominent in the novel. "The villagers say when a clay pitcher breaks, you see that the air inside it is the same as outside" (J 15). This is an image for the self and the other, the inside and the outside. This image is also a contrast to the outlook of his father who still lives in nostalgia for the past in Lahore. He never comes out of that pitcher of past. He thinks that it's different from Pakistan but he does not understand that it's the same as inside. Nostalgia is very much present in Jasmine's life but it is like an invisible baggage that she carried with herself always. While living in the house of Mrs. Gordon she feels for her lost home. When she came across the pictures of the Kanjobal Indians, she cries on looking at those pictures. When she tries on new shoes, this incident makes her remember that time when she went to buy shoes with Prakash in India. She always wants a secure company and she longs and desire for it after seeing the close knit relationship of kanjobal women for themselves. In India she felt that it women who is against women.

Mrs. Gordon helps her to move forward by keeping her past aside. She taught her that if she will live in past than she cannot do anything. She has to keep the past in mind, but must not live in past. She tries to make her past her strength. Her advice helps her a lot in overcoming her both physically and mentally.

Mrs. Gordon shows her the photograph of migrant labors and these photographs make her feel nostalgic but now after few months she does not feel that nostalgic. She tries to gather strength from her past, instead of crying over past she wants to learn from past.

I remembered Kate's book of photographs of migrant workers that Lillian, the proud mother, had shown off to me back in Fowlers Key. That book had brought back such sharp memories of Hasnapur that I'd cried. It was now only a few months later, but I didn't think I could cry over Hasnapur, ever again. (J160)

This nostalgia and the remembrance of the past make her to undergo drastic change while living in America. This helps her in becoming and living like Americans. Prof. Vadehara and his wife Nirmala and the family live in constant nostalgia. They speak Hindi at home, watch Indian movies, and listens Indian songs and keeps relationship with the Hindu families in their neighborhood. Prof. Vadhera, his wife and parents inspite of living in America has little that can be said as American. They live in an Indian cocoon. Vadhera family has created an Indian atmosphere at their home. They live like as if they are living in India, watch Indian movies, eat Indian food, wear Indian clothes, speak Punjabi language. On Sundays they visit to other Punjabi families and give into nostalgia. "Punjabi newspapers and Hindi film magazines at the corner newsstand, and a movie every night without having to dress up for it."(J146)

Nirmala always lives in her past. She is an epitome of nostalgia. She is always busy watching Hindi movies and working like an ideal Indian wife. She tries to maintain Indian culture and ethnicity in her home. She is just nineteen and she is a lot younger than Prof. Vadhera. She has no ambition in her life. She never questions her husband about his work and his where about. She is happy in living a life according to her past.

To date in her year in America, Nirmala had exhausted the available stock of Hindi films on tape and was now renting Urdu films from a Pakistani store. She faced a grim future of unintelligible Bengali and Karnataka films. Everyone in Flushing seemed to know her craving. Visitors from India left tapes of popular Indian television series, and friends from Flushing were known to drive as far as New Jersey to check out the film holdings in the vast India emporia. They had a bookcase without books, stacked with television shows. (J145)

Jasmine willingly gives up her past and memories but the memories still remain with her always. Her past unconsciously interferes in her present and plays a vital role. She tries to unburden her nostalgia and past but it keeps on coming. She takes new identity at new places. But when she comes across the murderers of her husband the past again come in front of her. This incident reminds her how she entered into America as an illegal immigrant. Her past haunts her again.

Jasmine wants to be a part of safe and secure society, where she can feel as a part of that society and to be a part of them she shuns off her past and tries to adapt according to the host land people and culture. But she is unable to completely give up her past. The conscious and unconscious attachment to the old values and habits

comes in her way. In the novel Bharati Mukherjee shows how a displaced person or an immigrant faces the conflict between the past and the present. When an individual leaves his native land and enters into an alien land then he faces various cultural clashes. Jasmine does not live in nostalgia but she does not give up memories all together. She always keeps her past with her. We came across how well she has remembered her past in the form of her childhood memories. She was predicted about her widowhood and exile by an astrologer in her village, when she was just seven years old, she remembers it and when it occurred she goes back to that prophecy, but she makes her memories an instrument to fight against her fate and her search for new identity. She becomes ready to face all the challenges in her life. For the majority of immigrants the host land remains just a piece of land where they just live for some purpose, sometimes for better prospects, sometimes its voluntary, involuntary or forced. But often it becomes their permanent residence. Their so called "Home" or "Native Land" has been left behind and this "Home" becomes the locus of nostalgia and longing. They want to return to that happy past, but a very few can return to their native land. Others only visit through imagination or try to find peace in nostalgia. The past is continuously been reconstructed through memories. This moving back in the past is a constant feature of immigrants. This past always keeps on coming in the present. The immigrants move towards the past because they find something which is missing in the present. When an individual is unable to adjust in the present, when he feels neglected or rejected in the host land than it is only the past memories or the nostalgic impulses which gives him comfort in an alien land. The immigrants are a type of psychological exiles who can neither give up their past nor they can go back to it. As a result they live in a state of peculiar nostalgia.

To conclude, the postmodern world of diasporic fiction depicts the expatriates who are engulfed by the pain of nostalgia. The void created in their lives continues to engulf them and leaves them stranded between the binaries of us/them, self/other, inside/outside and centre/periphery. Memory of the past or the spectres of absence give rise to trauma or mourning which leads to the alienation of the displaced subjects.

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