

# Haptics of 'Home' and 'Homemaking' in South Asian Literature



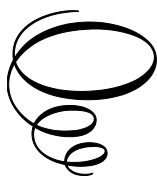
# Haptics of 'Home' and 'Homemaking' in South Asian Literature:

*Identification in Diasporic  
Fiction*

Edited by

Parul Yadav

**Cambridge  
Scholars  
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## INTRODUCTION

The complexities of migration cultural perspectives are themes in cultural perspectives studies, particularly in South Asian literature. The experiences of cultural perspectives have generated a corpus of literature that interrogates issues of belonging, identity, and the agony of being an exile. Home is ambiguous, contested, and over-determined by the politics, history, and emotions of cultural perspectives, migration, and the diasporic experience. Leaving behind one's native space in search of better opportunities, separating from one's loved ones, and making a new place into a home are central themes of this volume. *The Haptics of Home and Homemaking in South Asian Literature: Assemblages of Identification and its Reflection in Diasporic Fiction* is an admirable example of dispossession and reconstruction. Contemporary South Asian diasporic literature approaches these.

Its significance is especially pronounced today, as migration is the human experience. Migration in South Asia frequently overlaps with the legacy of cultural perspectives, cultural perspectives, and economic and political instability, creating an intrinsically complicated diasporic experience. In these works, the concept of home is more than just a physical space; it is a fluid and ever-changing construct created by memories of the homeland, dissonance in the hostland, and the psychological anguish of migration. As such, home encompasses belonging and identity. Homemaking is equally complex, involving an emotional, social, and cultural negotiation of a place and a community. In this way, South Asian diasporic fiction often explores how characters reconstruct their sense of home in unfamiliar environments, navigating the tension between nostalgia for a lost homeland and the need to adapt to new societal norms.

The relevance of the theme of home in contemporary literature can be traced to the political and cultural forces that shape the diasporic experience. Postcolonial migrations—whether as a result of indentured, refugee crises, or voluntary relocation—have shaped the way South Asian communities engage with both their homelands and hostlands. The rupture caused by these migrations, coupled with the continuing impact of historical events such as Partition, evokes a sense of continuous cultural perspectives in the

lives of many. As these communities settle in new countries, the challenge of maintaining cultural identity while engaging with foreign values often becomes the central struggle. South Asian diasporic literature is thus not only a reflection of this struggle but also a way of reclaiming cultural perspectives over the notion of home, exploring the complexities of attachment, loss, and the possibility of belonging in a fragmented world.

In the recent global discourse on migration, it has become a metaphor for issues of citizenship, belonging, and transnationalism. In this age, the diasporic experience has become more complex as communities straddle multiple spaces and identities. The haptics of home in South Asian literature, as explored in this volume, offer insights into the lived experiences of these migrants and the emotional and psychological dimensions of cultural perspectives. Through their stories, diasporic writers invite readers to reflect on what it means to belong to a geographical location, cultural perspectives, and cultural inheritance. The intersection of personal and collective histories in these narratives makes the concept of home not just a literal space but an emotional and psychological landscape, deeply intertwined with the broader themes of identity and memory.

The themes in this volume draw heavily from cultural perspectives studies, cultural perspectives theory, and cultural geography, providing valuable insights into the lived experiences of South Asian migrants. Postcolonial theory, the impact of colonial histories on identity and cultural perspectives, helps understand the tensions between the home and the host and the intricacies of negotiating these spaces. Diaspora theory further enriches this conversation by highlighting how diasporic subjects create new identities within exile and reconcile their cultural heritage with the realities of their new surroundings. At the same time, it is central to understanding how the past is embodied and re-lived in the diasporic experience.

In bringing together seasoned scholars and emerging voices in South Asian literary studies, this volume aims to enrich the field by expanding the critical discourse around diasporic identity and memory. The chapters, with their varied approaches, offer fresh insights into the literary representations of migration and belonging while also addressing how these themes intersect with broader political, social, and cultural forces. The subsequent chapters will delve deeper into these issues, comprehensively analyzing the haptics of home and homemaking in South Asian diasporic literature.

## Theoretical Perspectives

Migration, exile, and identity are foundational themes in cultural perspectives in South Asian literature, often explored in ways that challenge conventional understandings of home, belonging, and cultural inheritance. These themes are deeply intertwined with the legacies of cultural perspectives and the sociopolitical upheavals accompanying the world. This volume seeks to address the intricacies of these themes by examining how contemporary South Asian diasporic literature reflects and interrogates the complex experience of migration, identity formation, and exile.

To understand the theoretical frameworks of migration and exile in the context of South Asian diasporic fiction, engagement with several critical frameworks, primarily cultural perspectives theory, cultural perspectives studies, cultural geography, and memory studies, is necessary. These frameworks are essential to unpacking how literature from the South Asian cultural perspectives articulates identity space, history, memory, and the psychic and physical experiences of cultural perspectives. The exploration of migration, home, and identity in South Asian diasporic literature opens up broader discussions of cultural hybridity, the negotiation of cultural heritage, and the sense of belonging or alienation within the hostland.

Postcolonial theory provides the foundational framework for understanding migration dynamics, cultural perspectives, and identity within South Asian diasporic literature. Key to this theoretical approach is the idea that the colonial past continues to shape the experiences and identities of individuals and communities, even long after the formal end of colonial rule. The complex legacies of British cultural perspectives—such as the cultural perspectives of India, the forced migration of millions, and the creation of cultural perspectives—form the backdrop for much of the literature explored in this volume.

Central to cultural perspectives discourse is the work of theorists like Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, who offer critical insights into how colonial histories inform the diasporic experience. Cultural identities are fluid and contested, shaped by the interactions between them. Hybridity highlights the creative tension within the cultural perspectives between maintaining cultural heritage and adapting to new environments. Bhabha's notion of the third space is particularly relevant to understanding how South Asian diasporic subjects negotiate their identities in response to their homeland culture and the demands of their hostland society. In this

context, cultural perspectives become a site of in-betweenness, where identity is continuously negotiated, adapted, and reconstructed.

Similarly, Edward Said's *Theory of Orientalism* offers valuable insights into how the East (and, by extension, the South Asian diasporic subject) is perceived and interpreted by the West. Said's analysis of how the West portrays the Orient as distinct and unfamiliar helps us understand the challenges that diasporic South Asians encounter in their interactions with Western societies. These challenges influence literary representations of cultural perspectives, where the balance between cultural belonging and displacement is often explored within the context of historical influences.

Spivak's work on socio-cultural and the expression of underrepresented voices further deepens our understanding of diasporic identity. For Spivak, the socio-cultural refers to those positioned outside mainstream social frameworks, and her work explores how the perspectives of such groups—often women, working-class people, and minorities—can be acknowledged and represented. In South Asian diasporic literature, this figure is frequently reimagined as writers seek to highlight the overlooked experiences of migration and cultural dynamics.

Colonial violence, economic migration, or political instability. Central to cultural perspectives studies is the understanding of diasporic subjects as individuals or communities in exile who sought refuge or made new lives. The notion of cultural perspectives challenges traditional national and cultural boundaries, fluidity, transnationalism, and the multiplicity of identities that diasporic individuals inhabit.

In South Asian literature, cultural perspective studies provide a framework for understanding how South Asian writers portray the lived experiences of migration, settlement, and belonging in their works. A key aspect of diasporic identity, as noted by scholars such as Robin Cohen and James Clifford, is the idea of rootedness—a sense of connection to one's homeland—alongside the experience of dislocation, which often accompanies migration. Diasporic individuals navigate diverse loyalties and aspirations, balancing ties to their ancestral homes with the need to adapt to new cultural settings.

Clifford's notion of "diasporic consciousness" is useful in understanding displacement's psychological and emotional dimensions. Diasporic subjects are often engaged in continually remembering and reimagining their homeland while simultaneously dealing with the challenges of assimilation

or marginalization in the hostland. This constant movement between two spaces—one remembered and one lived—creates a dynamic tension in the diasporic experience, often reflected in literary representations of migration.

Cultural geography is another theoretical lens that helps explore how space and place shape the experiences of diasporic subjects. In particular, “haptics” is crucial to understanding the embodied experience of migration and home. The term “haptics” refers to the sense of touch and how the physicality of space—whether through the feel of familiar objects, the homeland’s architecture, or the hostland’s textures—shapes the emotional and sensory experience of home.

Geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan have explored how a place is not merely a physical location but also a psychological space where identity takes shape. The body’s interaction with space—how it moves through, occupies, and responds to it—is essential in understanding the diasporic experience. For South Asian migrants, the sense of “home” often emerges as a blend of past and present, influenced by memories of the homeland and redefined through daily practices in their new environments. As the contributors to this volume highlight, this sensory connection to “home” is constantly shaped by physical and emotional interactions with space, whether through activities like cooking, wearing traditional attire, or participating in cultural rituals that evoke a sense of belonging.

In this context, the role of memory is central to how diasporic individuals maintain a sense of continuity in their identities despite changes in their surroundings. Sensory and emotional ties to the homeland—the aroma of spices, the sound of familiar music, or the visual landscape of a city or village—remain embedded in memory and continue to influence the diasporic experience. These memories are not fixed but continuously reinterpreted through daily life, emphasizing the idea of home as a dynamic and evolving concept.

These academic perspectives offer valuable tools for understanding the complex experiences of migration, identity, and belonging in South Asian diasporic literature. Drawing from cultural studies and geography, literature becomes a space where writers explore the layered nature of diasporic identity and the ongoing redefinition of home. In the following chapters, this volume comprehensively analyzes how contemporary South Asian authors examine themes of home, memory, and adaptation in their works. Each chapter sheds light on the varied ways migration and identity are portrayed, enriching our understanding of the diverse experiences within

South Asian diasporic communities and the enduring importance of home and belonging in an interconnected world.

## Organization of Chapters

The chapters in this book, seven in total, are strategically organized to provide a nuanced exploration of the haptics of “home” and “homemaking” within South Asian literature, with a particular focus on its reflection in diasporic fiction. Each chapter examines different dimensions of how “home” and “homemaking” are conceptualized and represented across various literary works, highlighting the intricate assemblages of identification that shape diasporic experiences. The chapters reveal how these narratives negotiate identity, displacement, and belonging issues by analyzing literary portrayals of spatial and emotional connections to home. Through a series of in-depth studies, the book offers a comprehensive view of how diasporic fiction reflects and refracts the complex realities of home and identity in South Asian diasporic contexts, thus providing readers with a rich understanding of the interplay between personal and collective senses of home.

### **Chapter 1: “History as a Game of Cognates: Troubled Diasporic Identities in *The Way Things Were*” by Nikhitha Mary Mathew & Dr Smita Jha**

The chapter explores Aatish Taseer’s novel *The Way Things Were* as a thoughtful examination of diasporic identity and cultural dynamics, focusing on how intergenerational memory shapes personal and cultural identity. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch’s theory of post-memory, it examines the novel’s depiction of India’s classical past and the political shifts of post-independence India, as reflected in the lives of Toby, a Sanskrit scholar, and his son, Skanda. The narrative highlights Toby’s struggles with belonging and identity, showing how historical challenges, cultural complexities, and the evolving idea of “Indianness” are passed on to the next generation.

Toby deeply connects to India’s classical heritage, viewing Sanskrit as a core element of cultural identity. To him, Sanskrit represents an idealized past that modern India has not fully preserved. This disconnect creates a sense of inner conflict—a tension between the values of classical India and the realities of the present. Toby’s disillusionment intensifies through significant political events, such as the Emergency and the anti-Sikh riots, which, as Jenny Edkins suggests in her concept of trauma and betrayal, can deeply affect personal identity. These moments disrupt Toby’s trust in

India's social and political institutions, leading to his isolation within his homeland.

Skanda inherits Toby's cultural and emotional legacy through Hirsch's concept of "post-memory," where the experiences and values of one generation shape the next. The "game of cognates," a Sanskrit word association exercise taught by Toby, serves as an effort to connect Skanda with India's past. However, it also transfers Toby's unresolved inner conflicts, leading Skanda to develop a sense of detachment from modern life that reflects his father's struggles. Skanda's dual identity as an Indian and an outsider complicates this inheritance, emphasizing his cultural complexity.

Taseer uses narrative dualism and character contrasts to explore identity conflicts and the sense of displacement experienced by diasporic individuals. Toby's admiration for classical culture contrasts with characters like Maniraja, Uma's pragmatic second husband, who embodies the emerging merchant class and the realities of modern India. This contrast highlights the tension between traditional cultural values and contemporary pragmatism, illustrating the challenges of maintaining cultural identity in a rapidly changing world.

The novel also examines how cultural identity can be commercialized within India's elite circles. Characters like Gayatri Mann use their "Indianness" as a form of social capital, leading to identity struggles and disconnection from both their heritage and their adopted cultures. The chapter concludes that *The Way Things Were* presents a layered exploration of identity, memory, and personal disillusionment, offering insight into how historical influences and societal changes shape the understanding of Indian identity in a complex, globalized context.

## **Chapter 2: "Articulating Urbanity: "Migrating" through the Novels of Mohsin Hamid" by Paromita Bose**

The chapter explores migration as a central aspect of urban life and transformation through Mohsin Hamid's novels, drawing on Saskia Sassen's theory of global cities and Henri Lefebvre's notion of urban space. According to Sassen, cities transcend national borders to function as global hubs for capital and information, attracting migrants seeking economic opportunities. However, these global cities often exacerbate disparities, leaving many disillusioned with the "better life" they had envisioned. Lefebvre's "right to the city" underscores the need for inclusive, humane

urban spaces, a concept Bose uses to examine Hamid's portrayal of fragmented migrant experiences in cities.

The chapter analyses three of Hamid's novels: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Exit West*, and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*. Each presents unique perspectives on migration as both a spatial and existential journey. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, protagonist Changez migrates from Pakistan to the United States, initially embracing the American Dream but eventually encountering cultural and racial prejudices, particularly post-9/11. His growing alienation forces him to return to Lahore, reflecting the broader conflicts faced by migrants rejected by societies they hoped to call home.

In *Exit West*, Hamid uses "magical doors" to depict migration, bypassing physical journeys to focus on the psychological and emotional transitions of characters Saeed and Nadia. Saeed clings to his cultural roots and faith, while Nadia adapts fluidly to new environments. Their experiences highlight the paradox of urban migration: balancing the desire to belong with the need to preserve cultural identity. Bose notes Hamid's use of unnamed cities to universalize the migration experience in contemporary urban life.

*How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* portrays migration from rural poverty to urban success through a self-help format. The unnamed protagonist's ascent to wealth, driven by consumerism and profit, critiques the city as an economic machine. His story reveals how urban migration reshapes values, ethics, and aspirations under the pressures of capitalism.

Bose emphasizes Hamid's depiction of cities as both inclusive and exclusionary. His characters grapple with a crisis of belonging, torn between nostalgia for their origins and the alienation of their new environments. The chapter positions Hamid's novels as a compelling exploration of urbanity, migration, and identity, urging readers to reconsider cities as contested spaces that shape and are shaped by migrants. This nuanced analysis of the migrant experience sheds light on the psychological costs and transformative potential of urban migration.

### **Chapter 3: Roots/Routes of Emerging Nepali Diaspora: A Study through Manjushree Thapa's *Seasons of Flight* by Medha Devi**

In this chapter, Medha Devi explores the intricate dynamics of community and identity as reflected in Manjushree Thapa's novel *Seasons of Flight*. This chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of how the novel presents the

experiences of the emerging Nepali diaspora, focusing on themes of migration, identity, and belonging. It begins with an overview of the context in which *Seasons of Flight* is set. Devi introduces Thapa's work as a significant contribution to literature that examines the lives of Nepali immigrants as they navigate new environments while remaining connected to their cultural roots. The novel captures the complexities of migration, reflecting both the personal and collective aspects of this experience.

Devi examines the novel's portrayal of migration as a physical journey and a metaphorical search for identity. The narrative follows the lives of Nepali characters who relocate to different countries, and Devi highlights how Thapa uses these journeys to explore themes of transition, adaptation, and cultural negotiation. The novel's focus goes beyond simple movement, delving into how migration reshapes identities and transforms the meaning of home.

A central theme addressed in the chapter is the concept of "roots" and "routes" within the context of the Nepali diaspora. Devi analyzes how the characters in *Seasons of Flight* maintain connections to their Nepali heritage while navigating the challenges and opportunities of their new environments. "Roots" symbolize their ties to their homeland and cultural traditions, while "routes" represent their evolving paths in their new lives abroad. Devi's analysis reveals how these elements intertwine, creating a rich and complex sense of identity for the characters.

The chapter also explores broader issues that impact the Nepali diaspora, particularly the tension between preserving traditional values and adapting to new cultural landscapes. Devi discusses how Thapa addresses the balance between cultural continuity and the pressures of assimilation. The novel's characters face challenges in maintaining their cultural identity, managing generational differences, and finding their place in unfamiliar settings. Devi highlights how Thapa's narrative thoughtfully captures migration's emotional and psychological complexities.

Additionally, Devi examines the narrative techniques and stylistic choices employed by Thapa, noting the use of multiple perspectives and interconnected storylines to portray the diverse experiences of the Nepali diaspora. These techniques allow Thapa to present a layered view of community life, reflecting various aspects of identity and belonging. The chapter illustrates how *Seasons of Flight* presents the ongoing negotiation between maintaining cultural roots and adapting to new environments, offering a nuanced exploration of migration and identity.

**Chapter 4: Yes, the Subaltern Can Speak, but the Question Is How: History from the Below in Indo-Caribbean Diaspora and Gautra Bahadur's Coolie Woman by Sourav Singha**

The chapter critically examines how colonial historiography has systematically silenced the voices of marginalized communities, particularly Indo-Caribbean indentured women. Through the lens of Gautra Bahadur's *Coolie Woman: The Odyssey of Indenture*, the chapter interrogates the mechanisms of historical oblivion and epistemic violence, unpacking how these women's lived experiences were erased from mainstream narratives.

Singha highlights the limitations within traditional historiography, noting how prevailing narratives have often overlooked diverse perspectives. He draws on the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Paul Ricoeur to explore the historical neglect of indentured women, whose stories were frequently excluded from mainstream records. While Ricoeur critiques the selective nature of memory and historical documentation, Spivak focuses on how certain narratives have been disregarded, leading to gaps in understanding these communities. Against this backdrop, *Coolie Woman* emerges as a significant contribution to historical literature, aiming to recover the narratives of these overlooked women through methods such as archival research, oral histories, and personal accounts.

The chapter examines Bahadur's distinctive approach to documenting history, focusing on ordinary individuals' lives, challenges, and perseverance within complex social structures. Bahadur reconstructs the journey of her great-grandmother Sujaria, who migrated from Bihar to British Guiana as an indentured laborer, offering a vivid account of migration, labor, and survival. Singha emphasizes how *Coolie Woman* revisits colonial histories by revealing the difficult conditions of recruitment and life in plantation societies. The narrative also highlights the specific challenges faced by women during indentured migration, including social inequalities, gender-based struggles, and the additional burden of navigating economic hardship.

Through a critical analysis of *Coolie Woman*, the chapter demonstrates how Bahadur bridges personal memory with historical research, enriching the historical record by incorporating individual experiences. This method provides insight into the lives of two generations of Indo-Caribbean women—Bahadur and Sujaria—while reflecting on the broader societal forces that shaped their realities. Singha notes that Bahadur avoids simplistic portrayals, instead acknowledging the strength and resilience of these women as they navigated displacement and adversity.

Ultimately, this chapter positions *Coolie Woman* as an important contribution to historical studies, offering a thoughtful approach to representing previously overlooked voices and reconsidering the ethics of historical narrative. By blending personal stories with broader historical contexts, Bahadur's work not only brings attention to the experiences of Indo-Caribbean women but also encourages a deeper reflection on how history is recorded and remembered.

### **Chapter 5: Means of Retention: Ethnic Identity in Indian Diaspora Literature by Chandrama Basu**

The chapter explores the nuanced and complex relationship between the Indian diaspora and their ethnic identity as represented in literature. Drawing on a wide range of works from authors such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Anita Desai, and Bharati Mukherjee, the chapter examines how Indian diasporic characters navigate the challenges of cultural adaptation, assimilation, and the preservation of their cultural heritage. At the core of this analysis is understanding ethnic identity as a dynamic construct continuously shaped by memory, nostalgia, and cultural practices.

The chapter emphasizes how voluntary or forced migration creates a profound sense of dislocation for diasporic individuals. It highlights the hybrid nature of their identities, caught between the cultural frameworks of their homeland and the host country. Homi Bhabha's theory of the "third space" frames this experience, illustrating how diasporic identities often exist in a liminal space where new cultural meanings and strategies of belonging are constructed. This ambivalence is evident in Lahiri's *The Namesake* and Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*, where characters struggle to balance cultural continuity and adaptation.

Food, memory, and ritual are key to retaining ethnic identity in these narratives. Culinary traditions are portrayed as powerful tools for connecting with one's roots, offering comfort and a sense of belonging in foreign landscapes. For instance, Lahiri's characters in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* rely on traditional Indian dishes to preserve their cultural identity and recreate a semblance of home. Similarly, religious rituals and festivals anchor cultural continuity, enabling diasporic communities to pass on their heritage to subsequent generations.

The chapter also underscores the role of diasporic communities in sustaining collective cultural identities. Through shared practices, language, and religion, these communities create a support system that helps individuals

navigate the alienation and challenges of migration. This is vividly depicted in novels such as *A House for Mr Biswas* by V.S. Naipaul, where the formation of a Hindu community in Trinidad serves as a microcosm of cultural preservation.

Basu argues that retaining ethnic identity is neither static nor unproblematic. It involves a delicate interplay between longing for the past and adapting to the present, making it a vital element of the diasporic experience. By examining the literary representations of this journey, the chapter sheds light on the resilience and adaptability of Indian diasporic communities as they forge identities that transcend geographical and cultural boundaries.

**Chapter 6: Saga of Cultural Trauma, Lost Identity and Space - A Deconstructive Reading of Atin Bandyopadhyay's *Nilkanta Pakhir Khoje*, Sarojkumar Roychoudhury's *Neel Agun*, and Hassan Azizul Haq's *Agun Pakhi* by Sayak Moitra**

The chapter examines the lasting effects of displacement on communities following the partition of Bengal, as portrayed in Bengali literature. Analyzing Atin Bandyopadhyay's *Nilkanta Pakhir Khoje*, Sarojkumar Roychoudhury's *Neel Agun*, and Hassan Azizul Haq's *Agun Pakhi*, Moitra explores the emotional and psychological impact of forced migration, particularly on vulnerable groups such as women. Using a deconstructive literary approach, the chapter investigates how migration, religious tensions, and territorial divisions contributed to identity struggles and the formation of new socio-political realities.

A central focus of Moitra's analysis is the collective experience of displacement and its role in reshaping group identity and memory. Bengali partition literature often reflects the challenges displaced populations face as they grapple with fragmented identities and the memories of their lost homelands. Incorporating Henri Lefebvre's theories, Moitra highlights how space can serve as a tool for control or empowerment. For displaced individuals, new environments become a refuge and identity negotiation spaces.

In *Nilkanta Pakhir Khoje*, Atin Bandyopadhyay uses the Nilkanta bird as a symbol of hope amid the chaos of partition. The novel portrays Hindu-Muslim relationships in undivided Bengal, disrupted by conflict and unrest. The village setting, surrounded by rivers and forests, evokes a sense of pre-partition harmony. At the same time, characters like Malati and Jalali reflect

the hardships of starvation, displacement, and the violence endured by women.

Sarojkumar Roychoudhury's *Neel Agun* focuses on the struggles of female refugees who face dual challenges due to their gender and refugee status. Through the stories of Anjana, Ranjana, and Khanjana, the novel highlights the difficulties women face within a patriarchal society shaped by displacement and conflict. Moitra interprets the "blue fire" in the novel as a metaphor for the lasting scars of communal strife and societal disruption.

Hassan Azizul Haq's *Agun Pakhi* offers a deeply personal view of partition through the perspective of an elderly woman who refuses to leave her homeland despite her family's urging. Her strong attachment to the land reflects the deep ties between identity and place, while her experiences highlight the emotional challenges of uprooting.

Moitra demonstrates how Bengali partition literature preserves the memory of displacement, capturing the enduring emotional impact and reshaping of identities caused by migration. Women's experiences emerge as central to these narratives, reflecting the broader social upheavals of the time. These works encourage readers to reflect on the lasting effects of conflict, displacement, and social change.

### **Chapter 7: "The Shifting Thematics of Memory and Identity: Interrogating Indenture Experience through Select Indo-Fijian Life-Writing" by Anirban Banerjee**

The chapter explores the interplay of memory, migration, and identity within the Indo-Fijian community. Focusing on the experiences of indentured Indian immigrants and their descendants, it examines how individual and collective memory serves as a tool for shaping identity in the face of cultural shifts and historical oversight.

Banerjee provides an overview of the indentured immigration system, established as a labor solution following the abolition of slavery. Between the 19th and early 20th centuries, many Indians were transported across the *Kaala paani* to British colonies such as Fiji under challenging conditions. While migration offered hope for escaping poverty and famine in India, it also exposed individuals to complex realities, including racial prejudice and demanding plantation labor. As migrants adjusted to their new surroundings, their experiences became part of the evolving Indo-Fijian identity. However, Banerjee notes that this identity also contains gaps shaped by selective remembering and forgetting.

Drawing on Memory Studies, Banerjee examines how Indo-Fijian narratives reflect these dynamics. Brij V. Lal's collections—*Chalo Jahaji*, *Intersections*, and *Levelling Wind*—are central to this analysis, offering insights into how memory and identity have evolved across generations. First-generation migrants often used memory as a coping mechanism, balancing nostalgia for their homeland and adapting to new cultural settings. In doing so, they sometimes set aside the more painful aspects of their past to foster a sense of community within the multi-ethnic plantation system. However, Banerjee argues that this approach created gaps in historical understanding for later generations.

The second generation of Indo-Fijians grappled with this inherited silence, experiencing a sense of disconnection as they navigated fragmented narratives of their roots. In response, their descendants worked to recover and reconstruct these lost stories. Through memoirs and semi-fictional accounts, authors like Lal helped preserve collective memory, filling historical voids and offering vivid portrayals of the indentured experience. These narratives highlight how memory connects individuals to their past and helps protect cultural history from being overlooked.

Banerjee's chapter emphasizes the complex relationship between memory, migration, and identity in the Indo-Fijian community. By examining how identity and belonging are negotiated across generations, the chapter highlights the role of literature in preserving overlooked histories and fostering a shared sense of community.

### **Chapter 8: “Writing 1971: Narratives of War and Their Limitations” by Sukriti Pandey**

This chapter examines the contested memory of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War, exploring how literature and visual media shape national narratives. While Bangladesh celebrates the war as a victory of ethno-linguistic nationalism, Pakistan largely suppresses its memory, creating contrasting historical perspectives. Through Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2001) and Aquila Ismail's *Of Martyrs and Marigolds* (2017), this chapter explores how fiction reconstructs erased histories and challenges state-sponsored myths.

Shamsie critiques Pakistan's selective amnesia through Raheen and Karim, whose contrasting perspectives on maps and memory reflect broader tensions in national identity. While Raheen navigates Karachi through lived experience, Karim studies official maps to understand ethnic violence and

exclusion. Their collaboration on an internet map symbolizes an effort to reconcile fragmented histories and suggests a rooted cosmopolitanism as an antidote to national division.

In contrast, Ismail's *Of Martyrs and Marigolds* highlights the persecution of Urdu-speaking communities in Bangladesh, critiquing the erasure of their suffering from official histories. Through Suri's perspective, the novel documents both Pakistani army atrocities against Bengalis and retaliatory violence by the Mukti Bahini. It explores how language and ethnicity became the basis for citizenship, leading to mass expulsions and violence. The novel also questions the justice system and political decisions that marginalized entire communities post-war.

Both novels challenge official records, using fiction to reconstruct silenced histories. By juxtaposing wartime media, caricatures, and literary narratives, this chapter argues that memory and representation remain deeply political, shaping the ongoing discourse on statehood, identity, and historical justice.

### **Chapter 9: Countering the Diasporic Ethos: Displacement, Conflict, and Search for Identity in Roma Tearne's *Bone China* by Neelofar Shafi and Haadiyah Chishti**

This chapter explores Roma Tearne's *Bone China* as a diasporic narrative that examines themes of displacement, identity, and conflict against Sri Lanka's civil unrest. The novel intricately weaves personal and collective histories, portraying the struggles of the De Silva family as they navigate their forced migration from Sri Lanka to Britain. Tearne captures the emotional and psychological turmoil of displacement while reflecting on how war, cultural hybridity, and memory shape identity in a transnational context.

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Edward Said, Stuart Hall, and Homi Bhabha, the chapter explores how *Bone China* presents identity as a fluid and evolving construct. The novel's protagonist, Grace de Silva, represents the older generation's deep-rooted connection to Sri Lanka, while her children, Christopher and Thornton, embody the tensions of migration and adaptation in Britain. Through their experiences, Tearne examines the challenges of negotiating between cultural heritage and assimilation, revealing how diasporic individuals often exist in a liminal space between two worlds.

The narrative unfolds across two locations—Sri Lanka and London—highlighting the stark contrast between the familiarity of home and the

alienation of exile. Grace's forbidden love for a Tamil man, the family's gradual displacement, and the younger generation's struggle to reconcile their Sri Lankan roots with British society underscore the broader themes of belonging and loss. The novel's title, *Bone China*, is a metaphor for fragility and resilience, symbolizing the delicate nature of identity and the lasting ties to heritage that persist despite geographical and cultural dislocation.

This chapter analyzes *Bone China* to examine how diasporic literature engages with historical trauma, memory, and the quest for self-definition. By situating the novel within the broader discourse of migration studies, the chapter highlights the role of literature in documenting the lived experiences of displaced communities. Ultimately, Tearne's novel serves as a testament to the enduring impact of war and migration on personal and collective identity, offering a nuanced perspective on the diasporic condition in an increasingly globalized world.

This introductory chapter lays the groundwork for the themes explored throughout this volume, *Haptics of "Home" and "Homemaking" in South Asian Literature: Assemblages of Identification and Its Reflection in Diasporic Fiction*. Examining the intersections of migration, identity, and memory in South Asian diasporic literature demonstrates how these narratives articulate the multifaceted nature of diasporic life. The theoretical perspectives explored—ranging from hybridity and post-memory to spatial dynamics and sensory connections—highlight the evolving processes through which diasporic communities navigate the idea of "home."

The chapters in this volume collectively examine how literature captures the emotional, cultural, and historical experiences of South Asian diasporic communities. From personal stories of migration's impact on identity to broader reflections on cultural adaptation, these contributions offer diverse insights into the meaning of belonging and the creation of spaces of comfort and continuity.

By bringing together varied perspectives, the book underscores the resilience and creativity of South Asian diasporic communities. It presents homemaking as a response to dislocation and a dynamic process that reshapes identity and fosters belonging in new environments. Whether through sensory memories, intergenerational stories, or cultural traditions, the narratives explored in this volume affirm that the concept of "home" transcends physical boundaries, becoming a space of adaptation, reflection, and community.

As the collection progresses, readers are invited to engage with the evolving meanings of “home” and “homemaking” in diasporic contexts. By blending theoretical insights with literary analysis, this volume makes a meaningful contribution to ongoing discussions on migration, identity, and the transformative role of South Asian diasporic literature. It encourages deeper reflection on how literature captures the complex and ever-changing nature of human belonging.



## CHAPTER 1

# HISTORY AS A GAME OF COGNATES: TROUBLED DIASPORIC IDENTITIES IN *THE WAY THINGS WERE*

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### Abstract

Aatish Taseer's 2014 novel, *The Way Things Were*, presents the reader with a complex amalgamation of three versions of India- the classical era, the post-independent era (1950-1990), and modern India. With multiple points of view for narration, the novel enumerates the troubles that Indians, particularly the rich, who migrated from India faced. Foreigners within the motherland, their struggle to accept a newly formed identity, the struggle of the second generation, and their relationship with India form the large canvas of the novel. This paper seeks to understand how Taseer places Sanskrit as a metaphor for "Indianness." Sanskrit is recognized within the novel for its functionality and associated legacy attributes. As a cultural artifact, Sanskrit is treated as a material possession that brings classical India closer. The focus will also be placed on the emotional impact of the main characters' disillusionment caused by political upheavals in post-independence India. Concepts related to cultural identity and the effects of betrayal will be applied to explore the complex identities of the elite Indian community depicted in the text. The idea of post-memory will serve as a framework to examine how the experiences of the earlier generation influenced the identity and historical perspective of the second generation within this community.

**Keywords:** Cultural schizophrenia, diasporic identity, Indianness, political trauma, post-memory

## Introduction

“Itihasa, of course. And it is a compound: *iti-ha-sa*: The Way indeed that Things Were” (Taseer 2014, 299).

*The Way Things Were* deals with the life of a Sanskritist who seeks the meaning of his life in translating Ancient India to the present. Written by British writer and journalist Aatish Taseer and published in 2014, the novel attracted an international audience and was longlisted for the DSC Prize of 2016. The novel’s central character, Toby, is a prince who lives outside India, making him a foreigner in his own nation. The novel revolves around three Indias: the classical India of the past, the present state of India, and the modern state it is becoming, as well as Toby’s attempts to connect them. As the title suggests, a major focus of the novel is the past, “the way things were” then. Sanskrit is a key symbol within the work, representing the nation’s rich cultural heritage.

As Toby taught his son, “After the material from which we’re made, he would say, this shared history of sound and meaning is our deepest affinity” (Taseer 2014, 24). This passing down of a love for Sanskrit and memories of the past to his son introduces a deeper emotional layer within the text. This father-son transmission of memory forms a crucial part of the novel. This paper seeks to analyze how Taseer represents the transmission of the father’s (Toby’s) emotional struggles to his son (Skanda) through the lens of post-memory theory. After a brief introduction to post-memory through the works of Marianne Hirsch, the paper will examine the challenges Toby faced using the concept of cultural dissonance and Jenny Edkins’s idea of personal betrayal. It will then explore how these experiences are passed on to Skanda, reflecting the role of post-memory within the novel.

## Post-memory

The paradoxes of indirect knowledge haunt many of us who came after. The formative events of the twentieth century have crucially informed our biographies, sometimes threatening to overshadow and overwhelm our lives. However, we did not see them, suffer through them, or experience their impact directly. Our relationship with them has been defined by our very “post-ness” and by the powerful but mediated forms of knowledge that have followed from it. (Hoffman, 2004,32)

The term *post-memory* explains the post-ness of trauma and its transmission from one generation to another. Marianne Hirsch developed the concept of post-memory in the early 1990s to explain the connection that subsequent

generations have with the significant experiences of their predecessors. This term was introduced by Hirsch in 1992 in her essay, “*Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory*,” published in the Winter volume (1992–1993) of *Discourse*. In the essay, Hirsch describes post-memory as not “beyond memory” but as something distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by a deep personal connection. She explains that post-memory reflects on memory, recognizing it as shaped and mediated through narration and imagination: “*Post-memory should reflect on memory, revealing it as equally constructed and mediated by the narration and imagination processes*” (Hirsch 1993, 5). Her works, such as *The Generation of Postmemory* and *The Connective Arts of Postmemory*, further elaborate on this generational distance and its relation to the past. Hirsch defines the concept as:

Postmemory describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before experiences they “remember” only through the stories, images, and behaviors they grew up in. However, these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. (Hirsch 2008, 103)

While memory is transmitted through direct recollection, post-memory is shaped through “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (Hirsch 2008, 8). Individuals who grow up surrounded by strong memories held by adults often find their own experiences influenced by these inherited memories, which become deeply ingrained in their consciousness. Significant historical events are frequently passed down in this way. Through this process, generations without firsthand experience of past events engage with them indirectly, forming a connection to those experiences. This delayed engagement with memory can also be linked to concepts such as “absent memory” (Fine 1988), “inherited memory,” “belated memory,” “prosthetic memory” (Lury 1998; Landsberg 2004), “*mémoire trouée*” (Raczymow 1994), “*mémoire des cendres*” (Fresco 1984), “vicarious witnessing” (Zeitlin 1998), and “received history” (Young 1997)” (Hirsch 2008, 105).

The whole idea of post-memory is based on the following controversial assumptions:

- (1) Descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection memory and thus that, in certain extreme circumstances,

memory can be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event.

- (2) This received memory is distinct from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants. Hence, there is an insistence on “post” or “after” and many qualifying adjectives that try to define both a specifically inter- and trans-generational act of transfer and the resonant aftereffects of trauma. (Hirsch, 2008, 115)

The “post-ness” of memory is closely linked to the “belatedness” of trauma, as explained by Cathy Caruth, referring to the delayed re-emergence of trauma over time. In a post-memory context, this delay is marked by a generational divide. Hirsch clarifies using the term “post” by drawing parallels with postcolonialism and postmodernism. Similar to these, post-memory “reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture” (Hirsch 2008, 121). However, unlike them, post-memory is not a movement but a process of memory transmission across or within generations.

Theorists like van Alphen have critiqued the notion that memories can be transferred between generations. He argues, “The normal trajectory of memory is fundamentally indexical. There is continuity between the event and its memory. Moreover, this continuity has an unambiguous direction: the event is the beginning, and the memory is the result. In the case of the children of survivors, the indexical relationship that defines memory has never existed. Their relationship to the past events is based on fundamentally different semiotic principles” (Van Alphen 2004, 108). In response, Hirsch draws on the ideas of “cultural memory” and “collective memory” developed by Jan and Alieda Assmann. Building on Maurice Halbwachs’s concept of “collective memory,” Jan Assmann identifies two forms: communicative and cultural memory. Communicative memory involves the informal passing of memories across generations, while cultural memory is more structured and enduring. Alieda Assmann expands on this by introducing two formats within communicative memory—“individual” and “group/family” memory—emphasizing how personal and familial contexts shape the transmission of memory. These frameworks support that memories can be passed down without direct lived experience.

According to Hirsch, the family is the primary space for this transmission. Through everyday interactions—from dinner table conversations to subtle gestures—children absorb the emotional weight of past experiences, integrating them into their understanding of the world. minute gestures, children observe their adults and imbibe and imprint their traumatic memories into their minds.

The language of family, the language of the body: nonverbal and noncognitive acts of transfer occur most clearly within a familial space, often in symptoms. It is perhaps the descriptions of this symptomatology that have made it appear as though the post-generation wanted to assert its victimhood alongside that of the parents. To be sure, children of those directly affected by collective trauma inherit a horrific, unknown, and unknowable past that their parents were not meant to survive. (Hirsch 2008, 121)

As the family is considered the most intimate space where individuals openly share their experiences, it often becomes the setting where the emotional weight of difficult memories is revealed in its rawest form. A child exposed to such memories may develop a heightened sense of responsibility—an urge to reconcile with the past and address the perceived injustices faced by previous generations.

In *The Way Things Were*, the intergenerational transmission of Toby's emotional struggles impacts Skanda deeply. He inherits a sense of passivity similar to his father's, which can be seen as his response to the complex experiences passed down to him. Like Toby, Skanda turns to Sanskrit to retreat from the realities around him. Toby's struggles are twofold: first, his identity conflict. He feels like an outsider within his own country, gradually experiencing a sense of cultural dissonance. The second struggle arises from feelings of betrayal and disillusionment. Toby's idealized belief in Classical India fades as he confronts the evolving social order, leading to a profound disappointment.

In the following sections, relevant theoretical frameworks will explore Toby's cultural dissonance and disillusionment. This will be followed by an analysis of how Toby's emotional struggles influence Skanda's character, highlighting the thread of post-memory that runs through their relationship.

## **Cultural Schizophrenia and Dualism**

We learn to split personalities  
 We become chameleons  
 We take on different accents  
 We dress differently  
 We change our names  
 We meet all expectations  
 We are closer to what we were before  
 But not quite- something is missing (Sherazad 1995, 128)

These excerpts from Jamal Sherazad's poem "Making of a Cultural Schizophrenic" shed light on the inner conflicts experienced by diasporic women. While the poem specifically addresses Indian women living abroad and their challenges, the themes it explores have broader relevance. The identity crisis faced by the diasporic community can be examined through the lens of "cultural schizophrenia," a condition where individuals struggle to reconcile or integrate two contrasting identities shaped by their immigrant status.

The concept of "cultural schizophrenia" can be closely linked to W. E. B. Du Bois's idea of "double consciousness." Du Bois introduced this concept to explore the psychological impact of racial inequality on African Americans. Double consciousness is described as "a concept in social philosophy referring, originally, to a source of inward 'twoness' putatively experienced by African-Americans because of their racialized oppression and devaluation in a white-dominated society" (Double Consciousness, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023). Du Bois first introduced the term in his 1897 article published in *Atlantic Monthly* and expanded on it in his 1903 work *The Souls of Black Folk*. He explains the dual nature of African American identity as:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sight\* in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 1903, 8)

This duality, or the "two-ness" as Du Bois describes it, can be applied to studying the diasporic community depicted in *The Way Things Were*. Du Bois focuses on the profound disruption caused by cultural shifts around an individual and how this can lead to a loss of self while adapting to new environments. Highlighting the experience of a "double life, with double thoughts, double duties, and double social classes," which "give rise to double words and double ideals" (Du Bois 1903, 136), he articulates the inner conflict faced by individuals navigating between two cultural identities.