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Examining Bharati Mukherjee's Short Stories via the Window of Memory and Nostalgia

Priya Dutta

Assistant Professor of English, Pt. CLS Govt. College, Karnal, Haryana, India

ABSTRACT: With reference to Bharati Mukherjee's short tales, the purpose of this study is to illustrate how diasporic awareness carries with it a large connotation of pain, memory, and nostalgia in a manner that is both archetypal and mixed in its character. The following three words are going to be examined by us via the perspective of Bharati Mukherjee, which provides a counterpoint to the cognitive processes of the immigrants. Her short story "idealises" the notion of memory not as a physical location known as "home," but rather as an experience of being intimate with the microcosm. Memory and nostalgia present a contradictory and unclear concept since she has written it against her cultural origins, national identity, ethnicity, and geography, all of which she claims to have forfeited. Remembering and nostalgia are both seen to be "traditional" and "backward" ways of seeing the world, and they may be a barrier to a feeling of belonging to the world and the places in it. The female characters are trapped in a terrible web created by the promise of the "American Dream" and recollections of their birthplace, yet despite this, they embrace and adapt to their new "selves." The way in which the author Bharati Mukherjee makes use of a mechanism called "double lens" to locate a solid reference point for her characters who are continuously under the danger of nostalgic push and pull elements will be a primary focus of this article.

KEYWORDS: Trauma, Memory, Nostalgia, Backward, Traditional, American Dream, Homeland, Paradoxical, Host land, Ambiguous, National Identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

In diasporic frameworks and literature, the full potential of the literary portrayal of concepts like memory, nostalgia, and trauma has not been explored to yet. In this day and age of globalisation, it is essential to study the many political, social, and cultural manifestations of it. Nostalgia and remembrance serve as instruments of cultural repair and resilience in diasporic tales, which are stories in which the past serves to enliven the present. The past becomes the "vital ground" that a diasporic person always has to till and care to in order to maintain their identity. Those who are uprooted might cultivate their memories via the cultivation of nostalgia. It is the feeling of isolation and disconnection that drives a diaspora to unconsciously reminisce about happier times. This might take place in terms of physical space, or it can take place in mental space when one feels nostalgic. It would seem that when feelings of nostalgia begin to rise, Bharati Mukherjee is there to pierce them with the harsh truths of the here and now, allowing her readers to go on with their lives and let go of stale memories. She does not seem to be in a hurry to close the cultural understanding gaps, despite the fact that she does not disregard them. In his book titled "Memory: Performance, Knowledge and Experiences," Endel Tulving, an experimental psychologist, neuroscientist, and Professor Emeritus at the University of Toronto, defines memory as "[M]emory is the present conscious awareness of an event that has happened in the rememberer's own past" (3). Professor of Mechanical Engineering and recipient of the Young Investigator Award at Texas University, Dallas Jie Zhang classifies memory in his work titled "Memory Process and the Function of Sleep" based on time under three different labels: long-term memory, short-term memory, and sensory memory. Zhang's research was published under the title "Memory Process and the Function of Sleep." Diaspora suffers from long-term memory, which may last a lifetime and allows them to remember prior days, regardless of how joyful or unhappy those days may have been. Memory that is stored for milliseconds is called short-term memory, and memory that is stored for many seconds or more is called sensory memory. A young Swiss scholar named Johannes Hofer used the Greek word "nostos" for the first time in his work "Medical Dissertation On Nostalgia 1688" (1934). The word "nostos" means a return to one's native land, and the word "Algos" means grief or suffering. Together, these words were used to define an illness that was observed among Swiss students and mercenaries who had been relocated. There was a time when people used the word "nostalgia" to refer to feelings of homesickness, mental illness, and mild insanity, all of which might result in identity crises, withdrawal, violence, and even attempts at suicide. The idea of melancholy, or nostalgia, is often intertwined with descriptions of the natural world in works of diasporic literature. It has both good and bad characteristics, such as having fun together and being united, as well as negative features such as loneliness, tragedy, and death. It is a combination of affectation, cognition, and conduct that entails remembering prior events while



experiencing sensations of warmth and a "glow" inside oneself. It is characterised by this combination. In her book *Classic Literature Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation* (2015), Mary Ainsworth reinforces the fact that people who have secure attachments or social relations typically benefit from nostalgic pulls more than people who have insecure attachments or distrust in relations. This is because people who have secure attachments or social relations are more likely to look back on their past with fondness and appreciation. The psychological trauma and the role of memory in the process of moulding cultural identities as well as individual identities and senses of selfhood are the primary concerns of trauma studies. The field of trauma studies was established in the nineteenth century on the basis of Sigmund Freud's thesis, which describes trauma as an extraordinary event that questions and ruptures language and its scope, ultimately resulting in the entire breakdown of meaning. The short tale titled "Angela" has a female protagonist by the name of Angela who is from Bangladesh and is an orphan. She was given a new home in the Buren area of Iowa by a family from the Brandon house. She is haunted by the memories of her previous life, in which she was a victim during the Bangladesh War of Independence. Scars are what she thinks of when she thinks of her childhood home; these are the memories that she remembers "Soldiers armed with bayonets severed my nipples when I was six years old. They abandoned you, you poor baby, thinking that you were dead. While I was in the orphanage, Sister Stella would tell me... They abandoned you and thought you were dead, but the Lord brought you back to life. It is now up to you to give him the recognition he deserves" (10). "Angela" is a story about loss, desire, enticement, selflessness, altruistic concerns, and the symbolic rebirth of the protagonist in a new setting, North America, where everything that the protagonist has ever possessed is in a state of disarray at the moment that she utters: "I don't know how I got here.

"The name I was born with is lost to me, the past is lost to me. I must have seen a lot of wickedness when I was six, but I can't remember any of it. The rapes, the dogs chewing on dead bodies. The soldiers. Nothing" (13). In spite of the suffering and the trauma that she endures in her previous life, she yearns for the opportunity to begin once again, from the very beginning, with the cleanest sheet. She accepts the Christian way of life, which is based on the Gospels' teachings that one obtains God's love via acts of forgiveness and forgetfulness. Her recollections from her childhood give her the strength to turn down Dr. VinniMenezies' advances in the romantic department. As a result, she carves out a job for herself and helps individuals whose lives are similar to hers and who are in need of assistance: "They are familiar with me and my family. I have experience working with children that have various disabilities. with youngsters from the burn centre. I won't let my life go to waste" (19). In the short tale "Angela," the main female character suffers from the fragmentation of her mind as a result of the severe physical abuse she endured as a kid. This abuse occurred at the hands of her stepfather. Freud theorised that traumatic experiences and hysteria may be traced back to previous memories of sexual abuse that had been suppressed for a very long period in the individual's conscious memory. This, in turn, leads to feelings of melancholy via the literary lens of Bharati Mukherjee. It is necessary to engage in "talking" in order to break away from the symptom-causing syndrome caused by the actual incident that continues to haunt and cause suffering. The phrase "hysterics suffer mostly from reminiscences" may be found in the book "Studies on hysteria" (1955), which was written by Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud (7). It is possible to explain trauma as a method of remembering or as an event that is kept in the unconscious mind and that, as a result, causes the ego to divide or disassociate, which ultimately results in the formation of a "double conscience." The short tale "Angela" demonstrates for us that the dissociation or lapses in memory that caused Angela to continue to be infected were caused by the fragmentation of the mind, as shown by these two phenomena. According to Bharati Mukherjee, nostalgia is a kind of "selective remembering," in which the past is downgraded and least glorified, but the attention is instead on the defects and former economic and sexual deprivation. [Citation needed] [Citation needed] In Bharati Mukherjee's short stories, nostalgia plays a dual role. On the one hand, it enables her characters to find fixed reference points by becoming a critique of the world that has passed, and on the other, it gives them a "utopian yearning" for a westernised life called the "American dream" that they have always hoped for in spite of their impoverished circumstances. Mukherjee employs the technique of "double lens" to achieve this. Every recollection of "home" is seen as an obstacle in the process of establishing a new sense of belonging in the United States. While her protagonists speed their way towards a hopeful dream-like future, Bharati Mukherjee forbids them to reflect on love memories of days gone by or on fleeting moments of effusive attachments. In her article "A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman" (1991), Bharati Mukherjee refers to the people in her story as "Pioneers," "Middleman," or "New Settlers." These characters, as part of their effort to form a broad coalition, re-create and recreate other settlements in the lush and welcoming soil of their newly acquired homeland out "of the hurlyburly of the disturbed magma between two worlds" ("A Four-Hundred-Year-Old Woman" 37). In the short novel "The Tenant," the main character, Maya Sanyal, decides to leave her stable marriage and her pleasant house in order to pursue a more westernised way of life and more sexual freedom. Because of her history, she feels sorry for herself and is full of apprehensions. As a result, the following things happen to her:



...She can't move. She feels ugly and unworthy. Her adult life no longer seems miraculously rebellion; it is grim, it is perverse. She has accomplished nothing. She has changed citizenship but she hasn't broken through the light, the vigor, the hustle of the New World. She is stuck in dead space (10).

Within the context of the narrative, Maya goes through the harrowing ordeal of seeing the end of a relationship from her own past. In this context, trauma might be seen of as an event that brings about changes in destiny and awareness. In this bottomless pit of unease, a brand-new perception of both the self and the outside world is formed. There is a possibility that experiencing trauma and its ramifications may cause one's awareness to shift in some way. At the Thanksgiving meal that Renata hosts for her family in the short tale "Orbiting," she and her lover Ro' introduce her relatives to each other. Renata lives in a condo in New Jersey. Narratives written by Bharati Mukherjee arise from the shadows of the marginal lives of immigrants, such as Ro', who is a refugee who escaped the Civil War in his native country of Afghanistan out of fear of being detained by the Soviet government. Ro' is a reflection of Bharati Mukherjee's work. As Renata pointed out, he is attempting now to reassert himself in the brazen world by going against the ideals he has acquired from his family and by trying to forget the difficulties and anguish he has experienced in the past:

He becomes shy, dismissive: a pack of dogs attacked him when he was a boy. The skin on his back is speckled and lumpy from burns, and when I ask he laughs. A crazy villager whacked him with a burning stick for cheekiness, he explains. He's ashamed that he comes from a culture of pain

Bharati Mukherjee wants to rethink the meaning of the word "home" so that it is no longer associated with a diasporic sense of comfort and safety. She disregards the citizens and their addresses. She eliminates any concrete symbols that represent recollections of the native place by seizing the relationship that her primary characters have to one another. The characters choose a new path, one in which beginnings are valued more highly than conclusions. This place has a strong longing for its host country, the United States of America. She is adamant about dropping her hyphenated identification as an Indo-Canadian-American citizen in favour of being referred to only as an American writer. As a result, she uses the structure of a "double lens" to enable her characters to locate a reliable source or testimony of their geographical ties. She considers the experience of trauma, violence, and loneliness as well as sexual assault, emotional scarring, physical abuse, and prejudice to be necessary for the construction of a new identity in the host country. She is quoted as saying the following in an interview that she granted to Bill Moyers for broadcast on the News Hour of the Public Broadcasting Service: "An immigrant is a person who, in a variety of ways, including psychological, social, and psychic, has completely reinvented themselves in the new world. Who is taking the new world in as her own and adopting it as her home?" "Making up the Rules as I Go Along" may be found at time stamp 00:04:47. The United States of America encourages its people to have ambitious dreams. In order to create a hopeful country and a better world, Bharati Mukherjee places an emphasis on the need to mongrelize or fuse different cultures. She works to construct and reimagine the concept of America as a land of limitless opportunities. Her protagonists are always engaged in combat with various villains, and they never flee the "battleground" that is the United States of America. Her characters have the strength of the land itself, which endured immense adversity in the past to take control of the land away from its original occupants and establish a new nation and a new way of life for its people. This strength is reflected in her writing.

II. CONCLUSION

It is impossible to reconstitute identities and a 'home' in diasporic works by completely rejecting Indian origins, ethos, or culture. This is the case even if the author is from India. It is possible to maintain new cultural studies between post-colonial dichotomies of modernity and tradition using this method. When attempting to adapt to pitfalls and obstacles in the form of a language barrier, professional and financial instability, loneliness, traumatic episodes, culture shock, and so on in a new cultural environment, an immigrant needs some kind of positive association from an idealistic past to provide a sense of safety. These pitfalls and obstacles can take many different forms. Illegal immigrants, refugees, expellees, and exiles are members of oppressed populations portrayed by Bharati Mukherjee. These individuals are unable to escape their formative years. It is via them that she communicates complaints that are common to her likes and raises an urgent voice and encourages to an ultimate resonance to keep their hopes and dreams alive in a new place. She does this by acting as a wellspring of emotional fortitude, a source of inspiration and strength, and by discovering deeper significance in their upheavals and displacements. The usage of cultural memory and nostalgia has been brushed off as having emotional overtones to the concepts of "home" and "belonging" in the current millennial malaise that pervades the literary landscape. One interpretation of this is that it is an illness with the purpose of distorting the current moment. Pioneering both in the realm of new literature and new territory is Bharati Mukherjee. She has given a new meaning to the term "diaspora" by describing it as an unhyphenated re-housemate that transforms the United States into a continent of ongoing literary innovation and development. She creates a new kind of writing



from the perspective of an immigrant, in which her native India is depicted as a place where opportunities are limited due to restrictions imposed by caste, family, or gender, whereas America is portrayed as a place of freedom and fluidity that nevertheless comes at a cost. In spite of the scary independence and the crippling sensation of loss, her hybrid self pushes through the obstacles by refusing the pulls of illusion and pity. She makes an effort to seize the thrilling world that is full with opportunities and exotic, lively experiences by creating a new cultural self. Within Bharati Mukherjee's short stories, this leads to the birth of a new metaphor known as "The Middleman," "New Settlers," or "The Pioneers," which refers to characters who become the producers of their new "selves" while attempting to reconcile a world that is fragmented.

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