



**BETWEEN MEMORY AND MIGRATION: NOSTALGIA AND
DIASPORIC IDENTITY IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN WRITING**

Pritee R. Desai

Research scholar, Department of English, HNGU, Patan.

E-mail: desaipritee1234@gmail.com

Dr. Mihir M. Dave

Co - author

Associate professor, Department of English

G. D. Modi college Palanpur, HNGU Patan.

E-mail: mihir.dave@gdmca.ac.in

Abstract:

This research paper examines diasporic identity and nostalgia in the works of three contemporary Indian diasporic writers—Nina Sharma, Zara Chowdhary, and Devika Rege—through the lens of recent theoretical developments in diaspora studies. Moving beyond traditional representations of exile and longing for the homeland, these writers articulate a new diasporic consciousness shaped by intersectionality, trauma, political memory, and global mobility. The paper argues that nostalgia in contemporary Indian diasporic writing is no longer purely sentimental; instead, it is fragmented, critical, and reflective, functioning as a tool to interrogate identity, history, and belonging. Using theories of Stuart Hall, Homi K. Bhabha, and Avtar Brah, this study highlights how these writers redefine diasporic identity for the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Indian diaspora, diasporic identity, nostalgia, contemporary literature, hybridity, memory

Introduction:

Diaspora is an emerging word in literature. Literature produced by the diasporic writers explores the problems and possibilities engendered by the experience of migrancy and diasporic life. Needless to say, it is gaining tremendous popularity among the lovers of literature.

The word 'diaspora', derived from the Greek word diaspeiro, literally means scattering or dispersion of the people from their homeland. It was first used by the Greeks for the movements of the Jews away from their homeland. Today, the term is applied to a number of ethnic and racial groups, living in an alien land.

People today are migrating to different parts of the world for one reason or the other. From India too, millions of people have migrated to various alien lands under 'forced exiles' or 'self-imposed exiles'. Some of them have made a mark in the field of writing. These immigrant writers reflect, on the one hand, their attachment to the motherland and on the other, their feeling of alienation and rootlessness. They suffer from psychic trauma and the haunting



presence of their lost homeland, the land of their birth-and also suffer from the anguish of reinventing home in the land of their choice.

Diasporic literature has occupied a significant place in postcolonial literary studies, particularly in relation to themes of migration, displacement, identity crisis, and nostalgia. Early Indian diasporic writers such as V. S. Naipaul, Bharati Mukherjee, and Jhumpa Lahiri often depicted nostalgia as an emotional longing for the homeland, rooted in memory, cultural traditions, and familial bonds. Nostalgia functioned as a response to loss and alienation in an unfamiliar hostland.

However, the conditions of the diaspora have changed dramatically in the twenty-first century. Globalization, digital connectivity, frequent mobility, and transnational cultural exchanges have reshaped diasporic experiences. Contemporary Indian diasporic writers no longer portray identity as a simple binary between home and host country. Instead, identity emerges as fluid, unstable, and constantly negotiated. Within this context, nostalgia itself has undergone a transformation.

This paper explores how Nina Sharma, Zara Chowdhary, and Devika Rege represent diasporic identity and nostalgia from a new perspective. Their writings challenge romanticized memories of the homeland and instead foreground fragmented memory, trauma, intersectionality, and post-nostalgic sensibilities. By examining their works, this study contributes to current debates in diaspora studies and contemporary Indian English literature.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in key theoretical concepts from diaspora and cultural studies. Stuart Hall's influential essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" conceptualizes identity not as a fixed essence but as a "positioning" that is constantly in process (Hall 225). This understanding is particularly relevant to contemporary diasporic writing, where identity is shaped by multiple cultural, racial, and historical forces.

Homi K. Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the "third space" provides a framework for understanding how diasporic subjects negotiate cultural differences. According to Bhabha, cultural identity emerges in the in-between spaces where meanings are translated and transformed (The Location of Culture 55). This idea helps explain how contemporary diasporic writers resist singular cultural affiliations.

Avtar Brah's concept of "diaspora space" further expands the scope of analysis by emphasizing that diaspora is not merely about migrants but about the intersections of multiple histories, identities, and power relations (Cartographies of Diaspora 16). Brah's framework allows for an inclusive reading of nostalgia as a contested and politically charged phenomenon.

Nostalgia, in this study, is treated as a critical mode rather than a purely emotional response. Scholars argue that modern nostalgia often engages with trauma, inherited memory, and



historical violence, making it a reflective and ethical engagement with the past rather than a desire to return to it.

Nina Sharma: Intersectionality and Fragmented Nostalgia

Nina Sharma's writing presents a nuanced portrayal of diasporic identity shaped by intersectional experiences of race, caste, gender, and mental health. Her work reflects the realities of contemporary diaspora, particularly within the South Asian American context, where identity is mediated by systemic racism and cultural expectations.

In Sharma's narratives, nostalgia is fragmented and uneasy. Memories of the homeland are intertwined with silence, discomfort, and emotional conflict. Rather than idealizing India as a cultural refuge, Sharma interrogates the inherited memories passed down through family narratives. Nostalgia becomes a site of questioning rather than comfort.

Sharma's diasporic subjects struggle to reconcile cultural inheritance with present realities. Their identities are shaped not only by geographical displacement but also by social marginalization in the host country. This reflects Hall's idea of identity as a process of becoming rather than being. Sharma's work thus represents a shift from traditional diasporic longing to a critical engagement with memory and belonging.

Zara Chowdhary: Trauma, Political Memory, and Ethical Nostalgia

Zara Chowdhary's writing offers a powerful exploration of diasporic identity through the lens of political violence and collective trauma. Her work foregrounds the impact of historical events on personal and familial memory, emphasizing that diaspora is often shaped by survival rather than choice.

In Chowdhary's narratives, nostalgia is deeply connected to trauma. The homeland is remembered not as a place of harmony but as a site of fear, loss, and political unrest. Memory functions as an inherited burden, transmitted across generations. This intergenerational transmission of trauma complicates traditional notions of nostalgia as longing for return.

Chowdhary transforms nostalgia into an ethical responsibility. Remembering the past becomes an act of witnessing rather than yearning. Her diasporic subjects seek understanding rather than restoration of the past. This critical nostalgia challenges nationalist narratives and highlights the political dimensions of diasporic memory.

Devika Rege: Post-Nostalgic Identity and Global Rootlessness

Devika Rege presents a distinct approach to diasporic identity by focusing on rootlessness and existential uncertainty in a globalized world. Her characters often inhabit transnational urban spaces where movement is continuous and identity remains unsettled.



Unlike earlier diasporic writers, Rege's work reflects a post-nostalgic sensibility. The idea of homeland does not occupy a central emotional space in her narratives. Instead, identity is shaped by personal experience, intellectual inquiry, and global cultural flows. Home becomes an internal and psychological construct rather than a geographical location.

Rege's writing reflects Bhabha's concept of the "third space," where identity is formed through negotiation rather than attachment. Her portrayal of diaspora suggests that for younger generations, belonging is not defined by return but by adaptation and self-definition.

Comparative Analysis: Reimagining Diasporic Identity

A comparative reading of Sharma, Chowdhary, and Rege reveals a significant transformation in contemporary Indian diasporic writing. All three writers reject monolithic representations of nostalgia and instead present it as fragmented, critical, and context-dependent.

While Sharma emphasizes intersectionality and emotional fragmentation, Chowdhary foregrounds trauma and political memory, and Rege articulates a post-nostalgic, global identity. Together, their works demonstrate that diasporic identity in the twenty-first century is shaped by complex negotiations rather than simple cultural loss.

This new perspective reflects broader global changes in migration and identity formation. Diaspora is no longer defined solely by separation from the homeland but by continuous movement, digital connectivity, and multiple cultural affiliations.

Conclusion:

The writings of Nina Sharma, Zara Chowdhary, and Devika Rege mark an important evolution in Indian diasporic literature. By redefining diasporic identity and nostalgia, these writers move beyond traditional narratives of longing and return. Nostalgia emerges as a fragmented, critical engagement with memory, trauma, and history. This study demonstrates that contemporary Indian diasporic writing reflects the complexities of modern global life. Identity is no longer anchored to a singular homeland but is constantly reimagined through lived experience. The works of these writers open new avenues for research in diaspora studies, particularly in understanding how memory and belonging are negotiated in the present.

Works Cited:

- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. Routledge, 1996.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, edited by Jonathan Rutherford, Lawrence & Wishart, 1990, pp. 222–237.
- Rege, Devika. *Quarterlife*. Fourth Estate India, 2023.
- Sharma, Nina. *The Way You Make Me Feel*. Penguin Random House, 2022.
- Chowdhary, Zara. *The Lucky Ones*. Crown Publishing, 2024.