

Postmemory and Identity in Postcolonial Writings: A Study of Bapsi Sidhwa and Jhumpa Lahiri's Short Fictional Works

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Abstract

The present paper explores memory and identity discourse in postcolonial short fiction written by two South Asian immigrant writers Bapsi Sidhwa and Jhumpa Lahiri, through the lens of postmemory, a term coined by Marianne Hirsch. Both the writers fictionalize postcolonial nations and recreate the traumatic history of partition through their inherited memories, which play a vital role in their connection with the past. The study also attempts to investigate how postmemory defines and keeps shaping the identity of later generations based on the memories of their forefathers. For this purpose, the stories 'Defend Yourself Against Me' and 'A Gentlemanly War' from Bapsi Sidhwa's story collection *Their Language of Love*; and 'When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine' and 'The Real Durwan' from Jhumpa Lahiri's story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* have been selected for analyses.

Keywords: Immigrants; Memory; Postmemory; Postcolonial; Second Generation's identity.

Introduction

Memory has a special place in uprooted immigrants' life. The immigrant community of the Indian sub-continent tries to figure out the meaning and purpose of their existence and construct their identity in a foreign land through memories. After the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, most South Asian writers used memory as a tool in writings to build their connection with the past. These writers are somewhere at an 'in-between' position and are "haunted by some sense of loss" (19), as pointed out by Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* (1982). Their fictions cannot pres-

ent the “actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands” (10). They “give a voice to the first and second generation immigrants’ experiences and memories” who otherwise “occupy the periphery in Anglo-British fiction” (Bald 428) and formulate their identities through memories.

Theo D’haen suggests a relationship between memory and post-colonialism. He asserts that with the work of Halbwachs in the early twentieth century, later followed by Jan and Aleida Assman, “cultural memory” has become one of the most important and productive areas of research in literary studies. During the same period, literary critics developed an interest in postcolonial studies like Said’s 1978 *Orientalism*, followed by Spivak and Bhabha (257). In postcolonial literature, critical studies dominantly investigate the traces of binary oppositions in immigrant writings; however, in the writings of immigrants’ children, the focus is mostly on complex relationships between the generation of diaspora and their foreign-born children, “who, differently from their parents, had neither a native land to remember nor traditions to be kept alive” (Carreira 88). This study focuses on the postmemory that second generations have received from parents or forefathers who have had direct experiences of the historical past and collective memories they have developed as a postcolonial nation from various sources. The study also looks into how postmemories help the second generations shape identity.

“Memory,” as Judy Giles opines, “is an act of remembering that can create new understandings of both the past and the present.” (22). Past can be used in the present or future through memory. Memory has been a fundamental tool for constructing historical processes, which is not only an individual process but a collective dimension. According to Maurice Halbwachs, no individual memory exists but a collective memory which means the memory of a shared past preserved by members of a group, class, or nation as a result of shared communication. Memory is a negotiation of past and present through which our identities are defined in the present. Later the attention from the memories of a particular group has shifted to its cultural processes. As a result, “the memories shared within generations and across different generations are the product of public acts of remembrance using a variety of media.” (Erll & Rigney, 2006).

Halbwachs’s theory influences the notion of cultural memory. Jan Assmann considers cultural memory a collective memory because several people share it “that directs behaviour or experience in the interactive framework of society and one that obtains through generations in repeat-

ed societal practice and initiation" (126). Now the question arises why memory analysis is significant in South Asian diaspora narratives. Anh Hua answers this question by arguing that memory analysis is significant because it can reveal the states of postcolonial diasporas, such as desire, repression, trauma, dilemma, and abjection at both the level- psychological as well as social that can expose how power works and gives voice and agency to the marginalized. Memory analysis is one way to pass on traditions, rituals, and history to the next generations (199)

Marianne Hirsch introduced a vital term in memory studies—"Postmemory". In her words, "Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (103). She adds further, "the effects of these past traumatic events on the post generation continue into the present" (107) Second generation has an intense relationship with the experiences of their ancestors who suffered collective trauma that they "remember only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew" (106). Basically, in the context of immigrant characters, when memories rooted in traumatic past experiences and events haunt a diaspora and its memory in the present time, that is postmemory.

Postmemory and Identity

Partition of the Indian subcontinent has left indelible marks on people's minds. Many people were forced to migrate during and after the partition in search of a secure life in the West. Painful memories of past incidents have been transmitted from generation to generation. Because of dislocation, the later generation faces identity issues and struggles to find a true identity while dwelling between the culture of their homeland, their parents left in the past but still rooted in their own culture and culture of the host land, where they live trying to adopt its ways of life. Consequently, post-generation uses postmemories to shape their national or cultural identity. According to Bhabha, "in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (1, 2).

The study investigates textual interweaving of postmemory and identity discourse carried out by postcolonial writers Bapsi Sidhwa and Jhumpa Lahiri in their selected short stories- 'Defend Yourself Against Me' and 'A Gentlemanly War' from Sidhwa's story collection *Their Language of Love*

(2013); 'When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine' and 'The Real Durwan' from Lahiri's story collection *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). Both the writers fictionalize postcolonial nations and recreate the traumatic history of Partition through their inherited memories, explored through the lens of 'post-memory,' a term coined by Marianne Hirsch. The study also attempts to investigate how it defines and keeps shaping the identity of later generations.

In postcolonial texts, the partition of the Indian subcontinent has a significant place when people were forced to cross borders, where they felt a sense of losing their home, culture, and identity and tried to preserve them by remembering their past. These memories are not only handed over to their children but also have an impact on their identity as well. The 'post generation' of immigrants gets influenced by the culture and tradition of both ancestral and host countries. Even second-generation writers, children of survivors, are influenced by the historical past, as reflected in their works. Their stories showcase that when the objects or things trigger the memories of the early generation, causing pain and loneliness, their children also go through the same pain, not intense though, as Hirsch suggests.

Pakistani-American writer Bapsi Sidhwa belongs to the minority of Parsis in Pakistan who migrated to Lahore during the partition. She had witnessed the historical movement of partition in early childhood, which greatly influenced her writing, resulting in nostalgic memories of her homeland. In an interview, she told her painful experience, "There are certain images from my past which have always haunted me. Partition was a very violent experience for everybody in the Punjab. Although I was very young then, I saw chance killings, fires, dead bodies. There are images which have stayed with me. These were also the stories I grew up with." (Sidhwa and Singh 292). Through memories, Sidhwa has recorded emotional experiences, sufferings, how people dealt with trauma, and how they reshaped their lives after a dislocation. As she says, "literature can dig into painful memory and try to make sense of it more successfully than history can." (Sidhwa and Bruschi 141). In autobiographical narratives, Sidhwa relies on personal memories and memories of others she met. In 'Defend Yourself Against Me,' the man with the scar is named Sikander Khan. Sidhwa met him at a party "not in Pakistan, not in India, but on the other side of the world, in Houston!" (165). They share memories of Lahore; they once lived as neighbours in childhood. When Sikhs attacked his village in India during riots, Khan was nine years old. His family was killed, leaving him for dead with his head sliced open.

Khan and his mother went to Lahore, staying in an abandoned house near Sidhwa's. Likewise, Joy meets her childhood neighbour co-incidentally at a dinner party where she is a co-host. They remember their past situations as memories in which both come to know each other.

Hirsch believes that postmemory "describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors ..." (105). The trauma of partition is suffered by the "generation after," which refers to the survivors of war as young children and the later generation. Sidhwa belongs to "the generation of postmemory" in a certain way "to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness" (107) because she was too young to remember the atrocities of war and partition. However, her stories seem to be a literary representation of postmemory that come to her as images and metaphors at various stages, "Since childhood memories can only be accurately exhumed by the child, I will inhabit my childhood. As a writer, I am already practiced in inhabiting different bodies; dwelling in rooms, gardens, bungalows, and space from the past; zapping in time" ("Defend..." 165). Sidhwa admits that she "grew up with stories of what happened, hush-hush stories, which afterwards made sense to me when I was writing my book" (Bruschi 144). The memory of partition is related to trauma reflected in visible scars on Sikander's body: "The sun-charred little body is covered with scars and wounds...." ("Defend" 168). However, as a little child, Joy is unaware of the true reasons for his wounds.

Mr. Khan's wife, although not a witness to the traumatic past, tells the story of Sikander's mother, "Ammijee says she went mad! She would have killed herself if she could... She heard her eleven-year-old daughter screaming and screaming" (172). The postmemory comes to later generations in fragments which they develop from the gathered information from their parents or ancestors; that can be why the story of Ammijee comes to us in pieces. For Joy and Sikh boys, the trauma seems less intense than that of Ammijee, who had experienced it directly but could not express it in words. Sikh boys Pratab and Khushwant belong to the generation of postmemory. They were born many years later when the partition happened. Grief and suffering are transmitted to them by their elders in the family and around that affects them, even if they have not experienced it personally. Hirsch describes the situation of the second generation by saying that "the power of mourning and memory, and the depth of the rift dividing their parents' lives, impart to them something that is akin to memory" ("Past Lives..." 659). The concept of "postmemory" is related

to Holocaust memory in particular, and that memory is not the same as that of people who have experienced traumatic pasts. Sidhwa's work is influenced by Holocaust postmemory by which the identity of the second generation is shaped indirectly because the transmission of memory is not limited to family only but through society it helps to develop a collective identity having a shared history. It is fluid and unstable and changes, shifts, or reconstructs itself over time and space with history due to multiple factors like politics, religion, and language. Pratab and Khushwant inherit collective memories from their ancestors. They feel guilty for their forefather's wrongdoing and, on their behalf, ask Ammijee for forgiveness. They "lie face down across the threshold, their hands flat on the floor as if they are about to do push-ups. Their faces are entirely hidden by hair. Suddenly, their voices moist and thick, they begin to cry, 'Ammi-ji! Ammi-ji! Forgive us.'" (143).

Due to an ongoing process, identity is never fixed but always in flux. According to Stuart Hall, cultural identity is affected by history and culture rather than a final product (222). Joy, Sikander, Pratab, and Khushwant seem to become a link between past and present. Even in a foreign country, they develop a sense of identity, who they are, or what they have become. As Hall said, "national identity is a problem of "becoming" as well as "being," that "relates to both the future and the past" (225). The personal and collective identities of immigrants cannot be defined without remembering their past. In the same line of thought, memories of Partition in Sidhwa's stories seem to be relevant for shaping the identity of the immigrant community in the present "that needs to recall an unresolved common past, in order to define itself as united regardless of the ethnic and religious differences" (Vitolo 152).

'A Gentlemanly War' is also based on Sidhwa's past experiences and memories, when during the Indian-Pakistan war of 1965, the Indian army advances close to Lahore for an attack. Zareen and Cyrus hear the first Indian bombs near Lahore. Cyrus considers the gentlemanly gesture on the part of the Indian Army, "It's been a rather gentlemanly war so far" (9). However, Zareen takes off from Lahore with children to her family's Rawalpindi home to escape Indian bombardment. At Pindi, her brother surrendered his luxurious home to the President for the duration of martial law and moved to his humble residence across the street. Narrated autobiographically, the story describes the horror of the war retained in the memory of Sidhwa, who was very young at that time. When asked about her memories of war and partition, she once said, "the main memory is of hearing mobs chanting slogans from a distance. It was a constant throb

in the air and very threatening. Then I saw a lot of fires, it was almost like blood was in the sky, you know. And I saw a few dead bodies on my War-ris Road" (Sidhwa and Singh 518). Such horrifying moments from the past have an impact on a child's mind but in a different way than parents as Sidhwa "felt more of a sadness than horror" when she said that it "seemed so futile, even at that time when I wasn't really conscious of death, the waste of life" (David 518). This shows, as a generation of postmemory, Sidhwa's memories are built up by stories narrated by the family that 'preceded her consciousness.' As a child of Holocaust survivors, "I didn't feel the pressures myself, but my parents were tense: they were up much later than usual whispering and working all the time. And there were a lot of visits from aunts and uncles. Subsequently, I learned that some of my aunts and uncles from Bombay had advised my parents to get away from Lahore, but they chose to stay in Lahore" (David 519).

Parsi community has always remained a minority in Pakistan, represented through the life of Zareen and her family. It shows how the Parsi community struggled for its existence during war and partition and remained neutral towards other communities while the others were fighting for dominance. Due to the war, the family of Zareen has to leave its privileged home to move into a simple accommodation. When visiting the place later, Zareen feels nostalgic and says, "The years have not dimmed my memory" (21). She looks towards brother Rustom and mother Sarabhai, who, with her, "recognize each familiar detail with a proprietary sense of surprise and nostalgia" (21). Sarabhai's voice has a tone of pride and tremor when she remembers, "This used to be our home." (21). Sidhwa highlights that displacement leads to the loss of a home. The pain of this loss reflects Sidhwa's situation of being attached to her home and its memories. The children of exiled survivors also feel marginalized like parents, although they have not gone through the trauma of displacement and loss of home. For them, "Home" is always elsewhere," and this diasporic experience is a characteristic of postmemory (Hirsch, "Past lives" 662). When Zareen has to escape with children during the war, she gets separated from her home, as Hirsch points out, "Loss of family, of home, of a feeling of belonging and safety in the world "bleed" from one generation to the next" (112).

Belonging to the Parsi community, Sidhwa's narration presents insights into the state's political situation from Pakistan's perspective in days of conflict between the two nations. It illustrates the traumatic experience, suffering, and grief that people from minority groups felt at that crucial time. New generations of Indian origin come to know the other side of the war story from the Pakistani perspective through Zareen, "I cannot

believe Indian Intelligence did not know that the Lahore front was left defenceless... I believe that the underpinnings of this strange miscalculation were an unacknowledged compassion" (25). It can be argued that as Hirsch came to Postmemory based on her autobiographical readings of works by second-generation writers and artists, Sidhwa became acquainted with the historical event of partition and its aftermath through family narratives, images, and own observation of the sufferings of the survivors. Robert Eaglestone finds it unnecessary to invent a new term because memory is already communal and passed down to the generations. However, he agrees that "the idea of 'postmemory' does try to reflect the special concerns of memory and identity in post-Holocaust context." (80)

In the author's note, Sidhwa admits that 'A Gentlemanly War' is based on her memories of the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, and her family's experiences of it blended with her 'fictional depiction' of place and events (148). Although based on personal memories, her "narrative relates to wider narratives that structure more public life" (Eaglestone, 76). These kinds of narratives shape our national identity because narratives and behaviours are taught to us and acted out by us (Bhabha 145). Sidhwa was too young to have a clear memory of the partition. However, it affected her deeply since her past can define her national and cultural identity. Here Sidhwa tries to re-create the horror of the civil war that occurred in Pakistan she left in her childhood and migrated.

Jhumpa Lahiri, an Indian-American author, may be considered an excellent example of a 'translated' individual in terms used by Salman Rushdie. She is one of those diaspora writers who live in the 'third space' of Homi Bhabha (Carreira 89). Lahiri belongs to the second generation of immigrants who have not experienced a traumatic past personally. She explores it in her short fiction directly or indirectly, like her own, based on information obtained by transmitted knowledge based on her parents' experiences and archives. Kiran Kumar G identifies, "The influence of Lahiri's frequent visits to India and her parents who are still a part of Indian world despite their immigration to America shaped this collection." (59-60)

Lahiri's 'When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine' is built around a political situation during the Pakistan Civil War 1971 and its effects on Pakistani migrant Mr. Pirzada's family. Through an Indian-American little girl's perspective, Lahiri describes the atrocities of war, "In March, Decca had been invaded, torched and shelled by the Pakistani army. The teachers were dragged onto streets and shot, women dragged into barracks and raped.

By the end of the summer, three hundred thousand people were said to have died" (21).

Mr. Pirzada is often invited to Lilia's house by her parents for dinner. After dinner, they watch Television to know about the war situation back in Pirzada's homeland Pakistan, hoping to get some news about his family members. Lilia observes the suffering of Mr. Pirzada and her parents. On one occasion at Lilia's place, Mr. Pirzada refers to himself in humour as, "Another refugee, I am afraid, on Indian territory" (28). His words symbolize the plight of those Bangladeshi refugees who flee from Pakistan to take shelter in India. Such conversation between elders and watching the news on Television makes western-born Lilia acquainted with her native place and its history. She prays for Mr. Pirzada's family, fearing that he may lose his family in violence back home. She thinks that he is an Indian man like them because he shares many similarities with Lilia's parents; for example, they "spoke the same language, laughed at the same jokes, and looked more or less the same. They ate pickled mangoes with their meals, ate rice every night for supper with their hands" (25). She comes to know the fact only when her father tells her that "Mr. Pirzada is no longer considered Indian ... Not since partition. Our country was divided in 1947" (25). This information is shocking for Lilia because she was born and brought up in America and only learned American history in class (27). Her father's words confuse her because she is not able to notice any cultural difference between Pakistani Mr. Pirzada and her Indian parents. In this context, Dr. Kiran Kumar G argues that although their religion and nationality are different, "they share physical and cultural similarities" (60).

Wulandari connects food with memory, asserting that food is a "bridge between the old world and new world, the homeland and the present land, the past and present time" (1). Food is used as a metaphor for memory when Lilia sees Mr. Pirzada remembering about home when eating kebabs and imagines the plight of his family stuck in war, "One can only hope...that Dacca's refugees are as heartily fed..." (29). Here food becomes not only a medium for memory but also provides a sense of identity being South Asian. Strand Mattis claims that food and cooking can work "as a vehicle and as a remedy for intergenerational trauma" (1), and postmemory is a useful tool for understanding this concept. Memories of family meals and recipes passed down to later generations, and the tastes developed in childhood are significant elements in shaping the second generation's identities and help them understand their connection with the past.

Lilia learns about partition and the difference between her parents and Mr. Pirzada when her father shows colours on the map, "As you see, Lilia, it is a different country, a different colour...Pakistan was yellow, not orange" (26). Hirsch has mentioned two types of transmission of postmemory: familial postmemory, a direct transmission of memory from parent to child, and affiliative postmemory, a horizontal transmission of memory from a second generation to others of their generation ("The Generation" 114). Lilia and her father's conversation shows how familial postmemory passes through generations. Lilia is aware of the current political situation through the discussion between her parents and Mr. Pirzada, and Television news. She has not been part of it but can feel the pain of losing someone's family and home. Lilia is one of those second-generation children "who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created" ("Past Lives ..." 660) as clarifies Hirsch. The personal memories told by immigrant parents are mixed with the historical event of the homeland they left behind. Astrid Erll presents two significant levels of memory: individual and collective memory, in which collective memory includes the memory of nation and religion or even literature's memory (4). Collective memory comes to the second generation as postmemories of the holocaust past. It helps build their national, religious, or cultural identities, just as Lilia develops a sense of self and identity in the host country.

Being a second-generation writer, Lahiri may not have witnessed historical events personally but observed and heard its stories while growing up and developed knowledge as per her understanding. She visualizes the time of partition in her imagination through stories and characters belonging to immigrant communities living as marginalized or exiled, which becomes evident in 'The Real Durwan' that revolves around the character of Boori Ma, a refugee from Bangladesh in the aftermath of Partition but "No one doubted she was a refugee, the accent in her Bengali made that clear" (81). During partition, victim Boori Ma faced the horrors of the period, faced with forced migration, and consequently is burdened with psychological wounds. She is separated from her "husband, four daughters, a two-story brick house, a rosewood *almari*, and a number of coffer boxes whose skeleton keys she still wore" (78) while crossing the border and getting stuck in India. Now she lives alone in a stairwell base of an old apartment in Calcutta. She works as a sweeper in exchange for the shelter given by residents in the daytime and plays the role of Durwan at night. She often remembers her past life and speaks about glorious days spent in

her homeland before the partition.

Deepashree Dhar rightly observes that Boori Ma's participation in an "imaginative rediscovery" of herself in contrast to the harsh realities seems to make her happy and enthusiastic (2737). Boori Ma has a habit of creating stories of her enriched past, which is "a way of mourning the loss of her family" (Lahiri 72). However, it has become her daily routine to revisit the past through memories of her native land that filled her with a sense of belonging, "even though it might have been a creation of her imagination" (Dhar 2737). The residents tolerate her stories with disbelief and suspicion. One example of disbelief is when the narrator points out that Boori Ma crossed the border "with the thousands of others, on the back of a truck, between sacks of hemp" (81), but she insists that she had come across by a bullock cart. Even the residents' children sometimes ask her in fun, "Which was it, by truck or by cart?" (81). Like Lahiri and Hirsch, these are the children of Holocaust survivors who grew up "in a climate in which the after-effects of trauma and victimization manifested themselves in countless ways..." (Behrendt 51).

These children are gaining knowledge of partition and its trauma through the stories told by Boori Ma in a sense. They are obtaining information about their ancestors' painful history with disbelief. They think she might be making up a fancy story about her past based on a lie because there seems to be no similarity between her present position doing dirty work and the glorious past projected by her. The narrator draws attention to it, "What kind of landowner ended up sweeping stairs?" (72). However, Boori Ma sticks to her story, "Believe me, don't believe me." When residents come to know about a theft in the building, they accuse innocent Boori Ma, saying that her "mouth is full of ashes. What a building like this needs is a real durwan" (93). She tries to justify, but they do not show any sympathy towards her.

Trauma is considered to be a significant element of memory. Like memory, it can be personal or collective, or both simultaneously. In the opinion of psychologists, traumatic memories are not recorded in our minds as just replicas of the past but rather a reconstruction of it. They are more accurate than memory for ordinary events (Schacter, 2012). Memories of traumatized partition hunt Boori Ma throughout the story, causing loneliness, mental conflict, and identity issue. For Moller, these memories may be considered the voice of nostalgia that speaks through Boori Ma, whose presence is meant to "revoke India's rich and legendary cultural heritage from pre-colonial and colonial times" (66).

In his interdisciplinary study, Strand focuses on the role of food in the aftermath of historical trauma in the context of memory and postmemory. In Lahiri's work, food helps in memory recollection and connects the past with the present, where food is one of the significant elements in reviving memories of home. Like "When Mr. Pirzada..." this story also has flavours of food, however in Boori Ma's case, food comes as a tool for nostalgia through which she remembers and relives unforgettable memories of past in present time, "Mustard prawns were steamed in banana leaves. Not a delicacy was spared." (71).

Being uprooted from her homeland, Boori Ma suffers from a loss of her social, communal, or economic identity resulting in psychological trauma because she cannot return to her glorious past. Displaced Boori Ma struggles to re-establish her identity in post-partition India by following her culture to preserve it through the next generation that comes into contact with and hears her stories. Exploring the possibilities of re-establishing one's identity in the context of contemporary diaspora through a postcolonial reading of Lahiri's short stories, Deepashree Dhar debates, "Through her stories, Lahiri also makes it a point to talk about diasporic spaces created in the decolonized, yet oppressive environment, in the corner of her ancestor's land in India. (2749). Identity cannot be separated from postmemory as Boori Ma transfers it to the young generation in an affiliative manner. How one remembers the past has a significant role in shaping national, religious, or cultural identity. Boori Ma's identity keeps changing over time and space due to partition. This process of identity formation continues not only in the first generation but even in later generations.

Thus it can be argued that Lahiri has presented the struggle and suffering of the generation of Boori Ma based on her inherited memories, imagination, and own understating of the historical events. This can be justified by how Hirsch defines, "Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up" (106). Lahiri has represented partition and its consequences through the traumatic experiences and suffering of Boori Ma, even though she has no personal experiences. She learns about survivors' suffering through her parents and relatives. In such cases, "the family becomes not only the site of memorial transmission and continuity across generations but also a trope of loss, longing, and the desire for home" (Hirsch and Nancy 8).

Conclusion

Partition fictions are primarily literary representations of memory defined as “fictions of memory” by Brigit Neumann. The term “refers to the stories that individuals or cultures tell about their past to answer the question ‘who am I,’ or, collectively, ‘who are we’” (Vitolo 143). Postmemory of the historical past plays a vital role in forming the collective or individual identity of the second generation. It intensifies if the events or experiences of the past are traumatic. Second-generation immigrants preserve identity, not so much by their memories as by using the memories of first-generation. Their confused identity has roots in postmemories borrowed from parents, ancestors, or other mediums. Bapsi Sidhwa and Jhumpa Lahiri have not witnessed the pain and violence of Partition directly, but the tragedy of it has left a deep mark upon them. Their national or cultural identities are being defined in the present time by traumatic past. They both belong to the category of postcolonial writers, what Marianne Hirsch calls “the generation of postmemory,” since they both have successfully portrayed second-generation characters who struggle to construct their identities in different ways based on postmemory.

The idea of postmemory in their texts tries to reflect the theme of memory and identity in a post-partition context. Their narratives represent their deep connection to the country of their forefathers and transmit memories to the next generation. Since identity is a continuous process, their narratives express inherited memories that bring the historical past into the present and reflect a continuous effect of it onto the later generations that defines their identities. About postmemory and its influence on identity construction, Robert Eagleton opines that “Postmemory represents the ways memories are passed down generations, forming individual and communal identity, made possible by memory’s textualization in myriad different forms...” (80).

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