

Chapter 2

Writing Home

Memory, History Imagined Spaces

Locations, space and time—each one of these categories moves into a double or a multiple discourse, the moment the diaspora decides to ‘write’ home. I use the word ‘write’ in all its multiplicity: writing—the fact of creative expression; writing—as an inscription, a mark, a definition; and ‘writing’ —as a connectivity as if being called back, answering a summon. Memory is both process and raw material; process as it covers many journeys back and forth as a new subjectivity is defined, as relationships are reviewed and very often cleansed of bitterness and regret and raw material as it is the only reality which has been experienced either by them or their ancestors, that has created them, made them what they are. All the cultural nuances so imperceptibly imbibed and internalised and often fretted against are now highlighted and framed through the act of remembrance—an act which is simultaneously a process of self-analysis, self-discovery and relocation. It is raw material for, no matter how distanced they feel from it, it is the *primary* baggage they have lugged along the route, the context that provides a meaning. And it is through this they have inhabited familial, social and national spaces. Both history and geography coalesce in this memory as ‘a place on the map is also a place in history’.¹ Space becomes an important category through a double process—one of experience, the other of memory. The two may not reveal the same vision. Experiencing as a participant is different from witnessing as an observer. The recollected space is defined through a process of selection or through an experiential reality which too has undergone a transformation through a sifting and an evaluatory hindsight.

Memories work through spatial images as wide-ranging as houses, landscapes, battlefields and innerescapes. And even as they work through time, they are non-synchronous in time with contrary images clashing with each other. The narratives I wish to discuss bring together memories of the homeland with all their

¹Adrienne Rich, ‘Notes Towards a Politics of Location’ *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 2003. 30. Rich’s comments are related to the location of identity in terms of nation, race, ideology, sex and sexual preference.

complexity of history, politics and exile and are predominantly narratives of 'mourning'. Sara Suleri's two memoirs are elegies; one—*Boys Will Be Boys*—carries *A Daughter's Elegy* as a descriptive subtitle,² the other *Meatless Days*³ is a mellow homage to her Welsh mother, who lived her life in an adopted space. Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*⁴ is also a mourning for a lost homeland, a dead half-brother, a dead father and an unborn child. It is also an elegy for the loss of innocence. Rohinton Mistry apparently writes about Nariman Vakil and his divided family which becomes a story of the past and the destruction of a city. *Family Matters*⁵ is, in fact, about a nation which needs to rework its model of space. Sorayya Khan in her very first novel *Noor*⁶ works with histories of difference, war, defeat, loss and of coming together. Memories, both conscious and unconscious, lived through or inherited through a pre-birth trauma crowd the space as surrealistic images flow out in the coloured drawings of Noor.

These are the diaspora writers, all first-generation diaspora, and their memories are involved with their past in active association. But mourning, as Vijay Mishra has stated, is a continuing process⁷ which works itself through residual cultural inputs, a search for roots, in an attempt to explain the fact of this permanent migrancy. But then there are also the floating diaspora such as Kamila Shamsie, Vikram Seth and in some measure Mohsin Hamid who too 'write' home where history and culture are concerned. The manner in which they use time, memory and space offers an insight into the difference in rooted memories, those of the temporary diaspora who flit in and out of their home countries and are constantly in touch with its raw reality, and floating memories, which represent the permanent diaspora with a selection of montages like a photo album. Their different mourning strategies are reflected in these narratives through the use they make of exterior space in relation to the space of the mind.

One is always very hesitant in making general statements: the creative mind eludes them all. Yet, unless we begin with the difference, the sharpness of individual processes remains hidden. Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses*⁸ like Suleri's memoirs is a narrative of mourning—for a mother, who Aasmani believes is still alive, for the poet who was pushed into prison, exile and death, and also for a nation gone awry. The novel begins with a dream. But dreams have a tendency to go sour. Hamid, through an unputable-down monologue in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*⁹

²Sara Suleri, *Boys Will Be Boys: A Daughter's Elegy* (2003, New Delhi: Penguin, 2004).

³Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days* (1989, London: Flamingo, 1991).

⁴Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner* (2003, London: Bloomsbury, 2004).

⁵Rohinton Mistry, *Family Matters* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008).

⁶Sorayya Khan, *Noor* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2003).

⁷Vijay Mishra, 'The Impossible Mourning', *In Diaspora*, Ed. Makarand Paranjape, (New Delhi: Indialog, 2001), 24–51.

⁸Kamila Shamsie, *Broken Verses* (London: Bloomsbury, 2005).

⁹Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (New Delhi: Viking), 2007.

writes home through the wide view of cultural clashes, racial subjectivities, ambition-driven youth and the collectivity of a nation through the narrow space of a wayside cafe in Lahore. This memory is laced with self-critiquing, contrastive studies in culture and is a frontal attack on hegemonic self-conceit whether of the east or the west.

These narratives, falling in different genres and spread over a writing period of nearly two decades (1989–2007), choose to work with memories of the past, that refuse to be buried, memories that have a living presence and a foot in the future. They go back in time from a standpoint in the present to histories way back to more than half-a-century, when ‘freedom’ was an obsessive value. The hedging in of this freedom, the felt need to take escape routes, the closing-in of spaces—the prison cells, the fractured legs, the battered bodies, the closing-in of the human mind—all work criss-cross in these engagements with subcontinental histories.

At a subnarrational level, there is the muted rationality for travelling abroad, for rejecting the nation, and an equally poignant realisation that despite it all, the homeland calls. Hosseini’s semi-autobiographical narrative very succinctly states, ‘For me, America was a place to bury my memories. For Baba, a place to mourn his’ (Hosseini 112). In fact, graves too are a space. And they can be of different kinds—some where we can place flowers as a fragrant presence of a memory, others which are mass graves, badly dug, in which bodies are lying over one another, dead—or perhaps even half-alive, and a lost child searches for a mother or a father. Sorayya Khan’s four-generational family is built upon the memories of the mass grave where Ali, as a Pakistani soldier, fighting a war in East Pakistan, is organising a mass burial: ‘Then he stood next to others, if there were others, to offer namaaz-e-janazah, funeral prayers, for it was his duty to respect the dead’ (Khan 207). But these burials are also a battleground. As the Bengalis crowd in around the grave, the soldiers unable to cope with it, use their guns. Shot follows shot—and the living join the dead (212). Graves can also be appropriated as Ifat does her father’s grave, dying in an accident—a hit-and-miss murder, and following close on the heels of her dead mother. And graves also get erased. When Sara goes back home to visit her mother’s grave, she cannot locate it and offers her flowers at some other grave.¹⁰ Memory may pursue one, be resurrected out of the past as it happens in *Noor*, but it may be forcibly resisted and a conscious effort made to reduce it to silence as it happens in *Meatless Days*. The 1971 war was one such moment. On Javed’s return from Bangladesh, Suleri comments, that the prisoners came back to ‘a world that did not really want to hear the kind of stories they had to tell’ ... ‘My terror asked me, how will Ifat do it, make Javed’s mind a human home again and take those stories from his head?’ (*Meatless Days* 144). Ali in *Noor* gets no such helping hand. Instead, years later his mother digs out his memories, prodded by the uncanny remembrance of his granddaughter and the confessional scene re-enacted for Sajida’s benefit. Written more than a decade apart, the two writers, Khan and Suleri, work through the different facets of national memories in their work.

¹⁰Also, see *The Kite Runner*, 152–153.

There are some memories which refuse to be buried, because they have intertwined themselves in countless little ways into the living present. Amir, Hosseini's narrator in *The Kite Runner*, is repeatedly caught unawares by images of the past—his own hurt lip as a memory of Hassan's hare lip, the child Sohrab's uncanny skill at the slingshot, the kite that separates and brings together, Hassan's rapist, resurfacing as his son's and Amir's enemy, and the centrality of the orphanage which his father had built, replaced by the orphanage where Sohrab was kept. Memory is also constantly kept alive by a nagging sense of guilt. And more than all else by the compulsion to go over the same ground, the same landscape and feel the overlaying of the past by a grim reality. Baba's house has literally become a grave of history, dreams and individual and collective futures as the Hitlerian racism travels to far-off places across geography and time.

Mistry's *Family Matters* and Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*—narratives located in different geographical spaces—Kabul and far-off America in one, and Bombay/Mumbai in the other—share the story of Rustum and Sohrab, reaching beyond both temporal and spatial memories to histories lying buried in the Persian past. Firdausi's *Shahnama* is also a record of war, of victory interwoven with defeat, a son threatened by death at his father's hands, of separation and illegitimate children. Amir, taking advantage of the illiterate Hassan, never discloses to him the true ending; for Nariman Vakil, the past unfolds itself as a relationship and as a crossing over, when rejected by his stepdaughter, he finds refuge in the cramped space of his own daughter's house.

These writers look towards the homeland, though each in an entirely different way. Sara Suleri negotiates the past, and through her recollections, travels through the failures of the nation, the sorrows of her father and the silences of her mother, created by her vociferous husband, the strangeness of language and a resistant culture and 'the centuries' worth of 'mistrust of English women.' She learned to abnegate power (*Meatless Days* 163). The shadow of political uncertainty is always there, always looming large even as an island of evanescent bonhomie and laughter is created inside the four walls of their home. Hosseini's is a journey twice taken in search of guilt and forgiveness as Amir struggles against his personal sense of failure and observes the sliding down of his childhood ideals. Habits long cultivated by aristocratic conditioning and the practice of feudalism give way to a more realistic pattern of behaviour as refugeedom claims them.

Mistry, moving away from a direct confrontation with politics, constructs a micro-family which works with its internal divisions. Nariman's love for Lucy, thwarted by his parents, is an unfulfilled relationship which haunts him his whole life. Marriage to a widow with two children gives him a ready-made family. Significantly enough, all these texts, whether autobiographical or imagined, project half-families grafted on to another part. Amir discovers his half-brother, only after his father's death. There are several families—Amir's, his father's and Ali's. None of them is made up of a single unit. Ali's first wife had left him; the second had been seduced by his master and had subsequently eloped. His son is not his own—not engendered by him. Baba, Amir's father, a rich Afghan merchant, holds on to his friendship with Ali and his fatherhood of the hare-lipped Hassan. His is a family

divided by caste. Ali and therefore Hassan are Hazaras. Later, Amir's own family consists of his wife and the adopted Hazara nephew, Sohrab. None of the families is genealogically pure. Sara knows Nuz is their stepsister (*Meatless Days*), Coomy and Jal are Nariman's stepchildren (*Family Matters*) and in *Noor* the family is one solely of adoption, a creation of love, when a Pakistani soldier adopts a forlorn *waif* of a Bengali fisherman crossing barriers of race, region and language, and brings her to Pakistan a family is born. Similarly, *Broken Verses* has a double set of mothers and a half-sister. These half-families move across caste hierarchy, strict religious boundaries (such as the Zoroastrian), cross racial differences or fail to cross them, thus throwing into prominence relationships. They raise questions about the nature of fatherhood, the construct of a nation, about love and hatred, guilt and forgiveness. Not that they all yield or work towards similar answers. Both the nature of experience and the truth of history are different in each case; the genres are also different.

In some measure, these narratives also question the whole concept of a nation when they present critiques (Suleri), internal divisions and external aggression (Hosseini), one fragment of a nation (Mistry) and convergences of languages, cultures and histories (Sorayya Khan). Through the extensions of self and questioning of stable cultures, they also seem to state that there is something deeply wrong with methodological nationalism when we relate to plural societies and placing of migrancy in the modern context. As Daniel Chernilo observes, the very idea that the nation state is 'the natural or necessary container of modern social life' is a mistaken one.¹¹ The link between 'cultures, peoples, or identities and specific places' is no longer immutable or valid.¹² Cultures and identities spill over into other spaces.

The important question to ask is—why recall? Are the obvious reasons the real reasons; are Suleri's memoirs an elegy, a homage or a personal account of mourning and search for solace? Are they also recounting the collapse of personal and collective dreams? The political history of Pakistan punctuates the narrative—the birth of the nation, the hold of the leader on the imagination of its followers, Gen Ayub Khan's regime, the wars with India, Bhutto, his decline and execution, Yayha Khan and Zia-ul-Haq. But between these markers and the personal narrative, there is a constant criss-crossing with prison terms and hit-and-run deaths. One begins to wonder how easily the charges of sedition can be levied putting into question the concepts of loyalty, patriotism and freedom. Through the chinks of political control, one can sense the need for freedom.

Memory, even of historical events, is personal; it is rooted in a personal perspective. In Sara's case, it is generated by the family environment. The events are also, perhaps, differently seen than they were at that time. Memory, no matter how personal, acquires a double layer. The lens is now focused on an event which is

¹¹See Daniel Chernilo, *A Social Theory of the Nation-State* (London: Routledge), 2001. 1.

¹²See Introduction, *Displacement, Diaspora and Geographies of Identity*. Eds. Smader Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (Durham: Duke University, 1996).

seen through a time lapse, which at that particular time, also constituted the unknown future. As it captures, or attempts to capture, the emotion of the moment in the past, there is an inevitable conjunction between two lines of vision. As each sibling is lovingly chalked out, the search for a plot beings. The reference to the teacher, who first told Shahid that he was going to write a book about him, is crucial to the understanding of the work. All that he writes of Shahid is 'Shahid is a good boy', a text designed for didactic religious purposes. 'Shahid is a good boy' dwells on the idea of goodness as defined in a patriarchal, theological society. But goodness, if cramped by rules, loses its merit. Suleri comments on this, 'It never had a plot to it, anyway, the story of your goodness' (*Meatless Days* 108). The point has already been made in the first chapter. Women did not count—'the concept of a woman was not really part of an available vocabulary ...' (*ibid.*, 1), the negotiation was with roles—a sister or a child or a wife or a mother or a servant'. Suleri is aware of the communicative nature of this writing home, 'My audience is lost, and angry to be lost, and both of us must find some token of exchange for this failed conversation' (*Meatless Days* 2). The narrative, thus, needs to continue from a female location—a matriarch who is unable to achieve that strange self-contained authority which would define a rootedness. The politics of dislocation have overtaken Dadi—she 'resented independence for the distances it made' (*ibid.*, 2).

The luminosity of an Islamic culture which she is at pains to capture the code which is stressed in 'Shahid is a good boy', surfaces to the topmost layer with religion being taken to the streets. These were the years of the rise of Islamisation involved the suppression of individual freedom (the 1970s, the period of the Tableeg, the Hudood Ordinance which was proclaimed and legislated in 1979–80), 'I think that we dimly know we were about to witness Islam's departure from the land of Pakistan'. The romance was over. God 'could now leave the home and soon would join the government' (*Meatless Days* 15).

Suleri's language works simultaneously at several levels—straightforward, poetic, personal, cryptic. There is no hesitation in stating the truth, but the truth is dressed in an emotional response. The laughter which we find in the relationship of the siblings is lost in the silence of the house as they decide to scatter—Tillat moves to Kuwait after marriage, Sara to the States. And then their mother dies—apparently in a meaningless accident—but in actuality a murder. Ifat joins her through another accident.

The other side of memory is forgetting. We remember lest we forget. But we forget because we do not want to remember. We remember to keep alive the past; we forget in order to create new communities.¹³ Suleri writes 'One morning I awoke to find that, during the course of the night, my mind had completely ejected the names of all the streets in Pakistan, as though to assure that I could not return, or that if I did, it would be returning to a loss' (*Meatless Days* 18). A loss represented by young deaths and younger graves.

¹³Also, see Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002, 2004) 'Preface' viii–ix.

Memory and history are supposed to contrast with each other—memory is personal, akin to common sense, history is systematic and a critical collective memory.¹⁴ But who represents the collectivity? Whose voice is it? And how does the distancing or the framing take place? Is it through objectivity or emotion objectified? Does a witness-participant have greater legitimacy over an observer? In Suleri's case, memory and history are interwoven, and her experience of history is through the emotional range of her family as each individual reacts to the situation either through death, escape or flight or alternately by being put into prison. These recalls cannot be labelled as revisionists, and they unveil the human side of history.

The memoirs work through memories and responses—to womanhood, to politics, to the lives of the siblings, the shared space and through language and the deaths she was part of at times from a distance, only through emotions. The recall is also through dreams (*Meatless Days* 44). From births of nation and self, to deaths and then to education, to America, back to the past, all through there is a movement to and fro from Bhutto to 1947, to Zia-ul-Haq to Jinnah, back to the present. We had, she writes, 'lost the art of location' (81). Thus, when she wants to pay her respects to the dead—to her mother and sister Ifat—she is unable to locate the graves (87–88).

Meatless Days recounts in innumerable ways the reasons for her migration—the womenless world, the overpowering of history, the cramping of freedom (123). *Boys Will Be Boys* follows a somewhat different course. It is both a proxy writing—stepping into fulfil her father's unfulfilled intentions, and a peri-autobiography, fully demonstrating the limits of stepping into someone else's place—across gender, age and politics and a constant dialogue with her dead father. What is most touching and valuable about it is the return to Urdu poetry, inscribed in the Arabic script, going back to poets such as Ghalib and Hali, poets of a shared past. These epigraphs evoke emotional memories and the aura of a culture still surviving under the political web. They also single out the issue of language as the immigrant goes back to dwell on the sound, and the syllables of the past. Subtitled 'a daughter's elegy', the memoir begins with a rare collectivity of sibling fragrances as the opening chapter signifies. The sisters decided they would wear the same perfume, each identified with her smell. The perfumes change, Ifat and Nuz die, others are scattered—and the verses of Urdu poetry linger untranslatable into a less resonant language (4–5). The references to Pip—their father—interrupt or interlace the narrative.

The past resurfaces, through cities and landscapes, through monuments, and wars. It is almost a parallel account of the events described in *Meatless Days*, but the central character is Pip. Pip is also the listener. The memories are all evoked for him; he is addressed, drawn into her own memory. The father-children relationships with their surprises, restraints and teasing are knitted in, and alternately, she takes in his presence and his absence, his anger and petulance, his hopes and the shattering of these hopes. *Boys Will Be Boys* is also an account of how individual lives are lost

¹⁴Margalit, 63.

in the making of dreams and nations. At the fag end of the memoir, there is a reference to Faiz. Kamila Shamsie in *Broken Verses* gives us an account of the poet's loves, confinement and efforts at eluding confinement. But Shamsie does not mention the poet's name. Turning it into a personal narrative, a fiction of interrupted emotions, Shamsie creates a mystical reality. Is it the difficulty of living in a society which one is trying to recall in its pain? Suleri's account of history on the other hand does not have to go in search of fiction; it stands by itself as a comment on the nature of censure and censorship as well as on the capacity of art to circumvent them.

Broken Verses covers almost the same period as Suleri's memoirs, with two differences—it has the freedom of fiction, and it is located in Pakistan. The politics of the period also asserts itself more strongly for it is a politics which intervenes with all kinds of relationships—mother-daughter, wife-husband, a woman and her lover. Freedom is gauged in terms of certainty, knowing what is happening in terms of sexuality—the freedom to choose who you love and how you love. It is also defined as the freedom to write. Hence, the poet's figure is chosen as a representative of freedom, history, love and exile. Woven together through dreams, coded language and memory, *Broken Verses* faces politics frontally. Politics, as it is enacted through an ordinance (the Hudood Ordinance), gender discrimination and repressive authority (Bhutto's execution, confinement, exile and murder),¹⁵ steps right into one's home. It has a degree of materiality in its use of space—the *Save the Date* studio, the bedroom with the open window, the public meetings Aasmani's mother addresses and the chopped ingredients for biryani. There are other spaces of the mind—memories of separate bedrooms, of exile, of cities abroad. It also happens to be a novel of transgressions of all kinds—of conventions and character blueprints (142–143), and of the stereotyped cultural feminist norms, for solidarity amongst women can produce superwomen who can 'take on governments, buy the groceries, wrest religion out of the hands of patriarchs ...' (184). Memory, for Shamsie, is an inhabited space.

Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* runs a different course, close to history even as it narrates a story of personal evolvment. It is a narrative of how countries are ravaged, cultures shorn alike of their negative fixities and of their strengths, and replanted in other locales. Amir and his father leave home as refugees and migrate to States in search of peace and a better future. Here, they are almost landlocked into their migrant community, where blood ties and kinship patterns, segregated womanhood, concepts of honour and the rituals of honour still prevail carried over from the native home. The real agency of change still remains the individual who, when placed in alien circumstances, needs to select, preserve and rebel. More significantly, the narrative works through a trope of guilt and forgiveness. How does one ask for forgiveness and is it possible to get it? Do the dead forgive? If not then who forgives? Does it have to be earned through a personal act of expiation? It

¹⁵See Kamila Shamsie, *Broken Verses* (New Delhi: Penguin). 92–96.

is in this intermixing of history with individual life that the Ricoeurian description of 'the epistemology of history borders on the ontology of being-in-the-world'.¹⁶

Fiction does not depend on historical veracity, it depends on historical truth. To that extent, veracity, reality and truth, each is different from the other—veracity cannot be measured, cannot be known unless it is subjected to a multifocus. Reality is limited to a single experience: again everyone's perception and sensibility of reality is different. Truth, despite its multidimensionality and indefinability, is capable of being defined in terms of human loss, pain and anguish. Those who live in the moment touch shoulders with truth, and fiction enables a reliving in a partially sanitised atmosphere. The aesthetics of narration, even as it ignites and reawakens the pain, allows it to be bearable. *The Kite Runner*, through its circuitous geographical and emotional moves, travels across a period of more than a quarter century—1975–2002—moves back even further in time, to a period not recalled personally but through others, moves across space from Afghanistan to States, back again to Afghanistan via Pakistan—Peshawar, Khyber Pass, Islamabad—through traditions of honour, military glory and peace to the weekly flea market and petrol pump jobs, from freedom of the streets to coats and uniforms hanging loosely on ageing shoulders. Throughout the narrative, certain themes hold it in place and one such connectivity is the phrase 'For you a thousand times over' (*The Kite Runner* 59, 61, 323). Kite-flying itself is a symbol of the spirit of independence of the Afghan people: 'Afghans cherish custom but abhor rules. And so it is with kite-fighting Fly your kite. Cut the opponents. Good Luck' (*ibid.*, 45).

Assef's rape of Hassan is a symbol of power gone wrong, of the rape of a country, aided by its own people. And Sohrab's attack on Assef with his sling is, on the face of it, a rescue operation for Amir but also the hand of fate with the son settling his father's debts. Hassan's rape is paralleled by the narration of the lamb being sacrificed for Eid (*ibid.*, 67); it happens in Amir's moment of celebration. Beneath these recurring metaphors, the central concern of morality and ethics is woven throughout. Amir in his personal relations violates the code of ethics in his relation to his conscience and morality.¹⁷ The journey back to Afghanistan is necessary for his redemption. Rahim Khan acts as his conscience as well as his father's conscience. He protects the child Amir from his father's wrath, realising full well the guilt of young Amir's lie shields him. In this, he fails as his conscience. Thus, Rahim Khan's summoning him back for a purpose only half-stated, giving him the name of a non-existent orphanage is justified on account of the Polaroid

¹⁶See Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History and Forgetting*. Trans. By Kathleen Blamey and David Pallauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 208.

¹⁷See *The Ethics of Memory*, 7. Margalit makes a distinction between the morality of ethics and the morality of memory. The first is concerned with loyalty and betrayal, the second with respect and humiliation. Amir is guilty of violating both. By accusing Hassan of being a thief he is doubly betraying him, and Hassan is aware of this. His silence is a constant reproach. As Rahim realises the truth, Amir thus also suffers a loss of respect (as well as self-respect) and humiliation. His many attempts to push it aside do not put the gnawing of the spirit to an end. The guilt has to be replayed, this time alongside expiation, for even a temporary rehabilitation of the self.

photograph he has with him of Hassan and his son Sohrab. It is essential for Rahim Khan to summon him back. In 1988, he had gone to Bamiyan in search of Ali and Hassan, in order to bring them back: again an act of restoration. Now Amir is handed over the responsibility of bringing Sohrab out of the Taliban-infested Afghanistan, back to some semblance of life.

It is in the journey back that the personal narrative expands to take into itself the larger narrative of war, aggression, poverty and hunger as the war between power and the powerless is fought on many fronts. There is a silent questioning of the justification of choices—Assef's who stays to destroy rather than leave with his parents, of the Russians, then the Americans and all the proxy powers who fight their wars on alien territory. There is a questioning of the meaning of development and of prosperity. The larger ends of life are constantly lost to smaller gains.

At the heart of *The Kite Runner* is the critiquing of a feudalistic culture, a careful sifting of its values that can survive on an alien soil, and its expansion into a larger discourse of guilt, expiation and forgiveness. Amir, in addition to his own guilt, was also the 'unwitting embodiment of Baba's guilt'. He was the legitimate half, inheritor of the guilt and Hassan the 'unentitled, unprivileged half' who had inherited what had been 'pure and noble in Baba' (313). Forgiveness and trust go together. As Amir asks Sohrab's forgiveness, he wonders 'how long before Sohrab smiled again. How long before he trusted me. If ever'.

Hosseini's recounting of history is a statement of facts, his recounting of human lives what historical events do to them, how they toss people around, dislocate them and eject them from their cultures. His 'writing' home is a writing of home, meant for both sides of the cultural divide, a writing for the outsider summoning him to probe his conscience as well as the insider for his divisionary approach. *Noor* coming out the same year (2003) as *The Kite Runner* is also a novel about self-reflection, guilt, the difficulty of living with the past and a need for forgiveness, if family communities wish to relate. Ali's sector becomes a representative home with an inner compulsion to face the ghosts before they can be exorcised. It is not only collective memory, but also memory transmitted through the body, obsessed with the past and its dead. Words, names and actions echo back; dress codes, tailoring techniques rise up from the river waters which are coloured red as is the blood of the menstrual flow (*Noor* 130), and the blood which continues to ooze even after one is dead (128–130). Haunted by memories, one gives up praying, one gives up talking about the past and also gives up certain kinds of food.

Family Matters, again like *The Kite Runner*, is addressed to both the host country and the country of origin. Through this family narrative, the idea is to reshape the nation along filial lines. Mistry writes about a Parsi household, comprising of three generations, but Nariman Vakil's parents, who were responsible for the damage done to Nariman, are the fourth generation looming large in the background even as they are absent from the period under review. Historical events fill in the background—the demolition of Babri Masjid, the Bombay riots, the Shiv Sena, but what is central is the relationships at home. Two kinds of space—the big, roomy flat that Nariman owns and has willed to his stepchildren and the small flat he has bought his daughter—are contrasted. Unwanted in the first he is bundled off

to the second with a broken ankle. His son-in-law washes his hands off all responsibility. Then follows a narrative of forced closeness, age old smells, economic pressures and inner debates about right and wrong. Pressed for money Yezad thinks of gambling, the two grandsons Murad and Jehangir make their own contribution. Murad saves on bus fares, Jehangir is tempted by his co-students' bribes. A lesson in morality is lived out, and Yezad can finally bring himself to offer nursing care to his father-in-law. In the other flat, Coomy has the plaster knocked off in order to delay Nariman's return, but in the process, she meets her end and Jal, who had always resented her rejection of Nariman, offers help to his half-sister. The two families come together, and the economic situation is eased. But two issues remain worrisome—Yezad's increased religiosity and the distancing in relationships when there is adequate space. Why this turn to religion—a return to purity, a holding on to the past? At the end of the novel, we learn that Yezad during the past few years has read nothing but religious books, as though making up for lost time. The house is full of books about 'Parsi history and Zoroastrianism, various translations of the Zend-Avesta, interpretations of the Gathas ...' (451). There is a withdrawal from the world of politics, the materialism of Mrs Kapur, the black money transactions and tax evasions of Mr Kapur. Yezad is no longer employed. But religion has made him serious, obsessed, perpetually scurrying for a bath at the slightest touch from another. Once again the question of marrying someone from outside the community crops up; it has come full circle from Nariman to Murad. Can a community lock itself in the past or is there a way of relating to others without hatred, manipulation and corruption? Yezad now cordons off space, and is in no mood to continue old ties—almost an antisocial attitude that rejects without examining. His journey is a journey into the past, triggered off by the photographs of Bombay as it once was, neat and clean and not crowded, shorn of all ugliness. These photographs represent the transference of someone else's memory into Yezad's imagination—a coming together of time and space.

Religious orthodoxy, in itself, closes-in the world, creates barriers, sends out messages of closure. Yezad, like Assef in *The Kite Runner* and like Changez, in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, turns to a closure of identity. But they are not similarly motivated except that all three feel shaken in their historical bearings. All else is different. Assef is driven by a streak of cruelty, a sense of power and a desire of conquest: human life has no value for him. Yezad is driven to it by frustration, rejection, fading hopes and a family divided by personal interests. One needs to think how far are Mrs Kapur and the Shiv Sena responsible for his orthodoxy—how when territories are being fenced in, religion becomes the refuge. The reluctant fundamentalist is not overtly obsessed. He closes in for reasons of self-preservation. The Lacanian mirror reveals to him, his racial self cloaked in a religious identity. What price white colour, the Princetonian education, the competitive edge, if they are all going to rule out relationships. Erica is a half-alive, half-dead monument to relationships; and Juan-Bautista in far-off Chile, as he presides over a failing publishing house, touches a respondent chord in him (Hamid 141–143, 145) when he draws his attention to the fact of self-destruction indulged in through

self-interest. Juan Buatista's reference to the janissaries who fought for the Ottoman Empire with fierce loyalty to 'erase their own civilizations' (151) is an eye-opener and a conscience-pricker. Which side is one on? This is the litmus test for the diaspora. Changez resolves to look around with an ex-janissary's gaze and consider reality from a holistic perspective. Changez's fundamentalism is not religious, and it is not even cultural; it is more a question of nationhood, location and perspective, a search for freedom from serfdom and indentured labour. The blanket of suspicion subsequent to his resignation disturbs him as his whole identity, nationality and religious affiliation are under question.

Fundamentalism resurfaces as a measure of self-defence, as resistance to being entirely taken over by alienness, or being incorporated in a larger whole or slotted in a marginal role. In Changez's case, it is the impact of exteriority on the making of his self. The encroachment of outer space into his inner being leads him to realise that boundaries cannot be restored, once they have been blurred—'Something of us is now outside, and something of the outside is now within us' (174). Changez locates the struggle for national identity in a power struggle, as a result of the dangerous game of power politics.¹⁸

Suleri and Mistry, as they 'write' home, expose its many myths and deconstruct its many stereotypes. They both juxtapose closed worlds with open worlds where boundaries can be crossed. If Suleri's memoirs are dominated by aura, Mistry's novel is dominated by images—the image of old age—upright by the seashore, prostrate, crumpled upon a bed, and the beautiful image of Daisy, fully dressed for a stage performance, giving a deathbed performance. These novels deal with the past both in their historical and fictive presence. But Sorayya Khan in *Noor* projects an imagined space, made up of pieces of history.

Briefly, *Noor* is a plea for peace. The oddly constructed family with affiliations going across race, colour, language and history becomes both a utopia and a human space with the little children of a fourth generation being born there, with the son-in-law—the outsider—moving in. The youngest child who is limited in her mental capacities throws her father out of the room; he sleeps in the dining space and rolls his bed back before anyone else is up. Her possessiveness is an assertion of her claim to space. And she expresses herself through her colours and drawings, which uncannily portray the scenes of the cyclone in Bangladesh, the rolling of trucks, the rescue, the tall palm trees swaying. How on earth did the child imagine those scenes of loss and aggression? Is it inherited, anguish and fear of the mother as a child passed on to a future embryo? How much continuity is there in terror? When imagined constructs of peace are transferred, they address the question both of self-imposed exile and deep cultural and emotional affiliations. At a deeper level, the novel engages with the issues of guilt, expiation, forgiveness and the need for a relationship that heals.

¹⁸For more details of power politics, refer Tariq Ali's *The Clash of Fundamentalisms* (London: Verso), 2002.

The diaspora ‘writes’ home to fulfil its many psychological, emotional and historical needs; it also feels free to comment on the political or religious happenings that push the nation into orthodoxies, fundamentalism and closed spaces. There are other reasons: it writes home to be ‘visible’ in the host culture, not as a waif but a person with a meaningful, valuable past. It also writes to establish a two-way connectivity and constantly chisel at a past which it claims. And then, that part of the diaspora which ‘writes’ home, does it also for the future. It combines a necessary exorcism with a convergence of polarities, which it seeks to dismantle through its repetitive journeys. It is a self-questioning and becomes for the writer a simultaneous habitation of plural spaces even as it critiques ingrowing and inbreeding of cultures. *Noor* carries the epigraph from Agha Shahid Ali’s verse ‘Your history gets in the way of my memory’. Memory, in the end, is subversive of history and is an account of all that has slipped through the gaps—the interstices.



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