

## **The Theme of Memory in Fakir Fadiya's *The Cry of the Dove*: A Diasporic Study**

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**Article History:** Submitted-07/02/2019, Revised-26/02/2019, Accepted-01/03/2019, Published-20/03/2019.

### **Abstract:**

This article tries to investigate the theme of memory in Fakir Fadiya's novel 'The Cry of the Dove'. Migration, immigration, diaspora are the terms, at broader sense used synonymously by the writers. The novel selected for study falls in the category of immigrant or diasporic literature. The dislocation from the motherland to the new host land results in nostalgia, alienation, rootlessness and search of an identity. These issues are the major themes of the diasporic novels as the writers undergo these pains. The article tries to present the diasporic experiences and its relation to the memories of the protagonist, Salma. The memories of the past are directly connected to the culture, tradition, religion and food habits of the homeland. The new culture, the alien land leads to a traumatic experience through which the characters undergo.

**Keywords:** diaspora, alienation, nostalgia, memory, homeland, identity.

### **Introduction**

The term 'diaspora' is defined as to 'scatter' or 'disperse'. Etymologically the term is derived from Greek origin 'dia' and 'speirein'. The words itself suggest to leave or move to another place or country. The term was used with reference to the Jews who migrated to Israel in 607 BC. People migrate to different countries for different purposes. Migration of people is not a recent phenomenon. Primitive man also migrated from one place to another in search of shelter, food or natural resources. The displacement by people from one place to other or from one country to other can be forced or voluntary, temporary or permanent. It

can be out of social, political, economic or religious reasons. Due to political pressure or war, people in masses migrated to other countries. The recent example is of Syria, where people are migrating to various places in Europe.

One of the reasons for migration can be economic. People migrate to new land in search of better opportunities and provisions. This kind of movement is not forced one, it is voluntary. The reason for the economic movement may be the poverty level of one's own country or the rate of unemployment. A large number of students, youngsters migrate to other countries for higher education, to develop professional skills.

Reason for migration of women is a personal one. They get married to a person who lives in another country. Due to the advancement in communication facilities like mobile, media, internet, it has become easy for people to come closer to each other resulting in friendship and marriage. Nowadays it has become a craze among parents also to search for a bridegroom who belongs to other nation or has settled in other nation. In the India they are called as NRI. Number of weddings as a result of the technologies is growing day by day, resulting in a risk to women. They are becoming victims of human trafficking or of domestic violence in the other countries. Homi Bhabha in the book *The Location of Culture* termed the diasporic dispersal as 'gathering'. He remarks:

I have lived the moment of the scattering of people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering. Gatherings of exiles and 'emigres' and refugees; gathering on the edge of foreign cultures... Gathering of people in diaspora, indentured, migrant interned; gathering of incriminatory statistics, educational performance, legal status, immigrant status. 199-200)

Easy modes of transportation could be another reason for migration. Globalization has brought the people all over the world very close. The world has become a global village. Easy and fast mode of transportation has made it possible for people to move from one country to other in a short period of time and for any number of time. Whatever might be the reason of displacement, it results in traumatic experiences of the people. Shattered identity, alienation, rootlessness, nostalgia etc are the consequences of displacement.

'Diaspora literature' is an umbrella term. It means literary works by writers who have migrated to other countries leaving their 'home' but write about 'home'. Literature, especially

by women diaspora writers, also gives us a deep insight into the issues related to displaced people. If the protagonist of the literary work is a woman, then they are presented with the double lens –as a woman and an immigrant. The women psyche, traumas of the newland are aptly presented by the writers. They share, through their protagonist, the agony of being in a new land, a new culture. The diasporic writers themselves have experienced the agonized life in the new country that had made them competent in presenting their characters. The reason for these women migration can be marriage. As in the case of Ashima, the character of *The Name Sake* by Jhumpa Lahiri or Tara from *Desirable Daughters* by Bharti Mukharjee. According to Urmi Satyan:

Ruma's mother migrates to accompany her husband. she observes her duties to help her husband progress. She is physically uprooted from her motherland, transplanted to a new land where she is not re-rooted in the newfound socio-cultural milieu. The problems, however, has been the need to feel attached to the mother culture. (46)

The migration by women can be to avoid punishment as the character has done some crime against the rule of their society or tribe. Salma, the protagonist of Fakir Fadia 's novel *The Cry of the Dove* leaves her country to escape the death punishment in the hands of her brother. Other reason to migrate can be only to enjoy life, to get freedom from the restrictions laid by the society in the homeland or in search of dreams. Lula, from Albania, who migrates to America is one such character of Francine Prose in her novel *My New America Dream*.

## Memory

Memory is storage of incidents, people, objects etc. related to the past and then recalling it. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines memory as “The store of things learned and retained from an organism's activity or experience as evidenced by modification of structure or behavior or by the recall and recognition”. Etymologically the word memory comes from the French *Memoire* and Latin word *Memoria* means 'mindful' or 'remembering'. The definition of memory as given in Wikipedia is

Memory is the sum total of what we remember and gives us the capability to learn and adapt from previous experiences as well as to build relationships. It is the ability to remember the past experience, and the process or power of recalling to mind previously learned facts, experiences, impressions, skills,

and habits. It is the store of things learned and retained from our activity or experiences as evidenced by modification of structure or behavior, or by recall and recognition.

Memory is one of an integral part of diaspora writing. The very root of sufferings of the migrant is their past. Alienation, rootlessness, loss of identity, nostalgia are all related to the memory of the past life. The past they have experienced whether good or bitter, the people, the community, culture religion and everything that belongs to their homeland are recalled, missed in the new land. These memories make them nostalgic. They feel like going back to their home. The home of their country keeps on haunting. It is not that only people, family, community, or home is recalled; even very small things, objects like food, drinks, clothes, valleys, rivers, animals and so on are also retrieved. Salman Rushdie as a writer shares the feelings of migrants as:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of Sali. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge- which gives rise to profound uncertainties-that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind.(10)

Memories of the past can be happy or painful. The displacement from the motherland to the new land is not only physical, but a psychological one, migrants along with them carry their own culture, religion, a way of life, language etc. as if they are carrying the whole nation with them. In the new land, they encounter a new culture, language, food, a way of life that confuses them, with a kind of tension of rejection in the foreign land. The encounter with the two diverse culture obviously affects the life of the people, torn between the past and the present without any particular identity.

The confused, tensed life of the immigrants takes them mentally to the easy, comfortable life of the motherland, in the past. Though they might have faced a tough life in the past comparatively was better than the present. It becomes difficult to reframe the cultural identity. One may get successful in achieving economic stability in the new place but not the cultural stability. It will be achieved when they will share the same lifestyle as they use to

live in their homeland –the same food habits, language, culture and so on. Thus, we can find that migrants are always in search of people who belong to their community or nation in this foreign land. This gives them a sense of belonging. In *The Namesake*, the Bengali community, in Boston gather together to celebrate Durga Pooja. Ashima feels at home when she performs religious rituals. Though they try to assimilate with the new life, culture, it is not possible to completely wipe out the past. They find themselves as unfit to this new place, society and sometimes they are openly rejected by the natives. This results in alienation and marginalization.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the memories of the characters. How on occasions they are consciously or unconsciously taken back in the past, whether pleasant or unpleasant. The traumatic situation of the characters in the new land reminds them of their glorious past. *The Cry of the Dove*, a novel by Fakir Fadia is a tragic journey of Salma. It traces her journey from the small village Hima, the Levant to Exeter, England which is a journey from East to West.

Salma is a seventeen years young girl from Bedouin. She has to leave her village as she has committed a crime against her Arabian tribe. Salma has sexual relation with Hamdan, a young boy of her neighbour and becomes pregnant. She leaves her village to escape the death punishment of her tribe, at the hand of her brother Mohamoud. Mahamoud has threatened her to kill her by shooting at the 'between her eyes'. According to the rules of her tribe, she has committed a sin. She has brought dishonour to her family. She herself admits the fact and laments, “Forgive me, Allah, for I have sinned. The heat of passion had made me bend.” (1) She continues, “And I had smeared the foreheads of my family with tar”(2).

Salma is rescued by her mother and teacher Naihlah. Her mother’s attempt to abort her baby fails, so she sends her to Naila. From there she is sent to a women’s prison to rescue her life. she will be under the protection of the law. This is done to protect her from her brother who is furiously finding her. In prison, she gives birth to a baby girl. Her daughter is named as Layla. But immediately the baby is taken away from her as it will be good for Salma’s future. From there again she is sent to Lebanon at a nunnery There she is left with Sister Asher, who then legally adopts her. Salma is given a new name, Sally Asher. Thus she gets her new identity. A Muslim Arab girl now becomes a Christian. From there she now moves to Exeter in England.

Exeter gives her new identity, with which she attempts to assimilate. She tries her best to fit into this new place, tries to adapt to the lifestyle of the whites and finally, she marries to a Professor, an Englishman. She gives birth to a baby boy. As everything seems to be good in her life, she is haunted by her daughter's cries. And finally, she decides to go to Bedouin, to meet her daughter, only to learn that her daughter has been killed by her brother Mahmoud. She goes to the grave of her daughter where she is shot dead by her brother Mahmoud.

The novel begins with Salma thinking about her past. Throughout the novel, we come across the situations where Salma oscillate between her past and present.

It was a new day, but the dewy greenness of the hills, the whiteness of the sheep, the greyness of the sky carried me to my distant past, to a small mud village tucked away between the deserted hills, to Hima, to silver-green olive groves gleaming in the morning light. I used to watch a shepherdess, who under a barefaced sun guided her goats to the scarce green patches with her reed pipe. (1)

There can be various incidents, objects, people, or a community which makes the character think about the past. In the case of Salma, the very important thing that continuously takes her to the past is her 'crime'. She always humiliates herself for the sin she has committed against the honour of her family. In her tribe individual identity is not given any importance; group identity matters a lot. The sin she has committed was not individual but against her culture, her family. This impact of cultural identity is very strong on the people who belong to that tribe. Salma is repeatedly reminded by her family members that she is a girl and she should not do any act that will bring any kind of dishonour to their family. Her father once remind her, "Your breasts are like melons, cover them up". Her mother rebukes, "Your tuft of wool is red, you are impulsive"(6). Her brother keeps an eye on her all the time. Her mother immediately notices that something is wrong with Salma. She remembers :

I fell in love instantly when I saw the reflection of his shoulders in the water.  
when I started watering the vegetable beds three times a day and fondling the  
horse my mother shouted, Salma are you in love? (6)

Even her mother easily notices when she gets pregnant and is rejected by Hamdan. Salma recalls:

When Hamdan stopped revolving in orbits and I stopped kissing the horse, the goats, and the trees, my mother and his mother grew suspicious. “You little slut, what have you done? My mother yanked my hair.

‘Mother, please.’

‘You smeared our name with tar. Your brother will shoot you between the eyes.’(27)

Physically she has moved away from her past, she has even tried to become like westerns, a White, but cannot come to do as she is always thinking of her identity and about her sin. She always criticizes her and blames for her deeds. She remembers the day when she comes to know that she is pregnant and asked Hamdan to meet her only to be shocked to hear that he is not responsible for this. He instead blamed her for seducing him and declares that he doesn’t know her anymore.

When finally he looked up at me he was a different man, his brown eyes burning with anger rather than desire. He cleared his voice and said, ‘you are responsible. You have seduced me with the yearning tunes of your pipe and swaying hips. He said and raised his arm about to hit me. I shrank on the wheat pile and covered my head with both arms.

I’ve never laid a finger on you. I’ve never seen you ever before. Do you understand? He said wrapped his kuffiya around his face like a mask and walked into a cloud of dust. (171)

Salma loves her family a lot. She always remembers the incidents of her childhood. Her childhood memories give her more comfort than the one of her young age. She is more comfortable when recalls her childhood. She seems to be very close to her mother. As a Bedouin Muslim, she is very strict, she follows the rules of her tribe. But being the mother she is seen liberal many times, defending Salma. She allows her to do some acts that are against tribe, her culture. She once permits Salma to swim in the river:

‘If they see you they will kill me. Only loose woman swims in public. Men might see you,’ she said and pulled up her black face mask, hesitated then added, ‘Be quick!’...The cold water against my hot skin was such a shock that I cried out with excitement. My flesh was so alive with wanting.

'Shush, broken –neck! We don't want the men of the tribe to hear you,' she said

She would have said no, but she said yes. ( 245 )

It was her mother who took her to Miss Nailah to rescue her from Mahmoud. She even tried to abort the baby but was not successful. Salma remembers the day when she had undergone the process of abortion:

Mother, I screamed, spitting the sour lemon out of my mouth. The midwife was sticking sharp iron bars inside me. She scraped and scraped looking for the growing flesh. The fluid of tears did not put out the fire

'Please I cried,'. Please, she cried .I...I...'and before I could finish the sentence, my mother's inflated face disappeared into darkness. (36)

Miss Nailah her teacher helps Salma to escape from her tribe. Salma is sent to a women prison. There she gives birth to a baby girl and named as Layla. This situation is similar to that of Hester Prynne of *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Hester gives birth to a baby girl out of adultery and is punished publicly. Hester's daughter is named as Pearl. Soon Layla is taken away from Salma so that she could not develop any affectionate bond with her. What she is given to her is the lock of hair of her baby. Which is one of the important asset she carries along with her mother's shawl throughout her life. As she was spending her days in prison she receives a letter from her mother informing her that her brother has found her and is going to kill her.

Salma remembers that she is then immediately shifted from prison with Sister Asher to Lebanon. She is given an English (lifestyle, language etc) training by Minister Mahoney. Sister Asher gives her a new identity by adopting her legally. Salma now becomes Sally Asher, and again is shifted to a new place, Exeter in England. In the new place with a new identity, she starts her life, trying to assimilate with changed scenario. She tries to fit in the new land but all the time she is taken back to her past memories.

She frequently remembers her daughter, though she has never seen her. She imagines her and even stitches a white frock for her. She remembers the conversation between Madam Lamaa and Noura. It was the decision of Noura to take away Layla from her mother. She regrets her decision but thinks that this was only good for Salma. Many times Salma stops in

front of the baby's toy shop or clothes shop and is reminded of her baby. Towards the end of the novel, we see that she gets her final, permanent identity when she marries Prof. John. A union between East and West. She gives birth to a baby boy, Imran. As it seems that everything is going smoothly and happily sudden change occurs in Salma. She is constantly reminded of her daughter. She said that Layla is calling her, she needs her and she feels like going back. She becomes nostalgic. John tries to persuade her but in vain. One day without informing John she leaves her family, her son Imran and goes back to the place from where she has come. The call of the past is more dominant than her present. Arab wins over the Western. She completes an orbit. She learns in Hima from her mother, that her father, her grandmother has died. She feels sorry to hear the new. She asks about her daughter Layla to her mother. She discloses to her that she has been killed by her uncle Mahmoud two months ago. He justifies his action that it is against the honour of the tribe to let an illegitimate girl keep alive. Salma cries at the grave of her daughter and hugs her daughter's grave. She always wished to hug her daughter and love her but never thought it in this way. As soon as she turns back to see the noise, she is shot in the middle of her eye by her brother. He said that it is his duty, "dishonour only be wiped off with blood"(279).

Apart from her memories related to her sin and baby there are other objects, she is always reminded of. Food-related memories are also frequently visible in the novel. Various food habits related to the Arab, Muslim culture are presented by the writer. Salma recalls that "when we used to drink sage tea and spin and weave. Instead of walking up the mountains, looking for sage, bushes, picking the soft green leaves, washing them, drying them, there they were" (5). She is reminded of musk, thyme, sage, falafel kabab, ghee butter sugar sandwiched and many more related food habits.

Her story repeatedly shifts from present to past with such frequency that sometimes it becomes difficult to follow the flow of the happenings. The novel moves around her life in the past and in the present, to such an extent that she all the time thinks about her past. Her sin, her daughter, food, time spent in the prison, the nunnery. Throughout her journey though she is surrounded by people she feels lonely, alienated. Salma is all the time haunted by her past. The pressure of memories controls her life, out which she finds no outlet. she knows that she is hunted by her brother, to be killed, she decides to go back to her homeland, Hima. The past, the cry of her daughter has been torturing her life. It is her craving for her past that results in her tragic end.

Many Arab writers have successfully attempted to write about the Muslim tradition, culture, their tribal life. The theme is the position of women in such orthodox society. She has been presented as an oppressed, submissive human being. She does not have an identity of her own; instead she is bound to the rules set by society that is men as they are the ones who decide women's fate. And if she commits some mistake like adultery it will be against the honour of the society and the ultimate punishment is nothing but death. That too in the hands of men, maybe father, brother or husband. In such a case, she does not have any right to live. This kind of culture full of terror forces the women to feel guilty and label themselves sinful.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, through the novel, Fakir Fadia has been successful in presenting the situation of Arabian Muslim women. Patriarchy is found in every society whether it is East or West or any part of the world. It is not Salma who is the victim of her society but even her innocent daughter is punished for no fault of her. She is also killed in the name of family honour. She is illegitimate and has no right to live. Mahmoud, her own maternal uncle throws her in the well saying "like mother, like daughter" (227). Though Salma gets a chance to live her life happily in Exeter with her husband John and her son Imran, her past does not permit her to do so. She is haunted by her traumatic memories all the time. Every occasion of happiness in her life is shadowed by her past memories. She gets a new identity as Sally Asher, as Sal and then as Mrs. John but she is unable to come out of the tag of Salma, her original identity.

Immigrants remember their past for solace. A kind of peace is associated with their past memories. They feel tormented in the new land. They are unable to adjust in the new land, they are reminded of their glorious past. They face multiple problems in the new place, new language, culture, food, with which they try to adjust. But in case of Salma things reciprocate. she faces many problems in Exeter, new, foreign land for her. She tries to assimilate with the new surrounding. She attempts to learn a new way of life, culture, food everything. But she is a failure as she is unable to wipe out her past. She is tormented by her past. The past haunts her all the time whether it is her sin, her daughter or her brother. Every now and then she is reminded of her sin, as she herself in many situations considers herself as a sinner. She many times hears her daughter's cries, and imagines her face, which she has never seen. Many times she feels the presence of her brother as if he is following her to kill her. Unable to forget her past, she ultimately goes back to her homeland, Hima, with a changed identity. She thinks that she has dishonored her family and her tribe. So she cannot

show her face to the people. And finally, she meets her tragic end, in her own village, in the hands of her own people.

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