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Performing Nostalgia: A Study of Sleepwalking Episodes in Joginder Paul's *Sleepwalkers*

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Abstract:

Joginder Paul's *Sleepwalkers* stands out amongst the oeuvre of Partition fiction for its unique portrayal of the human agony of displacement and re-rooting in new homeland. This essay discussed how the remembering subjects within the novel place themselves in the liminal space of memory, trying to cope with the depth of transformations around them. Nostalgia directs the remembering subject to achieve the journey of transition from the past to the present and leads to a literal reconstruction of home by the migrants in an attempt to transform the unfamiliar to familiar. This reconstructed place becomes a liminal, and heterotopic space defying the norms of immovability of place, the linear progression of time and questions cartographically defined borders of the post-Partition nation states: India and Pakistan.

Keywords: Partition, memory, nostalgia, liminality, heterotopias, *Sleepwalkers*, Joginder Paul, Homi Bhabha, Foucault, Svetlana Boym.

Joginder Paul's *Sleepwalkers* was originally published in Urdu as *Khwabrau*, in Lahore in the year 1990. The Indian edition of this novella was published in 1991. Translated into English by Sunil Trivedi and Sukrita Paul Kumar, *Sleepwalkers* was published in 1998, by Katha Perspectives. *Sleepwalkers*, set about fifty years after Partition, in the reconstructed Lucknow which is also called mohajir's Lucknow, located in Karachi in Pakistan, and exemplifies the tormenting presence of the Partition in the lives of those who were affected, decades after Partition. Though there are only a few characters in the novella, Joginder Paul portrays the predicament of mohajir identity. They have adopted different ways to deal with their nostalgia for homeland.

Joginder Paul highlights the centrality of the place Lucknowⁱ, the place of anchor for the novella, in the lives of those who migrated to Pakistan during Partition. Geographically located in India, Lucknow became foreign and inaccessible, for those who migrated to Pakistan during Partition. The Lucknavis, filled with nostalgia for the lost ancestral homeland, rebuild and replicate Hindustani Lucknow in Karachi, complete in the replication of its streets, chowkⁱⁱ and other buildings. This replica of Hindustani Lucknow in Karachi, a refugee settlement came to be known as “Mohajir’s Lucknow”, the locus of action in Joginder Paul’s *Sleepwalkers*.

Being a novella *Sleepwalkers* has only a few characters. The central character of the novel is Deewane Maulvi Sahab whose real name is Nawab Mirza Kamaluddin. Deewane – a Urdu word meaning mad, is the nick name given to him by his wife Achhi Begum, after their marriage. Born and brought up in Lucknow, (Hindustani Lucknow) his love for Lucknow was such that if he ever left Lucknow, he would be restless until he returned. His journey always started and ended in Lucknow. Even before Partition and migration, his physical distance from Lucknow resulted in his restlessness. Another source of his restlessness was not hearing his wife call him Deewane. Maulvi Sahab often tells his wife:

“If I remain in my senses even in these last few days of my life, it is only because you call me deewana. Otherwise, who, at this great old age, can tell what is what? Whenever you call me deewana, I feel like rattling off the one and three quarter times tables right upto its sixteenth multiple to you” (55).

Lucknow, his wife Achhi Begum and the name Deewane kept him rooted and sane. In 1947, when migration became inevitable because of Partition, he migrated to Karachi, Pakistan, with his family and other Lucknavi’s. Overcome by nostalgia, Maulvi Sahab leads the process of re-building of Lucknow in Karachi. As days go by Maulvi Sahab starts believing that he hasn’t migrated from Lucknow, but is still living in it. Accepting the replicated city of Lucknow in Karachi as reality, Maulvi Sahab starts living in the world of his imagination and conveniently forgets his agony of displacement, homelessness. Thus, the process of re-rooting becomes irrelevant in case of Deewane Maulvi Sahab. Though Maulvi Sahab’s sons now and then try to convince Achhi Begum to medically treat Maulvi Sahab, to bring him out of his life of illusions she has dismissed it. She believes that sanity and encountering the reality of displacement will only make his life more miserable.

Deewane Maulvi Sahab has two sons, Nawab Mirza and Ishq Mirza. Nawab Miza lives in Mohajir's Lucknow, in Maulvi Sahab's Nawab Mahal, with his wife Chand Bibi and three children. He owns a factory in Sindh populated area of Karachi. Ishaq Mirza, a second-generation migrant, born and bought up in the new homeland, has moved out of Mohajir's Lucknow, and married a Sindhi woman, in the spirit of embracing the new homeland. Nawab Mirza cites confrontations between native population of Karachi and mohajir settlers to justify the culturally exclusive settlement of Lucknavi population; Ishaq Mirza considers these confrontations as a signal pointing toward the need for cultural assimilation. While there is a clear difference of opinion amongst the mohajirs, with regard to the cultural assimilation; but Maulvi Sahab does not display any such conflict. Befitting his nickname Deewane, has avoided the conflict by believing that the image of Lucknow that he is living is the real Lucknow. His allegiance is neither to Pakistan nor Hindustan, but to Lucknow.

Maulvi Sahab's brother-in-law, Nawab Hakim Jamaluddin, lives in Ambion-wali Haveli, in Malihabad, within Mohajir's Lucknow. He has spent his time experimenting how to grow Malihabadi mangoes in Karachi, and owns a Malihabadi mango orchard in Mohajir's Lucknow. His wife Hakiman, who is adoringly called Sandookchi, meaning "treasure chest", carried the plans of their ancestral haveli all the way from Lucknow to Karachi, using which, the haveli was rebuilt. Hashim Ali, son of Hakim Sahab has left Pakistan to Saudi Arabia. Although Ishaq Mirza professes about the increasing opportunities in Pakistan, Hashim Ali has experienced the bitter truth of corruption. When in Pakistan, whenever there was a possibility of getting a job, someone at the top would pull strings in favour of their candidate, in spite of his qualifications he would be left without the job. When he found a job in Saudi Arabia, fed up of corruption and waiting, he happily left his homeland, returning occasionally to visit his family in Pakistan. Ishaq Mirza and Hashim Ali, have been friends for long and often communicate through letters. Ishaq Mirza's letters, addressed to Hashim Ali, representing his beliefs and dilemmas about his identity as a mohajir, nationality, and the cultural conflict, these letters voice the dilemmas faced by the younger generation of mohajir's Lucknow.

Sain Baba, a native of Sakkhar, a village in Karachi is the new cook of Nawab Mahal. Although Maulvi Sahab's family was keen on hiring a Lucknavi cook, they hire Sain Baba once he assures them of his refugee status in spite of being a native. Explaining his claim of being a refugee, Sain Baba says that "nobody in Karanchi belongs to Karanchi" (73). Speaking about his

wanderings from Sakkhar, where he ran away from at the age of twelve or thirteen, he has worked in different places. After Independence he says “I was kicked around from door to door all over my Sindhu desh until I finally came to Karachi” (74). He declares that he is “virtually a mohajir” without a place to call home: “I have no home, no neighbourhood, no bonds with the past or future” (75). While most of the characters’ claim refugee status in the novella is rooted in their displacement and migration, through Sain Baba, Paul provides a glimpse of the rise of a new set of refugees who are natives by birth but their living conditions has rendered them to be refugees.

Towards the end of the novel, we encounter much discussed conflict between natives and mohajirs in Karachi. It materializes in the form of a bomb explosion in Nawab Mahal, that kills Achhi Begum, Nawab Mirza, Chand Bibi, and Suraiya. Death of his family shakes Maulvi Sahab out of his illusions but unable to accept the loss, he rejects the reality of death and destruction, and slips into a new set of illusions immediately. After the bomb explosion Ishaq Mirza returns Mohajir’s Lucknow, to take care of Maulvi Sahab his family. Deewane Maulvi Sahab, who, before explosion, was under the illusion of Mohajir’s Lucknow as the reality, now believes that he is in Karachi, accompanied by his grandchildren Salim and Dilnawaz, visiting his second son Ishaq Mirza and his family. He is restless to go back home, to Hindustani Lucknow, where he believes Achhi Begum, his wife, is waiting for his return in the ancestral haveli with his elder son and family. The novella ends with the image of Deewane Maulvi Sahab, all packed and ready to return home, to ‘Hindustani Lucknow’, and trying to convince his grandchildren Salim and Dilnawaz that real Lucknow is the one located in India and not the one in Karachi.

In “On Writing *Sleepwalkers*” Paul recollects witnessing the sleepwalking of Mohajirs in Karachi. During his visit to Mohajir’s Lucknow Joginder Paul found out that “Lucknavi’sⁱⁱⁱ were in the habit of walking out of their dreams at night to have come straight to the chowk” (114) though well past midnight. Although the place “Mohajir’s Lucknow” created an illusion of existence on a different geographical timescale, the appearance of people as though they were in deep sleep, draws attention to the fact that they are stuck in a dreamy sleep state, inhabiting a past time of pre-partitioned Lucknow. Paul, in the sleepwalking episodes of the novella, has recreated this dreamy sleep state he witnessed in Karachi. The title of the novel *Khwabrau* or *Sleepwalkers* comes from episodes of sleepwalking Mohajirs that forms an important part of the novella. It is not just the protagonist, but people of Mohajirs Lucknow, as a community, unconsciously participate in the procession of sleepwalkers.

In *Sleepwalkers*, the Lucknavi Mohajirs, together as a community do restore their original home – Lucknow, an act of restorative nostalgia^{iv} of building a trans-historical homeland. Mohajirs Lucknow, although a nearly precise reconstruction, conspicuously excludes the other in its reconstruction. Lucknow of Karachi was in a way a reinvention, an imaginary homeland that excludes those aspects that threaten the integrity of the place. While all the signs of the existence of any other religious community is erased from this new Lucknow, it also excludes the native people of Karachi, the local cultures and traditions. But the fact it is located within the geographical space of Karachi makes it an in-between space, in the words of Bhabha - a liminal space. Bhabha explains liminal as the “interstitial passage between fixed identification” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 04) that becomes the third space. Conceptually the liminal space could either be concrete or abstract. According to Bhabha it is the space between two binary points, that an individual or group occupies. In the state of liminality, one does not belong to either of the fixed points. It is a space between here and there, the space one occupies in the process of transformation. It could be a transformation from past to the present, from traditional to the modern or old to new. It is also a space one takes refuge in, when he/she does not want belong to either of the provided fixed points and wants to escape both. Through nostalgia they replicate the lost homeland within the boundaries of new homeland thus occupying a liminal space between the past and present homelands.

In *Sleepwalkers* Paul presents before us a culmination of different forms of nostalgia, forming a community of nostalgic citizens. Paul’s portrayal of nostalgia is not limited to the representation of a migrant’s yearning for home and homeland. He discusses the effects of nostalgia especially on two different levels: one on individual level and two as a community of migrants. It is nostalgia that brings the migrants together to remember and rebuild their hometown Lucknow in Karachi. Although lead by Maulvi Sahab, the Mohajirs of Lucknow take part consciously and willingly in the process of re-building Lucknow in Karachi. Mohajirs thus participate in their nostalgic remembering, making the process of re-building Lucknow a commemorative act they participate as a community. But living in this mirror image of Hindustani Lucknow does not appease their nostalgia. It continues to get expressed in different ways.

Amrita Ghosh calls this reconstructed Lucknow a hyper reality, and uses Foucault’s concept of ‘heterotopias’ to analyze *Sleepwalkers*. Ghosh considers the Mohajir’s Lucknow as

an example of 'heterotopia of deviation', that questions the "national imaginary of rooted spaces and border control" (06). In the essay "Of Other Spaces" Foucault discusses the construction of internal and external space, with specific focus on the external space. Central to his analyses of external space is the division of external space into utopias and heterotopias. While utopias are "sites with no real place", that "... present society itself in perfected form or else society turned upside down" (03). Foucault describes heterotopias as "counter sites" in which "... real sites that can be within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (03) He says that every society consists of heterotopias, mainly there are two kinds- crisis heterotopias and deviant heterotopias. Crisis heterotopias – the spaces reserved to be used by individuals undergoing crisis, like the space for menstruating, pregnant women, Foucault believes are quickly disappearing these and are being replaced by deviant heterotopias that he describes as a space for "... individuals whose behaviour is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm are placed" (05). Psychiatric hospital, prison, and retirement home are the example Foucault cites as spaces of deviant heterotopias. Mohajir's Lucknow becomes a deviant heterotopia, located in cultural and cartographical borders of Karachi, as it both questions the authority of cartographical borders and denies to be included within the temporal and cultural borders of Karachi or even the nation state of Pakistan. This heterotopic space is one consciously constructed by the migrants to serve their nostalgia for home.

Foucault also draws our attention to the spaces that are neither utopias nor heterotopias but sites that give mixed experience of both. Illustrating with the example of a mirror as a heterotopia that accommodates creation of a utopia within, for the person who looks into it he says that mirror does the function of both utopia and a heterotopia. He says:

"In the mirror I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual place, that open up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enable me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror". But the mirror in itself is a concrete reality and "... it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there".

Just like a mirror, the mohajir's Lucknow, a mirror image of Hindustani Lucknow creates the illusion of being located in real Lucknow. But the fact that it is actually located in Karachi makes it an unreal space. The concrete existence of Mohajir's Lucknow in Karachi makes it a heterotopia. Being located in this heterotopic space helps Lucknavi's to transcend both time and space in their sleep. The inhabitants of Mohajir's Lucknow, sleepwalk unconsciously, through the streets this heterotopic reality and they imagine themselves to be in Lucknow of their imagination, in Hindustan, occupying pre-partitioned times.

The episodes of sleepwalking highlight how mohajir's Lucknow works as a mixed site that Foucault talks about, at times as heterotopias and at times as utopia. Paul introduces the episodes of sleepwalking in the opening chapter through the conversation between Ajijo the chaiwala and Manwa Chowkidar, the night watchman of Mohajir's Lucknow. In the beginning Manwa used to bump into people, in the deserted chowk, but slowly he began to see people. Manwa calls them "apparitions" because Lucknavi's who were walking through the streets of Mohajir's Lucknow, he says, were in reality asleep, in their beds, in their respective homes. The narrator says:

"In the dying hours of the night, when the silent lanes of Ameenabad are lit with the eerie glow of colourful lamps, people lying deep in sleep in the pitch dark of their homes roam about the bustling chowk, as if it were day. In the beginning Manwa Chowkidar would constantly bang his lathi on the road, wide eyed with fear and astonishment, as he stared at the dazzle around him...The entire Chowk is deserted; who on Allah's earth do I keep bumping into, in this dead silence? ... What was even stranger was that, within a few days, he actually began to see apparitions, In fact, it so happened that it was only rogues and crooks that the chowkidar could not spot. He could clearly see all the people who had walked to the Chowk through their sleep" (13).

Being the night's watchman of Mohajir's Lucknow, who roams the streets fully awake Manwa reports a steady increase in the number of sleepwalkers on the streets. For Manwa these sleepwalkers look like apparitions. The mohajirs, alive and awake during the day, turn into sleepwalkers whom he calls "apparitions". Manwa even had a conversation with the sleepwalking apparition of Maulvi Sahab who gave Manwa a two-rupee note. Since Manwa is

the only one who talks about the apparitions and sleepwalkers, we are left wondering if the whole episode is a dream or reality. Either it is Manwa who is slowly slipping into madness just like Deewane Maulvi Sahab or if the walking indeed is a reality, the mohajirs following the lead of Maulvi Sahab must be slipping into the life of illusions. In the beginning he only bumps into these apparitions. Later Manwa says that he spoke to one of the apparitions, that of Deewane Maulvi Sahab. Among the group of sleepwalkers he also spots Ajijo:

“Forget others, Ajijo, I even saw you going towards the bazaar.

But I was enjoying Khwaabe Khargosh then, you know!”

“That’s exactly what happens! People are out in the streets while they’re sleeping in their homes” (14).

But, as Manwa relates the story Ajijo dismisses the words of Manwa as “mumbo-jumbo” and says that if people are really walking around at night, he might even keep his tea business open at night. Being located within the heterotopic space, defying the norms of place and time, makes it difficult for one to distinguish if these sleepwalking episodes are part of Manwa’s dream or reality.

When Manwa narrates the sleepwalking again, to Ajijo the number of sleepwalkers has tremendously increased. As there are increasing incidents of violence between native and Mohajir population, more people seem to have started sleepwalking. After asking one of the sleepwalkers Manwa gets to know that the sleepwalkers’ gathering was a result of bomb explosions in and around Lucknow, and they were going in procession to Laat Sahab’s Bunglow. Determined find out what the Sleepwalkers were up to, Manwa decides to go to sleep, so that he too can join the procession of sleepwalking apparitions. He says:

“The moment I wrapped the sheet around myself, I fell asleep. And then I joined the procession directly in my sleep. The procession was already on the move” (96).

All through his narration Manwa pointedly distinguishes himself from the group of sleepwalkers. Even after joining the procession of sleepwalkers in his sleep, he distinguishes himself from them continues to be an observer from outside. Manwa approaches Maulvi Sahab,

who was leading the procession of sleepwalkers, so that he could take a good look at what they were doing:

“In the beginning, Maulvi Sahab shouted Nara-e-takbeer in his booming voice. Then suddenly - who knows what occurred to him – with all his might, he screamed into the loud speaker, we shall have...! And do you know, Ajijo, what the entire procession cried out in one voice? Pakistan! Pakistan! What happened after that is absolutely incredible. Though these ears have heard and these eyes have seen it all, I still cannot believe it. Deewane Maulvi Sahab was, in any case, even more insane. He does not know that it has been nearly half- a century since Pakistan was created. But just think, Ajijo, what was wrong with the whole crowd? Had it also gone mad with the bombs and explosives?” (96-97).

The sleepwalking episodes narrated through Manwa Chowkidar are rooted in the Mohajirs’ pain of separation from homeland, their nostalgia and extreme longing of the lost home. Living the reality of dislocation and homelessness during the day, consciously they replicate and reconstruct their past home in Karachi. But as they sleep, denying the reality of dislocation and passing of time, they relocate themselves in a different time zone of the past and when they were located in Hindustani Lucknow and sleepwalk through the streets of Mohajirs Lucknow, re-living and re-enacting their past.

It is their nostalgia that directs them to create the heterotopic space of Lucknow, one that is physically available in the spatio-temporal zone that they occupy, to encase the spirit of the world that left behind. But their longing is not limited to the place of Lucknow. Incidents narrated by Manwa Chowkidar, the night watchman of Sleepwalker’s Lucknow shows how deeply the conscience of Lucknavi’s is affected by nostalgia. In their inability to reverse the lost time, they become sleepwalkers, reversing the time in their dreams.

Unlike the pre-Partition days when people were united and participated in procession to resist violence, in spite of recurring bomb blasts, Mohajir’s Lucknow has witnessed no such act of resistance. When Ajijo learns that sleepwalkers were gathered for a procession resisting recent violence, says:

“Very interesting news this, Chacha Manwa. What should happen during the waking hours of the day has been done by these fellows in their sleep” (95).

But Ajijo is unaware of the different time zone the sleepwalkers illusion themselves to be in. The procession of sleepwalkers is a display of their nostalgia not just nostalgia for the place but also for those times when people were united and resisted the violence.

Although nostalgia, as a concept generally alludes to a place the subject is nostalgic about, Paul thus draws attention to the centrality of time in the performance of nostalgia. The sleepwalking episodes show that their nostalgia is not just for the place that was their homeland but also for the lost, and irretrievable times of the past. Reflecting upon the role of time in formation nostalgia Svetala Boym says:

“In a broader sense nostalgia is rebellion against modern idea of time, the time of history and progress. The nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology, to revisit time like space, refusing to surrender to the irreversibility of time that plagues human condition” (KL^v 191).

The construction of time as moving in linear progression promotes nostalgia. Dennis Walder, considers the perception of time as central in determining nostalgia. He says that since most of the modern societies have a linear view of time i.e. the understanding that the time past, is past and there is no reversal of the past time. This understanding of irreversibility of time promotes nostalgia. He also lists the sense of inadequacy and deficiency of the present and accessibility to the objects of the past as the aspects that promote nostalgia.

In *Sleepwalkers* nostalgia leads to the re-creation of place, and through the re-creation of place that allows the nostalgic subjects to dwell in the lost time and lost place, the linear movement of time is nullified. The sleepwalkers prefer to locate themselves in the times before Partition wishfully denying the later developments of Independence, partition, displacement, migration, and the violence and trauma accompanied. The lost past time is retrieved through the recreation of place, filled with memories of the past. It is the reconstruction of Lucknow, though a heterotopic space, that aids the sleepwalkers in transcending time. Writing about complimentary nature of time and place Trigg says that:

“ . . . it is only through materializing itself in place that the felt experience of time gains its powers. . . . Moving in place, be it from the car park to the elevator or from one planet to another, we experience time in and through place” (Trigg, 07).

It is not only the lost home, but they also inhabit a past time thus saving themselves from the trauma of remembering their loss of home and homeland. Inhabiting the past time, the present is forgotten, along with the pain of displacement and the painful act of remembering lost home. By inhabiting past time of pre partition period, they involve in selective forgetting of the traumatic past to cope with the trauma of loss. At night, they are seen sleepwalking, in procession through the streets of Lucknow located in Karachi, shouting:

“Le ke rahenge Pakistan!

Pakistan!Pakistan

Pakistan ka matlab kya?

La Ilaha Illallah!” (97).

While they inhabit this liminal place Mohajir’s Lucknow during the day, at night, sleepwalking through its streets, Lucknavi’s inhabit a liminal space between dream and reality. Thus, inhabiting a past time of pre-partition Lucknow, challenging the conceptions of immovability of place and irreversibility of time, they exhibit how the homeland so fervently fought for and achieved, has become elusive.

Notes:

ⁱ Although the name of city has been spelt in different ways, I have used the “Lucknow” to refer to the city. Since there are two places with the same name, the usage “Mohajir’s Lucknow”, “Sleepwalkers’ Lucknow” and “Lucknow of Karachi” are used to refer to the reconstructed Lucknow located in Karachi. The original city of Lucknow located in India, is referred to as “Indian Lucknow” or “Hindustani Lucknow”.

ⁱⁱ Chowk is a Urdu word suggesting a place with junction of roads, and an open market place.

ⁱⁱⁱ The word “Lucknavi” to refers to the people of Lucknow, and culture and practices specific to Lucknow.

^{iv} This categorization is based on Svetlans Boym discussion of nostalgia, where she refers to two typologies: reflective and restorative nostalgia.

^v Kindle location

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