

Politics of homecoming: Evaluating the altering notions of nation and homeland in Vassanji's *A Delhi Obsession*

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Abstract: Nations and nationalism are not primeval. These notions are engrained in primordial human sentimentalities that are a culmination of kinship, solidarity, and communal cooperation. These attachments acquired an integral status in societal politics as they extended beyond family to clan and ethnic groups. The desire of a person to be a member of a family ethos and a nation is inherent and innate. These concepts become even more convoluted among migrants and occupy a central locus in the works of the forthright diasporic author M. G. Vassanji. Their longing to understand their nationalism and where they come from is the actual counselor of the protagonist's identity in the selected text, *A Delhi Obsession* (2019). The immigrant Muslim lead, Munir, returns to his 'homeland' in search of his roots only to find himself trapped amidst the altered socio-political equation of India. The paper attempts to evaluate the distorted notion of the nation from an immigrant's perspective who fails to establish a connection with his homeland. Since then, the homeland has undergone significant unwelcomed ethno-social changes. The research employs a qualitative approach to study the idea of a mythical return to a changing homeland, focusing on the concept of home by Safran, Brah, and Cohen. The paper captures the struggle of Munir in locating his ancestral roots in a rigid and fanatic society as he simultaneously discovers love for a married Hindu woman, Mohini. As citizens have always been immensely prejudiced towards individuals they visualise as members of their kin culture, ethnicity has been politicised since the beginning of politics.

Keywords: homeland, diaspora, immigrant, homing desire, nationalism, origin, myth of return

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Introduction

The term 'route' has attained a notable level of familiarity in contemporary discourses. The hallmark of modern existence is distinguished by mobility, encompassing both intra- and inter-national displacements. As popularised by James Clifford in his work, *Cultural Anthropology* (1994), the term 'route', connotes a distinct mode of existence that stands in stark opposition to the connotations of the term 'root', which implies a predilection for the accustomed earth and the relatively unchanging cultural practices that arise from it. The fundamental essence of 'routes' is intrinsically intertwined with the concept of 'diaspora' (Himadri 2019, 1). The phenomenon of Diasporic reality is diachronic in nature as it is located within the cusp of national politics, which involves almost all significant components that constitute the fulcrum of the sociological reality of literature and the formation of the genre. The emergence of diaspora as a genre is observed as the direct consequence of empire and colonial invasion, which have essentially been guided by national and international politics, economy, and culture (Mishra & Mishra 2021, 83). Diaspora studies scrutinise the intricacies of diasporic evolution while also analysing the potent undercurrents of agency that chart the impetus for dissemination. This also enables us to grapple with expeditious issues pertaining to dispersion, the plausibility of a nation-state, and the ramifications of a defunct nation-state on the host nation-state.

The concept of diasporic space is a complex amalgamation of spatial dimensions propelled by historical and cultural transformations. It is plausible to observe that during the progression of interstices, which involve the intersection and elimination of differentiated spaces, negotiations occur among intersubjective and collective experiences of nations, community interests, or cultural values. Thus, within the confined spatial parameters that allow for social exchanges and divergences, the spatial pursuit of diasporic individuals shapes the identity that perpetually engages with diasporic cultural differences.

Diaspora refers to a social construct that exists beyond the geographical and cultural boundaries of the nation of origin. The phenomenon under consideration pertains to the displacement of a significant number of individuals from their native land, either by coercion or by choice, and their subsequent relocation to foreign territories. Diasporic individuals typically exhibit a profound sentimentality towards the geographical region from which they have emigrated and the corresponding cultural traditions. Individuals may

exhibit a proclivity, intentional or unintentional, towards acculturation or assimilation into the prevailing cultural norms of their novel environment. The diverse components comprising the diaspora possess distinct historical trajectories. The individuals' divergent experiences and disparate aspirations in question are readily apparent. The existing literature on the Indian diaspora effectively highlights this pathos and orientation. The writings encompass both fictional and non-fictional works, serving as a record of factual occurrences in everyday life that contribute to the creation of artefacts that effectively communicate the essence of their respective 'life-worlds' (Karmakar 2015, 79). The endeavour to comprehend the diasporic Indian experience is confounded by the indeterminacy of the concept of 'home'. The concept of 'home' presents a complex and multifaceted challenge for both members of the Indian diaspora and individuals seeking to comprehend this phenomenon. The issue of home extends beyond its literal interpretation and encompasses a metaphorical dimension. The representation of earnings in the context of the homeland has been eloquently articulated by diasporic writers such as Rohinton Mistry, Salman Rushdie, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, V.S Naipaul, Ramabai Espinet, Jhumpa Lahiri, and M.G. Vassanji. The present study endeavours to analyse the unexplored literary work entitled *A Delhi Obsession*, authored by M. G. Vassanji, with the aim of evaluating the distorted conception of the nation from the viewpoint of an immigrant who is unable to establish a connection with his homeland due to significant and unwelcome ethno-social transformations.

The realm of the South Asian writer living abroad is characterised by a dichotomy wherein they find themselves ensnared between their forsaken homeland and their adopted abode. As they navigate the interstices of despair and potentiality, a confluence of vexation and optimism marks this juncture. The predominant mood of the writing is primarily derived from the interplay between two polarising forces, which engenders a sense of irony. Vassanji (1998) posits in his essay titled "South Asian Canadian Literature" that young writers who reside in self-imposed exile often repudiate their roots and embark on a quest for an idealised "promised land". The fundamental essence of the diasporic phenomenon, whether ancient or contemporary, is rooted in the state of dispersion beyond the confines of the homeland. Following the emergence of the notions of nation and nationhood, the notion of homeland becomes inextricably linked with these concepts. Within this framework, the term 'homeland' is not employed in a parochial

manner to denote a smaller subnational identity and territorial space, such as a state within a country or any small locality in which one's ancestors have resided for generations. John Mcleod, in *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2000, 210), writes:

[t]he concept of 'home' often performs an important function in our lives. It can act as a valuable means of orientation by giving us a sense of our place in the world. It tells us where we originated from and where we belong. To be 'at home' is to occupy a location where we are welcome, where we can be with people very much like ourselves.

The term 'home' encompasses our place of origin and sense of belonging.

Diaspora communities, particularly those comprising first-generation immigrants, experience a divided sense of home. The phenomena of division, amputation, expulsion from one's home country, and migration to an adopted country have resulted in the state of being existentially separate. The individuals in question exhibit a proclivity for frequent and vivid dreaming and a persistent longing for the geographical region from which they have departed, the mental representation they retain within their psyches (Sharma 2008, 133). The diasporas pursue their livelihoods and perform their customary routines within a foreign nation, which they have recently embraced as their own. They endeavour to cultivate novel connections and establish a sense of belonging, while the concept of 'home' persists as a mere representation within a physical enclosure. As a collective or singular entity, we are affiliated with a singular nation, community, and identity (Ibid, 134). We strive to actualise our yearnings, ambitions, and aspirations. Discussions on race, ethnicity, and related topics render a developing nation ineligible as a prospective home.

A home is a physical structure in a foreign jurisdiction, geographically and temporally distinct from the individual's current location (Ibidem). Within this state of discontinuity, the demarcation between temporal epochs and spatial locations is envisioned through fragmented and fissured representations of the home, characterised by cracks and crevices. The notion of 'homing desire' has been extensively examined by diasporic writers and critics, such as Rushdie, Bhabha, Avtar Brah, Uma Parmeshwaran, and Jasbir Jain. However, it is imperative to acknowledge that home is a place of irretrievable loss for the diaspora, as it no longer embodies the essence of home for either the first or second generation. It is highly probable that

individuals from the second and third generations of immigrants do not harbour any affinity towards India. They refrain from associating with cultural or dietary practices that evoke or recollect the Indian subcontinent. “India is certainly not their existential home. It is merely a mirage created by their parents. It keeps eluding them” (Karmakar 2015, 83). Salman Rushdie perceives the intersection of home and exile in relation to a new interstitial space located on the margins of two cultures and yet retains its distinctiveness and centre. As he puts it:

Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. (Rushdie 1991, 15)

This becomes the focus of the study in the selected text.

M. G. Vassanji is a diasporic essayist whose work is characterised by a distinctive and inclusive representation of his South Asian characters’ dual displacement, setting it apart from the scholarship of other Canadian academics. The primary motif that pervades the author’s oeuvre is the quest to return to one’s place of origin, a pilgrimage to reclaim the land of promise, and the unending expedition of the settler, who is caught in a perpetual cycle of circular motion. Transitioning from emigration-related anxieties and difficulties, the individual explores the proximate domain of internalised understanding and assimilation. The ongoing process of this expedition involves a persistent effort to fortify itself with greater confidence in discerning diversity, prevalence, incongruity, and fragmentation within individual and communal connections. The diaspora’s place of origin, namely their indigenous and hereditary abode, is a legendary land of yearning, yet it remains unattainable, akin to an optical illusion. For diaspora, the notion of a home assumes a dual signification: it represents not only the site of dispersion but also the locus where the diaspora has been brought, thus conferring significance and a measure of comfort to the fragmented identity of the expatriate. Munir, the central character in the literary work *A Delhi Obsession*, experiences an ambiguous psychological inclination to investigate his ancestral lineage and heritage. In congruence with his genealogical pursuit, the protagonist of the exclusive narrative, Munir, a tricontinental migrant, journeys from Canada to Delhi. Munir, who had lost his significant other a year prior, experienced a sense of displacement and creative exhaustion. As a result, he impulsively decided to embark on a journey to India.

Methodology

The concept of home is intrinsic to the understanding of diaspora. ‘The concept of diaspora’, according to Avtar Brah (1996, 190), “embodies a subtext of home” (see also Lahiri 2019, 44). Femke Stock (2011, 24) observes that “at the core of the concept of diaspora lies the image of a remembered home that stands at a distance both temporally and spatially” (see also Lahiri 2019, 44). Homeland is usually considered to be a bounded territory that is left behind. It is associated with personal and ancestral memory. It generates in the diasporic subject a strong desire for return. There is usually a strong emotional attachment to the territory and its culture, particularly in the case of members of the first generation of immigrants. Although it may be the norm, identifying with the homeland is much more complicated. Homeland brings in the related concept of home, which extends the meaning of homeland (Lahiri 2019, 46). The new space may also be desired for settlement- a space of comfort and prosperity. This is not necessarily the prior homeland that lies in a distant place. On the contrary, this may be the land of one’s birth and growth, a space outside the ancestral land- an ‘unaccustomed earth’ made ‘accustomed’.

William Safran has delineated the categorisation of diaspora versus migrant communities through the identification of six distinct sets of rules. The group espouses several perspectives, namely the perpetuation of a myth or a commemorative recollection of their ancestral homeland. Another being the perception of said homeland as their own and the desire to return to it eventually. Also, the dedication to the rehabilitation or preservation of the homeland. Lastly, the establishment of a personal connection with the homeland that may contribute to the formation and consolidation of their identity. These viewpoints succinctly establish that the diasporic subjects have homogeneous, collective identities bound together by shared feelings of alienation and a robust nostalgic longing for the place of origin. However, as Clifford points out, we must be wary of constructing our working definition by recourse to ‘an ideal type’ because even the “‘pure forms are ambivalent, even embattled over basic features” (Clifford 1994, 306; Mishra & Mishra 2021, 90).

In the novel *A Delhi Obsession*, the protagonist Munir, a third-generation diaspora, has no connection to his roots apart from the few stories he has heard from his grandfather. An unconscious hidden desire to explore his roots surfaces when he finds himself dejected and

alone after the death of his wife, Aileen. The recently widowed Munir desires to stitch the gap left rugged and untouched for decades and to quench the scathing indictment of not knowing where he came from. With immense hope, scepticism, and anticipation, Munir lands in India but encounters alienation from society on multiple fronts.

Second-generation immigrants grow up visualising the ‘concept’ presented by their parents. For many, India is probably the image of a single state, district, or city where their parents are from (Karmakar 2015, 87). For the diaspora, the native, ancestral home is a mythical land of desires, but, like a mirage, it is unattainable. “It had been always at the back of the mind, a journey that he should make one day, eventually” (Vassanji 2019, 2). For Munir, the prospect of visiting India was intimidating precisely because of its importance: a return to the ancestral homeland after something like a century. He could vaguely recall, as a child imagining India alternately as Delhi, “a strange city”. Anxious about what Delhi has stored for Munir and his surname “Khan”, he finally undertook a much-awaited journey to determine if he is one of them (Indians).

A diasporic subject faces ambivalence, and hence it looks in two different directions- towards a historical, cultural identity on the one hand and the society of relocation on the other. Salman Rushdie (1991, 9) calls it the emergence of an “imaginary homelands”, where the identity of the Diasporic subject is actively inscribed. Edward Said enunciates the sense of loss, the unbearable rift between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home. However, he also emphasises that the Diaspora brings profound creative empowerment (Mishra & Mishra 2021, 85). The present study examines the intricacies of native land. Munir, the Toronto-based writer of Kenyan origin and nominal Muslim faith, has predominantly concentrated on the portrayal of Asians in Nairobi. Following a capricious impulse, a retired individual and current empty nester embarked on a journey to India, ultimately settling at a prestigious club located in New Delhi. The article utilises Brah’s theoretical constructs of ‘home’ and ‘homing desire’ to assess Munir’s yearning for a fabled restoration to his ancestral roots. Avtar Brah (1996, 187) initiates her discussion of home by asking the question, “Where is home?” and proceeds to respond in the following manner:

[o]n the one hand ‘home’ is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to

visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of origin. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of a locality.

Brah reminds us how the everyday experience of life marked by racism and oppression may lead to different definitions of 'home'. Brah's critical formulation of 'home' collapses the binary understanding of the homeland/hostland boundary and helps us understand the synthetic and flexible nature of the concept of home/homeland. The diaspora concept establishes a creative tension between 'home' and 'dispersion' discourses and inscribes a homing desire while concurrently critiquing the discourses of fixed origins. The issue of 'home' and the sense of belonging is a fundamental aspect of the diasporic state. However, the emergence and resolution of related inquiries and their manifestation are contingent upon the unique historical trajectory of a given diaspora. It is worth noting that not all diasporas express a longing for a sense of belonging by means of a homing desire to return to a presumed place of ancestral origin (Brah 1996, 189).

The social constructionist attempted to prompt a renewed inquiry and a more nuanced comprehension of changes in the relationship between the homeland and diaspora. Through this process, Cohen (2009, 4) identifies three primary iterations of the concept of home/homeland: solid, which represents an unwavering and fundamental desire for a homeland; ductile, which embodies a more intricate and nuanced understanding of the concept; and liquid, which reflects a post-modern interpretation of the idea of a virtual home. The paper attempts to elucidate that the novel's protagonist, who embarked on a quest for his 'solid' roots, ended up being an outcast in his homeland by virtue of his diasporic and religious identity.

The novel provides a thought-provoking perspective on the secular nature of India, which may challenge some readers' beliefs. The author's writing style is engaging and descriptive, adding to the impact of the message. Vassanji's perspective on faith is not influenced by privilege. He has concerns about belief systems and their potential to trap individuals. His main issue with fundamentalism is not its disregard for history and rationality but rather its tendency to involve ordinary people in acts of violence. Alka Kumar accurately posits that when the domestic realm transforms into a mythical realm of longing, it concurrently becomes a location of irrevocable departure. Home can be perceived as multifaceted, with various iterations stemming from

the physical location of origin. These iterations are then reimagined and reconstructed through the interplay of the imagination and the lived experience of contemporary reality, which encompasses sensory stimuli such as auditory cues, olfactory sensations, visual stimuli, and chromatic hues (Kumar 2006).

Discussion

The protagonist, Munir Aslam Khan, a writer by profession, was mesmerised by the magnificence and elegance of a married Hindu woman, Mohini, a journalist. In her first meeting, Mohini established that residing outside India should be a reason for an Indian immigrant to be ignorant about Indian culture and traditions. She says,

[y]ou are Indian and you are ignorant about India? That's a shame. Why is it that people who leave India want to forget about it as soon as possible? We should know where we come from! (Vassanji 2019, 8)

In an interview, Vassanji stated that even though the novel is focused on the dynamics of passion, rebirth, and faith, no story exists for him without a context, and that is where politics comes in.

The politics of religious communalism or difference has always been on his mind since his first visit to India (Gee 2019). The theoretical framework of Benedict Anderson's notion of the nation is predicated upon his concept of 'imagined communities' as enunciated in an essay of the same name, *Imagined Communities* (Anderson 2006). As per Anderson's assertion, a "nation is a socially constructed community perceived through shared symbols, myths, and memories that engender a feeling of belongingness amongst its populace" (Ibid, 19). The concept of 'Indian' seems to be deeply ingrained in the psyche of the characters of the literary work. The individuals in question exhibit a notable inclination towards safeguarding their 'nationalist' identities, thereby engendering a sense of estrangement in Munir, who lacks a direct affiliation with the nation.

Munir expressed a desire to acquire further knowledge regarding the metropolis of his progenitors. He exhibited a heightened enthusiasm towards delving into the historical intricacies of the city, characterised by its tumultuous past. This endeavour was motivated by a desire to trace his ancestral roots, prompting him to implore Mohini to guide him through the less frequented areas, the 'non-tourist' Delhi.

Munir, a Muslim individual with a Westernised perspective and agnostic beliefs, repeatedly found himself enamoured by Mohini, a

Hindu woman with a delightful and contemporary demeanour and a sharp wit. She exhibited a combination of religious traditionalism and liberal, provocative tendencies as a newspaper columnist. The polar identities exhibited an inexplicable attraction towards each other while exploring the thriving markets and historical buildings of Old Delhi.

Notable achievements and prosperity characterised Munir's life, yet he remained desirous of the Canadian gentleness and unrefined qualities that had seemingly eluded him. The individual experienced a sensation of relief, a potentially immoral inclination towards liberation in response to the recent loss of his spouse. Munir experienced a notable connection with Mohini as they further investigated the historical aspects of the city. In the pages of *History*, he found some snippets of the past which led him to connect certain strings, and he contemplates- "[h]ave I come in full circle...has Delhi now reclaimed me?" (Vassanji 2019, 22). A homeland is where one's roots are and where the thread of one's identity originates. It has many memories, histories, and said-unsaid tales and legends that become a part of one's personality.

For Avtar Brah, 'home' became progressively nebulous, even miasmal. Her notion of diaspora bargains a critique of accounts and discourses of static ancestries while considering a homing desire, which is not equivalent to a longing for a 'homeland'. So, native land had emerged as a homing desire, and soon, the home itself became metamorphosed into an essentially placeless, though undoubtedly poetic, space. Munir evinced a profound appreciation for historical inquiry and derived great pleasure from exploring his ancestral lineage, although he exhibited a notable degree of emotional detachment from his personhood. While Delhi may not be Munir's place of origin, it is undeniable that his ancestral ties to the city have left an indelible impression on him. Following his inaugural visit, a fervent fixation has taken hold of him, which can only be described as a 'Delhi Obsession'. Munir's initial encounter with Delhi concluded on a positive note, prompting him to embark on a subsequent exploration of the city. His affinity for Delhi stems from a historical connection that, while indistinct, remains palpable. The protagonist observed various instances of alienation and discrimination, amidst which his relationship with Mohini flourished. Mohini encountered challenging circumstances as she prioritised specific values over those deemed appropriate or ideal for a married woman.

Mohini authored a weekly column for the periodical 'The Express Times' and delivered biweekly lectures on English language and literature at an institution of higher education. Mohini was married to Ravi, who was gainfully employed in the security services and bore two offspring, Asha and Priya. Mohini was attracted to Munir and continued defying the so-called societal conventions by engaging in an extra-marital relationship with a Muslim man. Although harbouring a fondness for Munir, she inadvertently ostracised him by categorising him as an 'outsider'. Munir, who exhibited a profound preoccupation with the historical accounts of Delhi and Mohini, encountered a multitude of inquisitive gazes within his native land. The individual in question was subjected to persistent othering and compelled to navigate prejudicial attitudes stemming from his familial name, "Khan". Munir's lack of effort in comprehending the connotative implications of his secondary appellation is noteworthy. However, the cultural milieu of India presents a contrasting scenario. As Frantz Fanon (2001, 119) perceives it in *The Wretched of the Earth*,

[n]ational consciousness, instead of being the all-embracing crystallisation of the innermost hopes of the whole people, instead of being the immediate and most obvious result of the mobilisation of the people, will be in any case an empty shell of crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been.

Ultimately, the relationship between Mohini and Munir becomes emblematic of Fanon's warning: a fractured national consciousness that, rather than uniting, perpetuates alienation through the very markers meant to signify belonging.

David Morley has analysed the congruence of home and nation and their conflation. Drawing on the analyses of Rathel and Ignatieff regarding nationalism, Morley states that individuals who strongly adhere to a notion of 'Heimat' as an inherently stable and immutable concept are more prone to exhibiting hostility towards newcomers. Furthermore, he contends that individuals with a strong sense of belonging to their group are more inclined to harbour hostile and violent sentiments towards outsiders (Morley 2008, 220-221). Morley concurs with Ignatieff's assessment of this phenomenon, which can be most accurately comprehended as a narcissistic overestimation of one's worth, leading to a corresponding underestimation of others or unfamiliar individuals, thereby intensifying intolerance (Ibid, 221). In coherence with these attributes, Vassanji creates a radical character named Jetha Lal from Ahmedabad who is presented as 'a Hindu

purifier' whom Mohini refers to as involved in the business of protecting cows and Hindu women. Jetha Lal is portrayed as an individual with solid and extreme views who engages in derogatory comments regarding Munir's national and religious identity, thereby contributing to an unwelcoming environment for the diaspora within their country of origin. "She's a flower of Hinduism. And you are a good Muslim. A pride of the Mohammedans. Canadian, Sir. But you like Hindu women I see. Better than Canadian women, no?...But you are Muslim, sir. Mlechha. Different" (Vassanji 2019, 212). During his frequent visits to India, Munir was not only alienated on the ground of nationality that his passport indicated but also due to his surname 'Khan'.

Munir never believed in such tags, and these never bothered or affected his existence in Canada. However, India was different; tags mattered here, and the more he realised it, the distant he grew from his homeland. Ravi vehemently points out that Munir no longer had any ancestral roots in India (Vassanji 2019, 85). Mohini was also frequented by thoughts of Munir being a foreigner. In one of her introspective moments, she states- "[h]e's not Indian at all. He's Westerner. How could I have been so stupid?" (Ibid, 124). Despite her self-perception as a contemporary woman, Mohini frequently observes Munir's absence of a self-validated sense of self, as he does not conform to the expected standards of either Muslim or Indian identity. Munir, whose deceased spouse hailed from Scotland and Canada, is surprised by Mohini's inclination to categorise him.

Mohini's reaction is instinctive. Her family's mythology is influenced by their apprehension of the ones who "butchered" their lives during the partition era, which compelled her parents to escape to Delhi from what is now Pakistan (Ibid, 100). Munir's quest to reconnect with his ancestral heritage in India led him to a 'solid' attachment to the nation as a stable and enduring homeland, grounding his diasporic identity. However, his religious affiliation ultimately resulted in his marginalisation.

All around him incomprehensible noise. It took a while for him to breathe easier, in out, several times, then he started railing against himself. How stupid and naïve he had been. A gullible fool. An idiot. A desperate and lonely widower. A defunct writer. He should have seen that he was a foreigner, and these Indians were aliens. He would never understand them. He had got much out of Delhi; he had attached to his personal history. He

was able to find a home for his grandfather's memories. He was grateful for that. Now he was ready to scam. To run for his life. (Ibid, 197-198)

The omission of homelands' ideational value is a matter of concern as it is likely to influence the nationalists' cost-benefit analysis of territorial conflict and compromise. Scholars have debated that homeland possessed a quasi-religious influence for a considerable period, rendering them a nationalist 'sacred ground'. In accordance with this anticipation, empirical investigations evince that the sacredness of native territories configures the inclinations of nationalists in a manner analogous to how spiritual principles configure the inclinations of adherents (Burghardt 1973; Hassner 2010; Murphy 2002; Smith 2000; Shelef 2022). Munir observed that the coexistence of hatred and savagery with sublime thought and heroic non-violence, as well as the coexistence of naked ignorance with significant intellectual achievements, was a disconcerting characteristic of India, the vast and intricate nation.

The past cannot be considered a fixed and immovable entity in a distant and stable location, which we can revisit at our leisure without experiencing any sense of threat (Rus 2006). Instead, it is a constantly evolving and dynamic force that is inextricably intertwined with the present, and as such, it is constantly modifying its dynamics. Comprehending this phenomenon also carries significant ramifications for advancing cogitation regarding the intricacies of the diasporic populace (Ibid.). The conflation of the past with space and community, which would allude to a cohesive, stable, and uniform community, is no longer tenable.

The narratives about 'Dariba Kalan', a thoroughfare located in Delhi, which were relayed to him by his paternal progenitor, were incongruous with the contemporary India he bore witness to. A noticeable contrast was observed between the emotional warmth experienced by Munir's grandfather and the emotional chilliness he encountered. During his inquiry into his ancestry, Munir was informed by his sibling that their grandfather had provided refuge to an individual of Bengali origin who had perpetrated an act of violence by detonating an explosive device targeting the British Viceroy, Lord Harding. Notwithstanding the prospect of receiving remuneration from the British Government, Munir's grandfather elected to safeguard the 'Bangali' and then relocated to Shimla and subsequently to Mombasa and Nairobi (Vassanji 2019, 148). Ravi, employed in the security

services, obtained and presented the information to Mohini as “...this Munir Khan is the grandson of a terrorist. One Yunus Khan of Dariba Kalan. A long time ago, still...” (Ibid, 182).

Munir is inclined towards the irresistible allure of history, particularly his own, and eventually succumbs to the captivating yet distressingly wedded Mohini Singh. The protagonist observed various instances of alienation and discrimination, amidst which his relationship with Mohini flourished. Mohini encountered challenging circumstances as she prioritised specific values over the prescribed norms and expectations for a married woman. Despite finding a companion in Munir, Mohini often referred to him as the ‘other’- “[b]ut you are a Muslim...you bowed to our gods.” This sense of otherness broke Munir quite often but still, he used to come to India “to hear again that voice, observe that chirpiness, and the tenderness behind it, see that face that was his last sight of her...” (Vassanji 2019, 47) Despite Mohini’s cognizance of the potential hazards, Mohini never stopped meeting Munir. She put all her relations at stake to spend private moments with her newfound love. In the novel’s concluding chapters, the couple engaged in passionate, reckless, fearless consummation, oblivious to the fire outside.

According to Brah (1996, 192), the notion of home as a mythical place of origin is also characterised by the perception of it as an irretrievable location, despite the potential to physically visit the geographical territory regarded as the point of ‘origin’. The concept of a ‘homing desire’ proved to be an elusive notion for Munir. Munir seldom referred to India as his homeland due to the infrequent hospitable atmosphere it provided. Munir had encountered the less desirable aspects of the Indian subcontinent. While holding bigoted opinions may be deemed unacceptable, resorting to violent behaviour or threatening to do so is entirely different. The authors unveiled the veracity of the threat that loomed like a shark beneath the veneer of commonplace existence in India.

The prospect of Munir gaining entry to his ‘solid’ homeland is unattainable. Vassanji remarks: “The divisive politics is so alien to the India many of us have loved, and so hurtful — the violence has been so gross on one hand and casual on the other — I decided that this was not the time to sound ambiguous or be subtle or draw epiphanies. I would be extra-literary if need be” (Gee December 16, 2019). The situation alludes to the lines of Mahmoud Darwish – “A person can only be born in one place. However, he may die several times

elsewhere: in the exiles and prisons, and in a homeland transformed by the occupation and oppression into a nightmare” (Clark August 11, 2008). The novel ends with the demise of Mohini Singh in a car accident preceded by the death of Munir Khan, whose murder was attributed to cow vigilantes as a plate of biryani had been found in the refrigerator of the man’s room and was undergoing analysis for beef content.

Conclusion

Munir, who traveled from Toronto to locate his origins, always remained a ‘foreigner’ in his ancestral land with no linkages. During the progression of his expedition, he encountered a setback in his relationship with his daughter Razia, as she did not deem it imperative to extend an invitation to her father for her nuptial ceremony. His sole source of comfort was in the romantic relationship with Mohini, a companionship deemed immoral and sinful in India. Vassanji’s choice to structure *A Delhi Obsession* as a romantic narrative foregrounds the socio-political complexities arising from religious diversity. However, his exploration of the ethical quandary posed by an unattainable love and a bad marriage is compassionate and morally ambiguous. Significantly, there is a conspicuous absence of any endeavour to provide a definitive solution. Vassanji’s novel achieves a remarkable breadth of scope, surpassing its intended goal of revealing the divisive nature of communalism due to the author’s modest aspirations and lack of self-importance despite his profound emotional involvement.

The text, *A Delhi Obsession* serves not only as a portrayal of the migrant’s unceasing endeavour for a sense of belonging and connection to a particular land and its narratives but also as a refutation of the notion of religious essentialism. Radhakrishnan (1996, 212) posits that an excessive preoccupation with the sanctity of one’s lineage results in the neglect of the historical narratives of other communities and the glorification of one’s own heritage. The conspicuous lack of regard for the historical legacy of Munir and his forebears, coupled with the unwarranted declaration of his grandfather as a terrorist, was readily apparent in the personas of Letha Lal and Ravi.

The persistent alienation experienced by immigrants in unfamiliar territories is further exacerbated upon returning to their native land, ultimately suffocating the diaspora to the point of existential distress. The concept of homeland underwent a significant transformation for Munir, as the absence of a tangible homeland precluded any possibility

of return. Despite the existence of a geographical region that could be considered his homeland, it failed to provide a congenial environment that aligned with his political, ideological, and social beliefs. The diminishing cohesive force that bound him to his native land resulted in a displacement, whereby he found himself without a sense of belonging. Consequently, the land of his birth appeared increasingly unfamiliar compared to the land he had chosen to adopt. The change in the religio-political status of the homeland puzzled Munir and led him to a state of in-betweenness- not of either-or but of neither-nor.

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