

# LOSS, LONGING, AND DESIRE:

## THE POETICS OF NOSTALGIA IN QURRATULAIN HYDER'S *MY TEMPLES, TOO*

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### INTRODUCTION

“Nostalgia,” writes Svetlana Boym<sup>1</sup>, often emerges in times of “historical upheaval”—that is to say, at times when the “rhythms of life” are suddenly “accelerated.” As we can understand, such nostalgic outbreaks are the consequences of the experience of impending loss, of observing the world around oneself change, and of an uncertain future heralded by such a change. One such moment was the Partition of India in 1947 that came hand in hand with Indian independence. For millions of people across the country, a known familial world was rendered unknown overnight. A memorable depiction of this change comes in the Urdu writer, Qurratulain Hyder’s novel, *My Temples, Too*. In this paper, I look at the longing and nostalgia for the pre-Partition world as depicted in this novel. For this, I will first consider a few ideas of longing and belonging, memory and nostalgia, particularly in the context of lived spaces and places. Thereafter, I will attempt a brief reading of Hyder’s novel to explore its poetics of loss, longing and desire.

### SPACES, PLACES, AND A SENSE OF BELONGING

The house of one’s childhood, writes Gaston Bachelard<sup>2</sup>, is an “oneiric” place. In his book *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard goes on to draw a phenomenology of the house, outlining for us

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<sup>1</sup> S. Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), p. 15.

the secret poetry of the cellar and the garret, the romance of closed drawer and locked doors, and the cosmic potentialities of the otherwise trivial cracks and crevices on the walls.<sup>3</sup> One thing that Bachelard maintains throughout the book is the importance of our “imagination” that, according to him, animates the house. For Bachelard, the house is an “intimate space”<sup>4</sup>, a space that is animated by the fact of our living in it. As he sums it up beautifully, “a house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space.”<sup>5</sup>

The house, for Bachelard, is then a ‘lived space’—a place that acquires meaning by the fact of our living in it, of dwelling in its many spaces. “Dwelling,” writes Heidegger, “is the basic character of Being in keeping with which mortals exist.”<sup>6</sup> To dwell then is to be in a place, and to be in a place, as Edward Casey tells us, is to know it, to “be in a position to perceive it.”<sup>7</sup> We dwell in a place, root deep within it, by grasping it through our senses: we reflect on it, revive it in memory, invest it with meaning. And this is not limited to the house(s) we live(d) in but includes other inhabited spaces like our neighborhoods and secret hides, a beloved street or an old bridge, and it even extends to the objects they occupy. Dwelling, in short, is to sense spaces; in sensing, we inscribe spaces with meaning, and in inscribing, the “physical landscape” of these spaces, as Keith Basso reminds us, “becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination.”<sup>8</sup>

The sensing of places, however, is not unidirectional; as Steven Feld observes, it is a “doubly reciprocal.”<sup>9</sup> Feld sums it up in the sentence: “place is sensed, senses are placed; as place makes sense, senses make place.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, we can say then that there exists a complex, multidimensional relationship between places and the people who inhabit them, a relationship that, to further quote Andrea Frank, is “dependent on human interpretation of the place setting,” and thus can “vary from person to person.”<sup>11</sup> This relationship is summed up in the phrase ‘sense of place.’

## MEMORY, LONGING, AND NOSTALGIA

Places are retained in memory and memory plays a significant role in investing them with meaning. But “[m]emory,” as Anh Hua writes, “is the construction or reconstruction of what actually happened in the past”<sup>12</sup> and as such, is subjected to distortions. Bachelard addresses

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem, chapters 1–8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem, p. xxxviii.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> M. Heidegger, “Building Dwelling Thinking,” in: *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper Perennial, 1971), p. 158.

<sup>7</sup> E. Casey, “How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena,” in: eds. S. Feld, K.H. Basso, *Senses of Place* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 1996), p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> K.H. Basso, “Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape,” in: S. Feld, K.H. Basso, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> S. Feld, “Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea,” in: S. Feld, K.H. Basso, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>11</sup> A.I. Frank, “Sense of Place,” in: ed. R.W. Caves, *Encyclopedia of the City* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 590.

<sup>12</sup> A. Hua, “Diaspora and Cultural Memory,” in: ed. V. Agnew, *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity: A Search for Home* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), p. 198.

this concern in the observation: “Memory does not record concrete durations.... We are unable to relieve duration that has been destroyed. We can only think of it, in the line of an abstract time that is deprived of all thickness.”<sup>13</sup>

Bachelard is indeed right, but his version of memory as “abstract time” deprived of “all thickness” is more close to nostalgia—that is, the yearning for a time out of time. The word ‘nostalgia’ was first coined by Johannes Hofer in his 1688 medical dissertation *Medica de Nostalgia, oder Heimweh*, to refer to a form of ‘homesickness,’ but has come to mean a lot more than that. Forged from the two Greek words, ‘nostos,’ meaning return home, and ‘algos,’ meaning pain, today nostalgia represents a longing for a time in the past, a time that is lost and cannot be retrieved or returned to. Boym makes this same point when she notes that while “nostalgia” may seem “a longing for a place” at first glance, it is actually “a yearning for a different time.”<sup>14</sup>

Nostalgia, however, as Linda Hutcheon reminds us, “is rarely the past as actually experienced”<sup>15</sup>; rather it is “the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire.”<sup>16</sup> In this context, Hutcheon finds nostalgia as “less about the past than about the present.”<sup>17</sup> Using Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of “historical inversion” (that is, the projection in the “past” of that which can be only realized in the “future”<sup>18</sup>), she describes nostalgia in the following words:

...the ideal that is not being lived now is projected into the past. It is “memorialized” as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire’s distortions and reorganizations.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, as Boym clarifies, nostalgia can also take root “for a home [or a past] that one never had.”<sup>20</sup>

“Outbreaks of nostalgia,” Boym writes, “often follow revolutions.”<sup>21</sup> The reason, for Boym, is simple. Revolutions are times when a society goes through change. Revolutions, in this context, “accelerate the rhythms of life.”<sup>22</sup> With moments of change, of transition and turbulence, furthermore, comes the threat of losing touch with the local and intimate space of everyday lived and felt experience. This is a space inflated with personal imagination and collective memory, a space that has been inhabited and thus made meaning out of, a space that informs our identity. It is, to use Dubravka Ugrešić’s<sup>23</sup> words, the “bit of space” shared by people living in it, that cannot be “shared” by others, or even “translated,” for it is “marked” by the “experience” of a “shared life in a particular country, in a particular culture, in a particular system, at a particular historical moment.” The space of the local and the every-

<sup>13</sup> G. Bachelard, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>14</sup> S. Boym, op. cit., p. xv.

<sup>15</sup> L. Hutcheon, M. Valdés, “Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern: A Dialogue,” *Poligrafias, Revista de Literatura Comparada*, 3 (1998), p. 20.

<sup>16</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>17</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> M. Bakhtin, “Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel,” in: *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. C. Emerson, M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 174.

<sup>19</sup> L. Hutcheon, M. Valdés, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> S. Boym, op. cit., p. xiii.

<sup>21</sup> Ibidem, p. xvi.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> D. Ugrešić, “The Confiscation of Memory,” <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i218/articles/dubravka-ugresic-the-confiscation-of-memory> [access: 20.02.2021].

day, in this sense, is unique to every group and every individual, and by association, too intimate. When such spaces begin to transform, they impinge upon us with longing and nostalgia—longing that, as Felipe De Brigard reminds us, is not limited to a “particular location,” but can extend to “general childhood experiences, long-gone friends or family members,” and even to “foods, costumes, aromas, [and] traditions.”<sup>24</sup>

We can say then: places and spaces, the objects they possess, the sounds and smells they harbor, the rituals they nurture, all tie us to them through a ‘sense of place,’ and evoke in us a longing for them whenever the knots of this relationship are threatened. It is useful to remember here Boym’s caution that though nostalgia is thought to cause the “afflicted to lose touch with the present”<sup>25</sup>, ironically nostalgia can also take root for the present—for the “present perfect and its lost potential.”<sup>26</sup> We need only wonder how we are often overcome by a longing for the moment that, in trying to be experienced, is too quickly lost, with the feeling that it was fully experienced. Nostalgia, in other words, can emerge from a longing, and a failure, to “arrest the moment.”<sup>27</sup>

## HYDER AND THE PARTITION OF INDIA

The plan for the Partition of India, that divided the Indian subcontinent into the two separate nations of India and Pakistan, was passed on June 3, 1947. Some three weeks later, the Boundary Commissions was set up, and Sir Cyril Radcliffe was appointed to demarcate the boundaries of the two would-be nations by diving “a province of more than 35 million people, thousands of villages, town and cities, a unified integrated system of canals and communication networks, and 16 million Muslims, 15 million Hindus and 5 million Sikhs, who despite their religious differences, shared a common culture, language and history.”<sup>28</sup> For his part, Radcliffe, writes Urvashi Butalia, had “little time, no familiarity with the land or the people” and presumably “old” and “outdated” “census statistics.”<sup>29</sup> There was immense pressure from the party leaders for the work to be finished by 15<sup>th</sup> August, and within “five weeks”<sup>30</sup>, Radcliffe drew the line.

“The term ‘partition,’” Sangeeta Ray writes, “implies a neat cartographical creation of a new geographical entity that elides the personal and political vicissitudes accompanying such remappings.”<sup>31</sup> Partition came with Independence, but Partition also came with a spree of unprecedented violence and bloodbath. Indeed, as one survivor of the communal massacres recounts, “it was only after the riots started that people began to recognize that Independence had come.”<sup>32</sup> Loot and arson were unleashed on communal lines, with Hindus

<sup>24</sup> F. De Brigard, “Nostalgia and Mental Simulation,” in: ed. A. Gotlib Anna, *The Moral Psychology of Sadness* (London, New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), p. 159.

<sup>25</sup> S. Boym, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>28</sup> U. Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (India: Penguin Random House, 2017), p. 83.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 84.

<sup>30</sup> Ibidem, p. 83.

<sup>31</sup> S. Ray, *En-Gendering India: Woman and Nation in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 131.

<sup>32</sup> G. Pandey, “Partition and Independence in Delhi: 1947–48,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 32 (36) (1997), p. 2262.

and Sikhs killing Muslims and vice versa. Trains that had erstwhile featured in the collective imagination as symbols of conjunction, connecting distant lands and communities, overnight became symbols of disjunction and dislocation, taking people away from the concrete reality of their houses to the illusive and elusive claims of two newly created nations. More often than not, they arrived with butchered bodies and gunny bags full of mutilated breasts.

To go by the facts, somewhere around twelve million people were uprooted, rendered homeless; some around a million people died; and about 75,000 women were abducted and raped. That is to go by the facts; but Partition also had its “human dimensions.”<sup>33</sup> These “human dimensions” are many and often overlapping and one of its facets include the tragedy of parting from one’s ancestral house and lived spaces. As stories of the time tell us, many people had to flee overnight with only the bare essentials. Hyder recounts in *My Temples*<sup>34</sup>, for instance, how one of the characters discovers in one of the vacated houses, “the tea-things still lying on the dining-table and the radio was on and all the lights were burning.” Moreover, once the borders were drawn, it became easier, to paraphrase Attia Hosain<sup>35</sup>, to visit the whole wide world than the home one had belonged to. To sever all ties with the house one grew up in, leave all the too-familiar people and surroundings and neighborhoods, all those spaces one belonged to, never to return: that was Partition. In a moment, all was lost.

Qurratulain Hyder was born in 1927 in Uttar Pradesh, in an affluent family, and to parents, both of whom were writers. She was educated mostly in Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh, from where she earned a Master’s degree in English Literature. Hyder was 20 when India was partitioned. She migrated to Pakistan along with her mother, only to return to India in 1961. In her two-volume autobiography, *Kaar-i Jahan Daraaz Hai*, Hyder tells us how, when her train was attacked by a rioting mob, she and her mother made a bare escape.<sup>36</sup> As such, Hyder had experienced Partition, its horror, and its loss, from close quarters. They dominate not just *My Temples*, but also her other works, like her magnum opus, *River of Fire*, her novel *Fireflies in the Mist*, the two novellas, *Sita Betrayed* and *The Housing Society*, amongst many others.

### *MY TEMPLES, TOO* AND THE POETICS OF NOSTALGIA

*My Temples* is Hyder’s first novel. Originally written in Urdu as *Mere Bhi Sanamkhane*, and published in 1948, it was later ‘transcreated’ by the author in English. By and large, the novel focuses on a small aristocratic group, collectively called “the Gang,” that includes the three Ali siblings, Rakshanda, Peechu, and Polu, the children of the Rajah of Karwaha, and their friends, namely Kiran, Ginnie, Diamond, Hafiz, Christabel, and Vimal. It begins 2 years prior to Partition, in 1945, and details the time leading up to the moment of rupture, as well as its aftermath, as experienced by the Gang. As such, *My Temples* differs from many other Partition narratives in that it only briefly deals with the horrors of the time—“the pornography of violence” as one scholar called it<sup>37</sup>—that is so defining of the latter. Rather,

<sup>33</sup> U. Butalia, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>34</sup> Q. Hyder, *My Temples, Too*, trans. Q. Hyder (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger and Women Limited, 2018), Kindle. All references are to this particular edition.

<sup>35</sup> A. Hosain, *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (India: Penguin Random House, 2009), p. 289.

<sup>36</sup> N. Anjum, “Questioning Partition’s Rationale: Qurratulain Hyder’s ‘My Temples, Too,’” *Indian Literature*, 60 (3) (2016), pp. 146–47.

<sup>37</sup> P. Gopal, *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History, and Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009),

Hyder's book is an elegy, a nostalgic evocation of the many spaces of "the modern syncretic culture" of Lucknow, crisscrossed with "pre-modern and historical antecedents"<sup>38</sup>—a culture that was lost with Partition. Since Hyder began her literary career at a time when this culture, as Farooqui notes, was already "heartbreakingly demolished by partition and the attendant massacres," even as she "celebrates it, it is already and always pre-figured by the destruction it is going to face [t]hereafter."<sup>39</sup> This nostalgia of the author for the lost past, accompanied by nostalgia of the characters for a present experienced as ever-fleeting, results in what we can call a poetics of longing and desire, of a yearning to prolong the present, to preserve those doomed intimate and syncretic spaces—perhaps more intimate because doomed—that made the beloved haven of Hyder, and is the lived home of her characters.

The landscape of *My Temples* is haunted by longing and desire. Hyder evokes the myriad aching of the human heart by syncing the rhythms of human life, its aspirations and failures, with the rhythms of nature. This syncing results in an overflow, a spilling over and absorption of human emotions into the social and natural 'scapes' of the novel—something that invests them with emotive qualities. Thus, for instance, autumn leaves in one of the scenes are seen falling off and being "carried away by the current" in the same rhythm in which the "heart" of the characters seem to sink under the weight of romantic and political disillusionments with the approach of Partition. Again, with the arrival of monsoon, the bells of Noor Manzil are heard "peeling" incessantly along with the heavy pour of rain, as Queen Rose, unable to contain her longing for Salim, plaintively awaits his arrival, wondering hopelessly what he could be doing in his "huge house" somewhere in the district. Two other memorable instances of this syncing come in the 'moolsiri scene' and the song of Gul Shaboo. In the 'moolsiri scene,' which comes just after the 'Noor Manzil scene,' the Gang is seen to converse about love, transience, and temporality in the lawn of Ghufuran Manzil in a post-rain surrounding, as clusters of "moolsiri blossoms" fall on them like "waterfall." Moolsiris in the Indian tradition are often associated with love and beauty as well as transience for their exhilarating smell and yet brief lifespan: while they begin to bloom and give forth their heavy and intoxicating fragrance only from the evening, by the early hours of dawn they are all fallen off. In this context, when Rakshanda, in consonance with Kiran, observes, "isn't it enough that all of us are here at its moment and the moolsiri blossoms are raining on our hair like a waterfall...?" her comment, while trying to seek consolation in the moment's plentitude in an attempt to outdo the force of its temporality, ironically acknowledges its very impermanence. In the second instance, the "rain-song" that Gul Shaboo is heard singing—"O Rama, the monsoon are passing by, come soon, come soon... O Rama"—alludes to the romantic longings of the characters. It is a reference to 'Ramakatha' or the story of Rama, found most memorably in Indian epic, the Valmiki Ramayana, and is an example of songs that exist in folk memory. It images the story's female protagonist, Sita, in exile, singing longingly of her husband Rama, after being abducted and held hostage by Ravana in the island-nation of Lanka. Interestingly, there too, Sita was abducted just before the rainy season, so that conjunction of Sita's wait with the passing monsoon makes perfect sense in popular culture.

Hyder evokes the syncretic culture of Lucknow through Ghufuran Manzil, the 'home' of the Alis, along with the many lived spaces and places of this old world which includes the

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p. 71; Gopal herself refers to Gyanandra Pandey.

<sup>38</sup> M. Farooqui, "Aini Apa," <https://kafila.online/2007/09/06/aini-apa/> [access 20.02.2021].

<sup>39</sup> Ibidem.



Awadhi districts of Faizabad, Barabanki, Pratapgarh, as well as the very land itself, traced through cultural and religious markers, like (Sufi) monasteries, mosques and temples. Housing the Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb—a popular metaphor comparing “the Hindu-Muslim harmony and friendship,” as Priyanka Upadhyaya writes, “to the holy confluence of India’s major rivers—the Ganges and the Yamuna”<sup>40</sup>—this world, however, is seen through the hooves of time as always on the verge of rupture. Ghufra Manzil, a symbol of the two-hundred-years old Awadhi Nawabi regime that had already been annexed by the British Raj by the time the story unfolds, itself stands in a “dilapidated” state. Yet, its spaces are still charted by a vivid synergy of cultural identities. The staff of Ghufra Manzil, for instance, includes Abbasi Khanum, the “housekeeper of Mughal descent” who is described as “a living monument to the old regime,” the more contemporary Gul Shabbo and Shola Pari, the maids of Abyssinian descent, Zammurund and Almas, and the Indian maids, Gainda and Ramania, the wives of Ram Bharose, the syce. Even the Gang stands as an example of the religio-cultural synergy of the pre-Partition world. The Ali siblings, for instance, are of Awadhi descent, while Ginnie Kaul comes from a family of Kashmiri Pandits, and Kiran Katju is of Kashmiri extraction. Hafiz, who has a Christian wife, Christabel, also hails from a feudal family like the Alis. That this old world is not static or out of time is reflected by the entry of Salim in the Gang. Salim, who comes from the middle class, represents the class of men who broke away from their traditional fates under the opportunities opened up by the colonial system (particularly WWII, as in Salim’s case), and rose in the socio-economic ladder.

The syncretic Awadhi culture is further sketched in the novel in various rituals, festivities, and activities. For instance, the Ali siblings are seen to celebrate the Hindu festivals of Holi, Diwali and Ram Leela, as well as the Muslim festival of Id in their village house at Manather. More interestingly, Holi is celebrated with Nauroze, the Iranian New Year. Again, on learning about Qamar Ara’s marriage to Salim, Hyder shows Diamond imagining Qamar with “vermilion powder in the parting of her hair.” The use of vermilion, an essentially Hindu practice, by Qamar, a Muslim, refers to the intricate and embodied ways in which the lives of different communities were tied together in the pre-Partition era. The modern, global culture in the novel, on the other hand, is represented by the Gang who frequent the coffee houses, talk of progress and politics, host charity shows, opt for modern occupational opportunities opened up under the British Raj, and mix freely without following the constraints of the zenana that used to separate the spaces inhabited by Muslim women in traditional families. Finally, on the crossroads of the old and the modern there exist other identities, like that of Queen Rose, the Anglo-Indian dancer from Lal Bagh. It is this peculiar world of old and new, tradition and modernity, past and future, embedded integrally in the various (physical) spaces of the novel and harboring a “heterogeneous and democratic mix”<sup>41</sup> of various identities, that Hyder writes nostalgically of in *My Temples*.

The passage of time in the novel is felt palpably throughout. The seasons keep on churning one after the other as swiftly as the clocks of Ghufra Manzil are seen to tick away the present (reminding us once more of the syncing of the natural and the human). This present in the novel, as Sunder Rajan observes, is realized as the “period of youth and happiness”<sup>42</sup>, so

<sup>40</sup> P. Upadhyaya, “Communal Peace in India: Lessons from Multicultural Banaras,” in: ed. K. Warikoo, *Religion and Security in South and Central Asia* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 86.

<sup>41</sup> S. Rajan, “Zeitgeist and the Literary Text: India, 1947, in Qurratulain Hyder’s *My Temples, Too* and Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*,” *Critical Inquiry* 40 (4) (2014), p. 447.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 449.

that the relentless sense of the present's erosion, of its continual receding into the past even as it unfolds, sits hauntingly on the characters, engaging them in pensive reflections. Pondering on the fugaciousness of the moment when Shehla meets Salim for the first time, the former thus wonders, "these are the moments I am going to remember all my life. They will haunt me forever, him sitting here near me in the blue evening, with the river flowing by," while at another point, Rakshanda, realizing how transitory everything is, questions herself:

Why do we all find ourselves present in this particular context, in this particular place? How have these pieces assembled here in this jigsaw puzzle? Soon, something will happen, pieces will scatter and become part of a new pattern. We won't be here anymore, this time will pass. What are we going to do in the days and nights to come?

The image of the jigsaw puzzle, its arranging and rearranging here refers to the order of human things that is wielded by the larger, unseen, but all-pervasive Time—something that, to borrow Sunder Rajan's words, features as a "destructive force," bend on "overturn[ing] the certitudes and arrangements of generations and pos[ing] the ominous threat of death and political disintegration."<sup>43</sup>

The fleeing sense of the present in the book is coupled with an irrepressible longing for the eroding old world. Early in the novel, Abbasi Khanum reflects on the way the "city" of Lucknow has "changed." Thinking nostalgically of the many "European-style houses" (another example of the cultural synergy as reflections in architecture) that were built by the "Anglicized Nawabs of Oudh" in the old days, she laments as to how such houses "would never be built again." We may note in this context that houses function as visible symbols of the old world in the novel, and as such, arrest the characters with nostalgia for the past. Thus, while Rakshanda is quite aware that Ghufraan Manzil was built on the exploitation of the subaltern masses and represents the "solidarity of the privileged classes," she cannot help loving its many spaces, for as she reasons to herself, "it was a silent reminder of past splendor." Rakshanda's nostalgia, as we can understand, is not for the "past splendor," for she has never experienced that past firsthand; rather, it is for a conjured past, a past that exists not in time but in memory. Objects, like places, are tied to our identities; they inform our sense of belonging, and separation of them, or their loss, can bruise our conception of our 'selves.' Ghufraan Manzil, accordingly, is part of Rakshanda; it informs her past and grounds her present through memory and imagination. It is not surprising, therefore, that its loss following the Partition renders her mentally unstable.

The pangs of loss, of longing and desire are perhaps most acutely felt by Rakshanda. Unable to contain the menacing march of time, the porosity of the present renders her emotionally wretched. Hounded by melancholic upsurges, she is forced to take refuge in philosophical conversations with her own self. It is in one of these moments that she wonders:

Do you recall what Krishna said to Arjuna, that time destroys its own creations? Do you know me, brother Kiran? This is I who am nothing. This is you who are nothing, too. Together we have seen the dawn breaking on high mountains, we have wandered through woodlands, singing. You and I have roamed those arbours

where the koels solemnly sing their eversong. Don't you still recognize the futility of it all? We have left Time far behind.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibidem.



The reference here is to a section of the Indian epic, *Mahabharata*, namely the ‘Bhagvada Gita,’ where Krishna is found to discourse on dharma to Arjuna. Interestingly, there too, one of the central things that the former advises the latter to conquer is desire (particularly of the senses, and for the fruits of action). The recognition that Rakshanda has in this passage, which goes in tandem with Krishna’s teaching, is of the impossibility of trying to capture time; yet unlike Arjuna, she is unable to reconcile with this bitter truth. Rather, referring nostalgically to the halcyon days of past—the image of Rakshanda and Kiran watching the dawn break on high mountains and wandering through woodlands is, if anything, from an oneiric, make-believe world of folkloric time—she laments as to how they have left that “Time far behind.” Sitting in the twilit garden of Ghufuran Manzil, she thus mourns:

The caravan will pass and nothing will be left behind.... Here come a pack of harmless raving lunatics who once thought they were going to beautify the world and bring peace to mankind. The end has come, Kiran Bhai, and the red petals are dropping in the eucalyptus grove and I am sitting by the fountain....

The “end” comes with Partition, and ruptures everything in its wake. Refugees start to pour in, the Gang scatters, mass killings begin. Hyder portrays the last few pulses of the old world through an anecdote of the last surviving descendent of the last King of Oudh, who, in deciding to hold his coronation and declare himself King, becomes the laughing stock of the newspapers. Trying to grasp the “acute tragedy” underlying this “comic coronation,” she comments, “Who can know what they feel who are left behind on the shore, while the river changes course...?” It is this understanding that brings her to the fateful conclusion, “The old sun has set. The world that has existed only for the sake of a humanistic culture was no more.” Towards the end, both Peechu and Kiran are killed by riotous mobs; Christabel returns to England, Ginner gets married, and Diamond migrates to Pakistan. Before long, the Zamindari Abolition Act is passed, and unable to meet the debts, Polu, in a moment of harsh irony, rents Ghufuran Manzil to the government for establishing a department for refugee rehabilitation. In gaining the nation, the home is lost. In the end, when we meet Rakshanda, her mental world is completely fractured. Having lost all that was dear to her, her people and her spaces, she can hardly make sense of the present. Lost in her own thoughts, she only utters in a monotone, “The whole day has gone... whole day has gone.”

## CONCLUSION

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym distinguishes between two kinds of nostalgia: the first she calls restorative nostalgia; the second, reflective nostalgia.<sup>44</sup> By restorative, Boym means a “nostalgia” that “stresses nostos and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home”<sup>45</sup>—something that she locates “at the core of recent national and religious revivals.”<sup>46</sup> In the context of India, this can be seen in the nativistic and nationalistic revivals and movements that preceded and followed the birth of the twin-nations of India and Pakistan on communal lines. At present they prosper, at least in the case of India, by inventing a “so-called” lost Hindu past<sup>47</sup> along with an equally elusive set of traditions, what Hobsbawm and

<sup>44</sup> S. Boym, op. cit., p. xviii.

<sup>45</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>47</sup> R. Thapar, *The Past as Present: Forging Contemporary Identities Through History* (New Delhi: Aleph Book

Ranger would call “invented traditions”<sup>48</sup>, and frequently claim, out of a desire to return to (misappropriated) origins, a Hindu country. In Hyder’s novel, elements of restorative urges can be discerned in the many references to the Two-Nation Theory. On the other hand, by reflective nostalgia, Boym means a “nostalgia” that “thrives in algia, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming—wishfully, ironically, desperately.”<sup>49</sup> Writing nostalgically in her brother’s flat in the new country of Pakistan about the old pre-Partition world of Lucknow<sup>50</sup>, one may perhaps identify in Hyder a similar reflective strain. The novel thrives in longing, in the irrepressible desire to return to a lost world. It looks back, pauses, and dallies there wishfully for a moment. Yet the recognition that this world is lost and past is always there, felt palpably in the ominous passage of time throughout the novel. Thus, in a strange instance of a dialectics of anachronism, even as Hyder commits the old world to paper from the luminous storehouse of memory, it is always already marked by its subsequent disappearance.

The anachronistic dialectics of the past informing the present-in-the-past that Hyder’s novel engages in can also be felt in its title. The Urdu word ‘sanamkhana’ that Hyder translated as ‘temples,’ has a wider range of connotations in the original. It means an idol-house, but it also means the house of a beloved, a sweetheart, one whom you worship, one whose house is akin to a refuge, a temple for you. It is taken from a couplet found in the fifteenth ode in the *Bal-e-Jibril of Iqbal* that, when translated<sup>51</sup>, reads: “You have your idol-houses; I, too, have mine/My idols are perishable, and your idols are too.” The ‘sanamkhana’ of Hyder, her ‘temples,’ are the many syncretic places and spaces of the old world of pre-Partition times, the world of the Ganga-Jamuni tahzeeb that she once inhabited and dearly loved, the world that perished with Partition. By using the second half of the first verse, she nostalgically commemorates these spaces, preserving them in her writing; yet in the following silent verse, their destruction is always already pre-figured. For a moment, that world gleams with all its aches and laughter in luminous spots of memory; the very next moment, all is gone.

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Company, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger Terence, *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> S. Boym, op. cit., p. xviii.

<sup>50</sup> N. Anjum, op. cit., p. 147.

<sup>51</sup> Q. Hyder, *A Season of Betrayals: A Short Story and Two Novellas* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1999), p. xviii.

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## SUMMARY

“Nostalgia,” writes Svetlana Boym, often emerges in times of “historical upheavals” or when the “rhythms of life” are suddenly “accelerated.” One can well understand that such nostalgic outbreaks are the results of the experience change. One such moment was that of the Partition of India in 1947. This paper focuses on this moment as it is depicted in Qurratulain Hyder’s novel, *My Temples, Too*. Hyder’s novel, that centers around the experience of Partition, is haunted by a palpable sense of loss, of rupture, and an acute longing for the places and spaces of the past that its characters witness as eroding. Following scholars like Boym, Linda Hutcheon, De Brigard, Gaston Bachelard, Edward Casey, and others, this paper first prepare the ground of its argument by showing how memory and nostalgia are often deeply rooted in everyday things, objects, and places of habitation, investing them with a sense of belonging. Thereafter, it situates Hyder’s novel in its immediate context and explores its poetics of loss, longing, and nostalgia.

## KEYWORDS

Qurratulain Hyder, nostalgia, longing, desire, Partition of India