Navigating the Idea of Postmemory and Material Memory Among the *Girmitiyas* and Their Descendants

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Abstract: The historical exploration of the indentured diaspora predominantly depends on the narratives and archives containing the official documentation pertaining to its history. The indentureship was a particular form of contracted labour that had limited documentation, and the discourse to this date remains absent in the public domain. The idea of 'home' and 'homeland' has always been a conflicting one and has become a challenging one when it comes to indentured labour. Is it the place of fixed origins, the place where our ancestors were born, or is it an ever-changing idea that is only a utopia? And how do we explore the idea of 'home' and its memory, if the movement is voluntary/involuntary at the same time? This article seeks to examine the role of memory in indentured labour and how the notion of 'home' is (re)constructed through the idea of 'material memory'. The stories in the volume *We Mark Your Memory* explores how the descendants of indentured labour trace their *roots* and their ancestors' *routes*, the impact it has on them, and how they experience these intergenerational memories. This text explores items that recreate home — through objects, photographs, food and culture, how they become sources of memory and, by extension, oceanic memories, and act as a witness to the *Girmit* consciousness. This paper argues how *Girmit* ideology can be constructively interpreted through the lens of 'postmemory' by Marianne Hirsch, where the notion of tracing 'home' becomes impossible to attain, as it is indirect in nature. Building on this, Avtar Brah's concept of 'homing desire' helps us to understand the complex longing for a place of origin that may be geographically distant, culturally unfamiliar, or even lost to history.

Keywords: *Girmitiyas; Indentured labour; Diaspora; Postmemory; Home*.

The genre of indentured labour is convoluted and unstable, situated between ethnography, autobiography, and archives. Historical accounts are constructed primarily from either provided narratives or archival materials containing official documentation about the subject's history. However, a question arises: how should one approach writing and rewriting history when both types of materials prove inadequate? The short stories "The Tamarind Tree" by Brij V. Lal and "Mother Wounds" by Gitan Djeli in *We Mark Your Memory* account for these two different narratives - the official archive which is reduced to numbers and names — the political memory and personal/collective memories the narratives of people/community that exist solely within a confined or transitional realm. Within the rich tapestry of narratives in *We Mark Your Memory*, I have chosen to focus on "The Tamarind Tree" and "Mother Wounds" due to their distinct exploration of postmemory and material memory. While the book encompasses a wide range of struggles faced by indentured labourers across various geographical locations (Trinidad, South Africa, Fiji, Malaysia, etc.), these two stories particularly resonated with the way they depict the reconstruction of fragmented memories. These stories utilise objects which serve as potent triggers for remembering experiences not directly lived in these stories. The titular tamarind tree acts as a collective heirloom, while photographs function as personal heirlooms. This emphasis on material objects for memory transmission sets these narratives apart from others in the book, which may explore the indentured experience through direct storytelling or focus on different themes such as resistance or cultural preservation.

As we explore the act of "memory" associated with objects and artifacts, it becomes crucial to consider whether the act of remembering evolves with time and generations. Moreover, as we transition into the digital age and, by extension, to digital memory, does the meaning of memory and amnesia remain constant? Numerous authors have dedicated substantial time to unravelling the intricate connections between memory, culture, and history. One such work is *Remembering with Things: Material Memory, Culture, and Technology* (2017) by Guy Allimant. In his book, Allimant dives into the dynamic nature of memory,

arguing that objects function not just as passive repositories of memories, but actively participate in the process of remembering and function as an active vessel for subsequent generations. He further explores how material memory then performs with technology and the cultural implications it creates. The change that stands at the current of time is perhaps the tension that exists between material and digital memory — the digital shift is probably one significant shift that has changed the dimensions of almost all niches of literature.

Aanchal Malhotra's *Remnants of a Separation* (2019) explores the power of material memory against the backdrop of India's 1947 Partition. It examines objects taken across the India-Pakistan border, investigating the movement of memories, possessions, and individuals' relationships with these items and their transferred memories. Malhotra, along with Navdha Malhotra, co-founded the Museum of Material Memory, a digital repository of the Indian subcontinent's material culture and memory. This platform traces family lineages and histories through artifacts, collectibles, heirlooms, and antiques. Whereas, Emily St. John Mandel's *Sea of Tranquility* (2022) spans multiple locations and timelines, connecting characters across centuries through the materiality of artifacts and environments. It examines how experiences and memories are transmitted and preserved through physical objects. On the other hand, Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* (2020) uniquely combines material memory and climate change themes. It explores climate change challenges and, in one section, depicts groups collecting objects and stories to preserve Earth's memory and record what has been lost.

Over the past two decades, the understanding of memory has evolved from mere reminiscence to a more complex concept of storage. Paul Longley Arthur, in his essay "Material Memory and the Digital," argues that memory digitalization impacts how memories are retained and passed down, focusing on the changing nature of "remembering—and forgetting—in the digital era" (1). This shift raises intriguing questions about the relationship between digital memory and intergenerational memory. The implications of such a shift would

differ significantly from traditional methods employed by communities like the *Girmitiyas*.

The abolition of slavery by Great Britain in 1833 created a vacuum that led to the emergence of indentured labour. This new system evolved to address the insufficiency of cheap labour when the system of slavery was abolished. India and China became the two major recruitment sites for cheap, unskilled workers. Over 2 million labourers from British India were sent to distant locations such as the Caribbean Islands, Peru, Brazil, South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zanzibar, Mauritius, Fiji, and Hawaii. Recruitment in India was primarily conducted by agents called *Arkatis*, who operated in rural areas. The indentured labour system appeared voluntary, requiring labourers to sign an 'agreement' - a contract that included conditions for returning to India after the contract period. Interestingly, this led to the coining of a new term: '*girmit*', a mispronunciation of 'agreement'. Consequently, the indenture diaspora became known as the '*Girmit* Diaspora' (Lahiri 36).

The uneducated men and women likely did not fully comprehend the contract's terms and legalities. *Arkatis* painted an alluring picture of plantation life, promising prosperity to entice workers into undertaking sea journeys on ships (*jahaz*) to work on sugar, rubber, and tea plantations in foreign lands. While the agreement was ostensibly voluntary, research and testimonies reveal that many were kidnapped or recruited under false pretences, without complete knowledge of the journey.

The term 'Gladstone's coolies' misleadingly emphasizes the indenture system's Caribbean origins. It specifically refers to John Gladstone, father of future Prime Minister William Gladstone, who hired a Calcutta firm to recruit Indian labourers for his two Guyanese estates (in what was then British Guiana). Many critics argue that the *Girmit* diaspora was merely a variant of the slave diaspora, citing the inhumane and dehumanizing conditions endured by labourers during their sea voyage and in their host lands. Islam, in her review of *We Mark Your Memory: Writing from the Descendants of Indenture*, observes: "...the introduction of indentured servants needs to be apprehended not as indexing a

shift from the systems that facilitated enslavement but as a continuation of similar structures of exploitation" (77). Similarly, Cohen notes in *Global Diasporas* that "after the collapse of slavery, the new milch was indentured labour" (64).

Many indentured Indians were housed in the former slave barracks of African slaves, a poignant reminder of their purpose. Their journey and arrival were met with disappointment. They endured cramped sleeping spaces, with the dead thrown overboard without rituals. Their diet consisted of dog biscuits, sugar, rice, and dried fish (Mishra 42). Upon arrival, workers were assigned to supervised, identical estates. They lived in small quarters, with three single men or women, or a couple, sharing each room. They were prohibited from leaving without an official pass, worked endless hours, and were forbidden from taking any other employment. Misconduct resulted in pecuniary and physical punishment. Offences against the labourers were also very common, such as inadequate rations, corporal punishment, sexual abuse and irregular payments.[1]

The increasing issues in indentured colonies led to higher suicide rates. These coercive aspects left an indelible mark on the psyche of the labourers, who longed for an often-impossible return to their homeland. The main difference between indenture and slave diaspora was that indentured labourers couldn't be traded like slaves and had a falsified promise of return after completing their agreement or a pledge of freedom after renewing their indenture.

'Indenture' and '*girmit*' are often used interchangeably, but incorrectly so. 'Indenture' signifies a system of confined contract labour embodied by capitalism and colonialism. In contrast, '*girmit*' represents a traumatic fissure and failure in apprehension and meaning, considered a "failed millennial quest" (Mishra 172). The promised land fell far short of expectations, resulting from a misleading contract that led labourers on an erroneous excursion to the wrong destination.

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[1] This is not to say that the testimonials only showcase the persistent narrative of degradation — accounts also include peaceful relations between Hindu and Muslims, and ability to save and rise in ranks occasionally. Although, in general *girmit* are subjected to have collective trauma due to the inhumane conditions and words such as '*narak*' meaning 'hell' is often present in these narratives.

The *Girmitiyas* were violated in terms of time and space, their reality bearing no relation to their fantasized haven.

The tumultuous journey led to a "split subject or self." Their journey was divided into two parts: first, an imaginary journey promising affluence, decency, and freedom from caste; second, the physical journey on the ship. This led to what Mishra terms a 'spectral translocation.' During the ship journey, the indentured labourer, not yet a *Girmitiya*, was split between a 'spectral self' (a feeling of comfort and ease) and a 'corporeal self' (enduring the voyage's hardships). This experience created communities of *jahaji bhais* (ship brothers) and *jahaji behins* (ship sisters) - foundational elements for a new diasporic society.

As they departed from the port, the homeland was gradually erased from their collective memory during the journey. The aftermath of this split led them to question their agency and identity, as there existed an absence of home and a lack of sense of origin or belongingness towards both the homeland and 'hostland'. They hardly resonated with either society, reinforcing their sense of being outsiders in both.

The faint and fragmented memories of the homeland were accumulated through a few objects — manifesting in terms of culinary practices and festivals like Tua Tua. The complex idea of home and homeland was then analysed by the *Girmitiyas* — a term that evolved in such a manner that it lacks any precise definition, where any meaning is rendered indeterminate.

Perhaps the idea was a dream image, a complex term interpreted differently by each successive generation that envisioned and idealized an altogether different home. Avtar Brah delves deep into the problematics of home and hyphens. She proposes a new concept she calls 'homing desire': "The concept of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' and 'dispersion' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourses of fixed origins" (192–3). 'Homing desire', as Brah defines it, is "a wish to return to a place of 'origin,'" (193) which, again, not all diasporic communities might possess.

For each subsequent generation, the links to India gradually dissolved. The idea of finding refuge and peace was kept alive through stories and mythical narratives such as *Ramayana*, where being in exile becomes a synonym for their experience, something they could associate themselves with. Through artifacts and memories, the idea of home was preserved, establishing a link to their origins. The issue of homecoming is complicated by the *Kala-Pani* or the 'black waters' and the myths associated with it. The traverse of the *Kala-Pani* carried a sense of breaking away, a rupture from society and an orderly social world — and beginning anew — which might have been the reason for many people to leave India. However, archives note that people who returned to India also faced discrimination, as they had crossed *Kala-Pani*, and their 'self' was now considered polluted, thereby making them aliens in their own homeland.

Within the narrative of "The Tamarind Tree", the mention of Ghalib's poetic verses, symbolizing 'ash', evoked a profound sense of loss. It suggested the transformation of something cherished into mere remnants, evoking a feeling of emptiness. These ashes served as a familial link for the author, connecting him to his ancestors, who once gathered beneath the tree's sheltering branches. As Arnab Sinha noted in his review, "The tamarind tree...has been a witness to the several cultural and religious activities of the generations of indentured labourers in Labasa, Fiji" (4). Moreover, the lines indicated that the loss was not just metaphorical but also physical, implying a break or rupture so grandiose that it demolished the fabric of their world, echoing the loss of their home and homeland:

> Indeed, everything about *mulk* (homeland) was golden, perfect:
> the nostalgia of a displaced people dealt a rough hand by fate.
> What strikes me now about the girmitiyas is how they were a
> people caught inbetween, stranded in the cul-de-sac of a past
> vanishing before their eyes. They were living in a place they
> could not escape, making home in a land they could not fully
> embrace (127).

The lines denote the in-betweenness and the plight of the *Girmitiyas*, as they are stuck between the two worlds, neither of them being their own. Hence, there arises a need to reconstruct or replicate the homeland in the 'hostland'. The pronoun 'We' from the title of the book situates the narrators of the current generations, whilst the determiner 'your' alludes to the ancestors — the *Girmitiyas*. The book tries to demonstrate academic activism by emphasizing the importance of personal narratives in the context of communal narratives. The book's cover features a photograph portraying a married indentured couple, accompanied by a scanned emigration pass belonging to Juman Khan, an indentured worker from Allahabad. Khan embarked on the ship 'Hereford'' from Calcutta port in March 1894 to migrate to Fiji, as indicated by the details on the pass. The editors note that this pass belonged to Akhtar Mohammed's maternal great-grandfather, who was one of the contributors to the volume. These documents serve as tangible evidence of the historical journeys being documented and emphasized in the current endeavour. The anthology is a 'commemorative volume' and attempts to build creative and critical pieces together through 'faction'— combining fact and fiction simultaneously by the descendants of indentured labourers.

Home became a distant idea, and the crossing of *Kala-Pani* further made it distant. As the migration was often involuntary, the idea of the great return or rather, 'homecoming' always stayed with them. The 'imaginary journey' — which was imagined to be a land of prosperity, turned out to be a false narrative. It became difficult for the *Girmitiyas* to create a home in 'hostland'. It is also important to remember that the 'diaspora space' is crucial to understand and conclude if the 'hostland' can become a homeland. The diaspora space is "the point at which boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and otherness, of 'us' and 'them,' are contested" (Brah 208–9). It is important to note that if every day experiences of life are marked by racism and oppression, it may lead to a different definition of 'home'. The idea of home is thus meticulously linked with how processes of inclusion or exclusion operate. In the case of the *Girmitiyas*, the violence and dehumanization experienced abroad did not let that

place become a 'home'; the host land remained an alien space for them, and the idea of homecoming stayed with them, for them 'India' or rather 'South Asia'[2] remained a home and homeland, which was impossible to attain. In such circumstances, it is important to understand how the *Girmitiyas* — first and subsequent generations — made the host land a 'home', even if temporarily. Unknowingly, in unique ways, this memory, or rather memories of 'home,' was transferred, and the 'homing desire' was attained through inanimate objects. These objects acted as catalysts for memories, triggers for remembering, as well as gateways into the past.

Material memory, in simple terms, refers to the relationship between people and artifacts, how this relationship produced memory, and the significance of these inanimate objects. The concept becomes complex in places where memories are fragmented and associated with displacement and trauma. It is compelling to note that though the memory might have diluted over time, the object remains untouched and unaltered, allowing for a historical study of the time and for further generations to draw from that history and possibly even understand their genealogy and lineage better. The inanimate objects can be photographs, jewellery, clothes, food, utensils, and roughly anything that transcends from an object to memory, and perhaps even a '*mulki* tree' as seen in "The Tamarind Tree". These artifacts have the ability to transfer us into a particular period of time and connect us to private and collective histories in a distinctive way. Each object acts as a balm to the wounds of the people and something that connects the community all together. It is interesting to note that though these things remain underappreciated, and in the backdrop, these 'inanimate objects' are something that helps the community to sustain and remain

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[2]Since India gained independence in 1947, 'Indian' increasingly refers to citizens of the Republic of India. However, as the Indian indentured labour started from 1834, the term 'India' is used in its initial sense encompasses countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives, and Afghanistan. Consequently, the term 'South Asia' is preferred in academic circles for its accuracy in describing the geographic area.

closer to the idea of 'home', even if it is an imagined one now.[3] Aanchal Malhotra, in her book *Remnants of a Separation,* states that "Memory dilutes, but the objects remain unaltered. It allows one to study the history within it…" (32). Material memory becomes an incredible yet unexplored route in navigating personal and collective narratives. In the text "The Tamarind Tree", we observe that the tamarind tree, a '*mulki* tree' — evokes the roots and additionally the routes of the homeland of the *Girmitiyas*; it becomes a site of memory, witnessing celebrations, rituals, resistance, a ray of hope and communion among several generations of *Girmitiyas*. The *mulki* tree served as a *terra sacra*[4] for the ancestors and the descendants until the tree's demise by lightning in 1962. The tamarind tree transformed personal memory into collective memory, where 'I' is transformed to 'We'. Thus, collective memory illustrates the idea of community which dwells in the oceanic memories and the shared beginning of "collective servitude" and a "site of communion", and it becomes a place where 'home' is reconstructed: "It was….under the Tamarind Tree that people recreated the rituals and ceremonies that they remembered from their childhood back in India" (127). We see other artifacts such as food and traditional Indian attire, "*satua*" "*lakdi ke mithai*", "*dhoti*", "*pagri*", and "*kurta*", denoting the land left behind and their attempt to recreate a home in host land.

The celebration of different festivals, irrespective of the religion, such as 'Holi' and 'Mohurram', were also ways to replicate home and recuperate the loss of a home. In fact, in "The Tamarind Tree", we see how a major portion of the text is actually a narrative made up of different celebrations as well as conflicts under the tamarind tree. The presence of the tamarind tree also indicates that tamarind is an important component in many South Indian recipes, evoking memories of home through food.

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[3]As stated by Rushdie, the concept refers to complex and often contradictory feelings of attachment and estrangement, of migrants who seek an understanding of the places they live now and the places they come from.

[4] Terra sacra is a Latin term that translates to 'sacred land' or 'holy land'.

Dominiek Dendooven explores the relevance of war keepsakes or entities that endured the Great War, in his book *Contested Objects: Material Memories of the Great War*. He states, "We all know how unreliable memory can be, how transient reminiscences are…Herein lies the beauty and power of conflict-related objects, some of which withstand the ravages of time in a way that memories do not" (28).

In the other text that I have considered, "Mother Wounds", the presence of photographs and certificates are conspicuous and forms the very basis of the tracing or analysing the matrilineage. The "monochromatic photograph" and the "sienna-tones" become a powerful method for writing down the impossible — the narratives lost in between — and is an attempt to reassess the idea of 'home' and achieving the homing desire through photographs. As Misra observes the idea: "since loss and absence of memories are natural and remembrance is an attempt to impose meaning upon a constructed discourse, historical or otherwise" (1). Remembrance of a memory that is not one's own leads to superimposition on their own account.

The photographs help the narrator to recapitulate her ancestors' limited identity, which is "unknown and unspeakable"[5]— there is a distinct lack of women in archives. They are either limited to their marriages or are reduced to their reproductive organs. The act of writing here is demonstrated through the material photographs of Gouna and Tina and the fragmented narratives act as a way to recreate her matrilineage outside of indentured patriarchy. Additional artifacts mentioned in the text include the "*dholak*," a "thick necklace," a "stiff ring", a "large, elegant nose stud" (36), and a set of "thick, heavy bangles," along with a necklace. These items symbolize the migrants' endeavour to establish a sense of home in their new land through cultural markers such as clothes and music and thus trying to attain a "homing desire," as Brah mentions, even though the recreation is not entirely possible or might be an apotheosis of 'home'. Abandoned by the dark waters, condemned by the loss of social status, and

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[5] Inspired by Saidiya Hartman in 'Venus in Two Acts', it is a process which happens at the limit of the unspeakable and the unknown.

deprived of the possibility of returning due to geographical distance, individuals of the plantation diaspora sought solace and understanding through the lens of memory. The "*dholak*" embodies the essence of folk music and folklore, particularly those celebrating the seasons, births, and weddings, which were prevalent among their peasant roots. It is interesting to note that though 'food' is an intangible object, it becomes difficult to access as its very essence is not captured compared to the other objects. Nevertheless, it remained very poignant. The artifacts in the case of *Girmitiyas* played a twofold role. First, as discussed earlier, they served to retain and reconstruct 'home'. Second, these objects became markers of identity — their clothes, jewellery, and food became assertions of their culture against colonial rule. The relationship between the artifacts and the narratives was complex and crucial to understand. These objects acted as silent witnesses, harbouring untold stories. The descendants later traced these stories, helping them to uncover their roots and synthesize their heritage.

In these narratives, we realize that there is a lacuna in terms of the 'speaker's perspective'. In fact, it is reduced to only a few lines, and quite often, the narrator's presence seems to feel like that of an intruder. This lack indicates how the narratives of their ancestors have dominated 'their' narratives, which raises the question of whether it is even possible to talk about something that one hasn't experienced. The speakers in both "The Tamarind Tree" and "Mother Wounds" possess a second-hand memory, something that is not their own. Marianne Hirsch's works present postmemory as a method of penetrating and apprehending the experiences of the offspring of Holocaust survivors, but are not linked to the trauma directly. Postmemory is primarily ideal for diasporic texts, where the idea of 'home' becomes unattainable and unachievable, as it resides in a different nation and at a different time. As Hirsch asserts, "condition of exile from the space of identity, this diasporic experience, is a characteristic aspect of postmemory" (243). She further adds that this persists in the "children of exiled survivors, although they have not themselves lived through the trauma of banishment and the destruction of home, remain always marginal or exiled, always in the diaspora" (662). It is important to note that postmemory moves

beyond the dichotomies of 'true/false', 'credible/incredible' and are subjective in nature; they focus more on affective theory than on statistical data.

Postmemory explores a memory that a person hasn't experienced themselves; it is a belated memory, a memory handed down by family members, a trauma passed down through personal/collective narratives and leads to the protagonist questioning their own narratives; Ward conceptualises this as "a strong identification with what happened … inscribing them into one's own life story … giving way to vicarious victimhood" (278–9). The idea of 'post' makes the 'memory' go beyond its known nature, i.e. the memory is then transferred to the subsequent generations, but with such an impact, something that feels personally experienced by the listener. The memories are passed down the generations and become intergenerational, something that acts as an open wound, as Long asserts "...a wound inherited by the affective internalisation of the suffering narrated by those who lived through it" (167). Unique in nature, it is often formulated through personal accounts and stories told to successive generations during childhood. These narratives can function as fairytales, phantoms, nightmares or myths, that can be internalized when children are too young or juvenile to comprehend the meaning and reality behind it. Similarly, among the *Girmitiyas,* these narratives, including their routes/roots, are shared in their formative years — in the form of folklore of the *Ramayana* and folk songs related to homeland[6]. These narratives tend to shape the identity of the subsequent generations. It is an esoteric narrative in which the 'self' is written, and as it is vague in nature, there exists a risk of having one's narrative being displaced or even evacuated (Hirsch 6). The broken refrains of lives lived by their ancestors are recurrent in their descendants, thus, making a connection that is mediated through material memories and oral narratives. As a result, it incorporates ambivalence, desire, longing, mourning, recollection, presence, and absence. The concept of absence here is to be noted as it is dual in nature. The

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[6]For those who never made it back, traditional songs offered a glimpse into the hardships of indentured labour. These folksongs offer an alternative perspective on the memories and stories of subaltern memory and narrative, tracing roots and routes and functions as a bridge 'between past and present.'

primary being the absence in the archives and the secondary being the absence of a home and a homeland. There are 'empty memories' in both texts, where a void exists because of a lack of archives and narratives, places erased, and thus, there arises a need to retrace their identities — both personal and collective. It is also clear that cultural narratives and rhetoric have a real impact on the way in which members of that community write and the way that they conduct politics. In the same way, the *Girmitiyas* have a collected conflated mythology of inherited memories and fail to create an absolute and attainable history. Henri Raczymow and Alan Astro note a void in these narratives as "memory full of absences and caesuras as records were lost, genealogies interrupted, stories forgotten, places erased" (104). In the eponymous text "Mother Wounds" are defined as "...generational trauma carried by women and passed down to their daughters and granddaughters in a patriarchal society…" (35). It is evident from the fact that the archives do not provide any information about the females and that they are filled with empty, horizontal, unimportant lines. Their stories are also restricted to stereotypes. The narrator asserts that, "I would have preferred not to focus on the marriages and the motherhood of women…but it seems to have an integral part of the colonial archive" (44). The personal narratives and memories are absent in the texts and are dominated by the lives of their ancestors.

In "The Tamarind Tree", we see even the subject 'I' is confined to a few lines, despite the narrative being in first person. For example, "I can still recall Father's tattered, wet khaki clothes…" (112). The act of writing and imagining historical narratives exposes the limitations of colonial archives and traditional historiography. Personal anecdotes often reveal gaps in official records, highlighting the inadequacies of conventional historical documentation. When confronted with incomplete or biased archives, writers must interpret silences and fragments, engaging in what Saidiya Hartman calls "critical fabulation" (11). This process involves creatively yet critically reconstructing narratives, especially for marginalized groups underrepresented in official records.

By incorporating personal stories and imaginative interpretation, writers can provide a more nuanced understanding of the past, demonstrating how the act

of writing itself challenges and expands the boundaries of historical knowledge. In the texts, we observe how there exists a limitation in the speaker's own narrative, and it often exists only in terms of a space where they are imagining the lives of their ancestors, "Allowed me to imagine" (26), "I could only picture" (31), "I imagine" (32), and "I can deduce" (35) in "Mother Wounds" and "from my scarce notes and fading memory" (115) in "The Tamarind Tree." As the human memory is fragile, we store experiences as memories. However, it cannot be assumed that our memories will not remain in a pristine mnemonic condition, especially as time progresses. The recollection of memories years later is perhaps its reconstruction, and as years and generations pass, the memory becomes malleable and accumulates minor ruptures that are filled or replaced with new experiences — imagined, fabricated, and sometimes an integration of several unconnected memories into a single memory. As these gaps of memories exist within generations, the fragmented memories of our ancestors indirectly become our own. The interesting thing about these fragmented memories is that there exists a thin line between fact and fiction, and it becomes difficult to assess such memories as they are not entirely our own, which raises the question if a 'true memory' exists through oral recollections, recorded histories and archives especially in case of a traumatic one.

It is riveting to see how the past and present interact with each other. In the process of grappling with the past, a historian endeavours to construct and reconstruct knowledge based on his navigation of historical complexities. As Ranjan Ghosh states, history "cannot be either absolutism or relativism" (668), and fragmented narratives cannot simply be an abstract method. There is also a theatrical and imaginative element to them. Historians and writers have to make an attempt to recreate a sense of the past and its circumstances. The narrator in "Mother Wounds" precisely does this and recreates a sense of the past of women outside patriarchal colonial oppression. She enhances her investigation by identifying and imagining the matrifocal society along with the facts from the archives such as the dates of arrival of *Utchamah* (great-great-great grandmother of the narrator) from India.

According to Vijay Mishra, the culmination of the indentured labourers saw "people illiterate in origin" (132). Owing to the fact that many *Girmitiyas* were illiterate and semi-skilled in the traditional sense, the following generations with developed and developing capabilities were unsure and ambiguous about their origins. The memories were passed down indirectly through retrospective witness by adoption and became a part of their identity. As Hirsch states, "Loss of family, home, of a sense of belonging and safety in the world "bleed" from one generation to the next" (34).

In many historical accounts, the past is either omitted or is present as stained and dishonourable. The *Girmitiyas* and their memory are complex, intricate mazes of disputes; it is postmemory experienced by the descendants of the next generation, who are confused and semi-repressed. Therefore, the memories from the past persistently influence the present narratives. This brings us to a crucial question: If they are haunting memories, should such memories be retained? The reflection demands that we constantly visit them and make sense of our complex relationship with the ghosts of *Girmitiyas*. However, at the very heart of diasporic imagination is the loss and mourning; not with regards to the homeland but to the *girmit*'s realm of the *Jahazi* community, its passage, and moments of belongingness felt through the experience.

The meaning of diaspora in the present generation has entirely changed forming new branches in its genre; however, what always remains is the presence of longing and nostalgia in all the narratives. Indian diaspora has come a long way from the *Girmitiyas* to the postcolonial diaspora, which is overwhelming — as there is a transnational movement of Third World professionals hailing from middle and upper-middle-class backgrounds, such as doctors, engineers, and skilled personnel, who are interestingly labelled as 'cyber-coolies', a term that ironically underscores both the nature of their professions and their desire for upward movement in First World nations. The term also establishes a link between the two branches of diaspora and is distinct in its nature as the focus shifts not on longing for a homeland but attaining 'Green Cards' and citizenship. The implications of the digital era and digital memory also open new avenues for

memory and postmemory, as the disappearance of the material objects, which were the heart of personal testimonies, are being altered, and communication processes are being transformed from physical to digital. It will be interesting to see how these memories will be inherited in a digital age and how postmemory will function for future descendants. The spectre of data loss, a potential 'black hole' for information necessitates careful curation and preservation strategies to ensure these digital memories endure.

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