Chapter – 5

Conclusion

A journey through the various ages of human civilization will demonstrate that man has been grappling with the elusive and far-reaching concept of memory. Memory is regarded as a storehouse and the creator of knowledge. An individual who does not have memory is often considered to be devoid of humanity or simply classified as unhealthy. As Goethals and Solomon reflect: “Memory allows us to be fully human” (qtd. in Rider 34). Memory is a comprehensive exhaustive subject falling under several fields of study. To prepare a theory on memory that addresses the political and the social dimensions as well as its philosophical and psychological aspects is a daunting task which has been attempted.

The functional model of memory utilized in the present study is a confluence of social, cultural, phenomenological, philosophical and psychological enquiries into the nature of memory. A careful observation at the mammoth scholarship produced on the subject of memory illustrates that it is habitually characterized by a rigid polarized or binary model. It is studied and visualized from the perspectives of two different and warring schools of thought—internal (philosophical/psychological/) or external (social/cultural). On the one end of the spectrum, memory is considered an internal phenomenon, entirely exclusive to each individual’s being and un/conscious mind. The act of recollection is considered to be intensely personal, psychological and emotive. However, on the other end, sociologists emphasize the external or socially-constructed nature of memory. Memories or acts of recollection need a social environment and material frameworks for their formation. Not only are memories collectively shared and revised, but are immersed in social relations and interaction as well. Within the social sphere, individual
memories are shaped by mutually acquiescent and sometimes complementary, conflicting memories of others.

However, any attempt to demarcate the internal from the external will only result in a partial and reductive theory of memory. Instead of talking in terms of dichotomies and binaries, memory has to be configured as a continuum. Memory is a comprehensive subject that not only incorporates, but also meshes concepts such as time and being, unconscious mind and perception, history and representation, truth and knowledge, society and culture. It is neither absolutely internal nor external, but a cumulative effect and intersection of the internal and external conditions. As a result, no single study can claim to compartmentalize such a subject of overwhelming magnitude and scope along a dualistic gradation model of internal/external. Memory eschews stasis; it is a process, too fluid a concept to be frozen as purely internal or external. The binary model of understanding memory fails to capture the dialogical relationship between the two modes. The two are embedded in each other, existing in a constant state of flux and dialogue.

Since the slipperiness and ambivalences of memory cannot be understood in and explained in a dualistic mode of thinking, the current study does not separate the internal or external aspects of memory as two different notions and entities, but presents a dynamic, complex model which is a harmonious synthesis of the two. In fact, the present work suggests that there can be no Manichean divide between memory and material realm (social and cultural) as well as memory and politics. To this end, it utilizes an interdisciplinary approach and methodology. Memory is no longer bound by the confines of a singular intellectual thought or discipline. The beginning of the twentieth century has seen the collapse of age old boundaries that structured human life and knowledge. Memory has suffered the same fate. It no longer remains exclusive to
one particular domain of study. The roots and branches of the memory discourse spread into a number of diverse fields, making it a focal point of exhaustive interdisciplinary investigations. The extremely devastating turn of course that History took, beginning from the colonial enterprise and slavery, to the catastrophic World Wars and Holocaust, and continuing into the various transnational and international conflicts that plague the twenty-first century, contributed tremendously to the emergence of branches and fields of study like postcolonialism, cultural studies, memory studies, gender and diaspora studies. The work in psychological and social theories of memory is coterminous with the examination and revision of the concept of memory in literary studies since memory is necessarily entwined with the issues of identity, language, representation and narratives. This can be regarded as most fortunate, despite the enormous obscurity of the subject, as it allows for the burgeoning of fresh perspectives on it.

The first section of this study introduces the major ideas that are explored in the subsequent chapters. A working theory of memory is provided in the first chapter. This textual model of memory is based on the writings of Derrida, Terdiman, Foucalt and Frow. A brief historical and critical context is provided to the understanding of memory. Metaphors as diverse as a block of wax, a slate, and even architectural images such as a theatre or building have been associated with memory since ancient times. The textual model of memory is based on the metaphor of writing which originated with Plato and Aristotle. This model speaks of memories being stored in the same way that impressions are received on wax from a seal. The model of the wax tablet is similar to the technical or linguistic processes of inscription.

The beginning of twenty-first century finds the concept and question of memory still intriguing and distressing the scientific, philosophical, and literary circle. Memory was then connected with postmodern and poststructuralist theories so as to explain the contemporary
understanding and consequences of memory on the themes of knowledge, truth and history. In their formulation, memory no longer a form of reproduction; we cannot assume that what is textualized is retrieved accurately and untarnished. Such a conception looks like the literalist memory model termed “reproduction,” in which content laid down is simply retrieved intact and unaltered from storage. The traditional model of textuality thus emphasizes stability, fixity and coherence of memory processes. As Terdiman says:

For memory conceived as pure reproduction (as in the historically important notion of the *ars memoriae* of antiquity) engages us in an infinite regress. Classical mnemonists and rhetoricians sought identical reproduction of already constituted texts. What they memorized and performed were effectively lists, and what they sought was fidelity. Such practices project a world in which stasis is normalized and, and in which change is noise, derogation or a fault in transcription. (58)

Rather, memory is considered fluid, malleable, similar to processes of writing, which includes revision, rewriting, erasure etc. The act of recollection retrieves as well as reconstructs the traces of the absent past. Representation and textuality (writing and language) even though different in meaning, are not at loggerheads. There is a reciprocal relationship between the two. Representation is a function of textuality. Memory represents through textuality and is indispensable, inescapable and inevitable in representation. Together, these ideas are expanded to imply that our memories can be read or translated as texts containing our past experiences. The act of recollection entails arrangement (weaving and interweaving which the term “textus” incorporates) and retrieval of texts of memories in a manner similar to a textual activity involving writing and reading. This idea of “writing” in memory is not be confused with
perfunctory writing or reproduction. It is to be considered as “praxis rather than doxis” (Carruthers 15). The textual process comprises of acts of writing and reading which are always accompanied by rewriting and rereading. The act of recording, inscribing and recollecting the past is similar to the activities of writing/rewriting and reading/rereading. Each act of writing (rewriting) and reading (rereading) casts the familiar past into a new light. No two writings/readings are the same. As Jack Goody says: “when you ‘write something down,’ you do not simply codify what is already there. Whatever the form of knowing that precedes its recording, the form produced in the text is inevitably new—the very image of a ‘literary creation’ ” (qtd. in Terdiman 59). It is in this sense that memory (and the act of remembering) is to be regarded as textual mediation. The textuality of memory functions through association, compilation, organization, selection and erasure. This model of memory deciphers the various hermeneutic activities—subjectivity, selection, interpretation, forgetting, rejection—inherent in recollection as textual processes. The presence of these hermeneutic processes makes recollection or remembering different from rote memorization or literal reproduction of the past.

As Albert Magnus says:

Recollection occurs consciously through association: one finds or hunts out the stored memory-impressions by using other things associated with it either through a logical connection or thought habit (consuetude), the sort of associations taught by the various artes memorativa. Rote repetition, since it is not “found out” by any heuristic scheme, is not considered recollection or true memory (memoria). (qtd. in Carruthers 23)

The textualization of memory is not a closed, inert process. The textuality of memory cannot be brought to a culmination. It is a never ending process. So there can be no master
memory or the transcendental signified/referent. Memory is therefore a reconstructive or representation process. Textuality therefore deconstructs the conventional interior/exterior bifurcation by foregrounding the material conditions and forces underlying the textual processes. Memory is the locus where internal and external world coalesce in innumerable ways. Derrida’s claim, “the inside is the outside,” becomes pertinent here.

Memory as a source of authentic and immediate presence is not reconcilable with its inherent textual functioning. Since the traces of the past continuously undergo a process of revision, reinterpretation, rewriting and rereading, they never unproblematically correspond to the referent or the transcendental signified. Memories are always in a flux of writing and rewriting, making the concept of original memory problematic. Furthermore, the de-naturalizing of mimetic epistemology that is at the centre of national, historical and archival enterprise is done in such a way that “the politics of the act of representing are made manifest” (Hutcheon PP 56).

All forms of representation and knowledge are not vacuous. They are not only ideologically situated and determined, but also imagined through the use of language in the form of narratives and metaphors. White notes that language is inextricably bound up with the construction of the past:

It now seems possible to hold that [a historical] explanation need not be assigned unilaterally to the category of the literary truthful on the one hand or the purely imaginative on the other, but can be judged solely in terms of the richness of the metaphors which govern its sequence of articulation. . . . Then we should no longer naively expect that statements about a given epoch or complex of events in the past “correspond” to some pre-existent body of “raw facts.” For we should
recognize that what constitutes the facts themselves is the problem that the historian, like the artist, has tried to solve in the choice of the metaphor by which he orders his world, past, present, and future. (46-47)

This implies that though the past cannot be consistently recuperated, it can also be never stabilized and totalized with rigidifying finality. The question of who remembers or what one remembers is confounded by the malleable and fragile nature of memory. Memory can be unreliable and susceptible to distortion. Memory is subjective, selective, and fallible. It includes both remembering and forgetting. Memory does not reside in the past, but in the present through the act of remembering. This act of remembering is always influenced by the present perceptions and thoughts of the individual and the group. This implies that memories are continuously altered, revised, and reinterpreted.

These revelations have significance on the construction of identities—personal and collective—and the representation of past. Memories do not remain static, but change over time. The construction of identity involves assimilating (remembering) certain past experiences and discarding (forgetting) others. Consequently, according to our present needs and contexts, we revise our memories, hence our identities. Similarly, memory does not store the past as a mirror image of the actual experience. The past is always represented or reconstructed from the vantage point of the present, and the reconstruction process involves the subjectivity and selectivity of memory, that is, remembering and forgetting. Accordingly, memory and the past is a representation or construction of reality rather than an objective phenomenon.

The malleability and mutability of memory also has political and ideological ramifications for the individual and the community/group since memory can no longer be seen as faithful image of the past, but as a structure or discourse of power—structures that can be oppositional or
coercive. Memory, therefore, can be silenced, moulded, distorted in multiple ways by the individual, community, and state endorsed mechanisms. Neither is memory an abstract concept, residing within an intangible realm in the human consciousness and psyche, nor merely a cognitive or physical faculty. It is a product and representation of the diverse, intersecting material, social, political and cultural forces and contexts.

The present study investigates the relationship between memory, knowledge, past, truth, and history in the selected texts. It aims to demonstrate that memory and by extension historical narratives do not provide transparent access to the past or restore the past as it was. The critical scrutiny of the novels proposes the formulation of countermemory, a term coined by Foucault as an ambiguous, in-between space in order to re-member and rehistoricize the past. Countermemory offers a radical critique of History as an inadequate representation of past, articulates the human dimension of lived or historical experience and time. This human dimension of lived experience and time encapsulates the multiple and diverse stories, the subjective and objective, linear and emotional, internal and external, personal and political/social, factual and imaginative.

In the selected novels, the three writers take up the theme of imposed forgetting. The novels show the twin diseases of memory—amnesia and nostalgia—in which the characters remain trapped, fluctuating between these two poles of the memory spectrum. Both nostalgia and amnesia leave the central characters disoriented and paralysed, stunting their present and future progression. The complete loss of memories or the forgetting of the past is equated with the loss of history of the self/community. The novels illustrate forgetting as an instrument for enforcing ideologies within the discourse of nation state. The discursive formation of an “imagined” nation is founded on the selective nature of memory—remembering and forgetting—which are
insidiously utilized by the state for political ends. Memory plays a significant role in the organization of power and authority. Individuals who are unable or unwilling to remember their past are incapable of creating their history and are consequently unable to form meaning in their lives or participate in meaningful relationships with others. Forgetting or loss of memories can cause existential nothingness.

The diverse corpus of work undertaken by Márquez, Kundera and Rushdie shares a topical common denominator—it focuses on the beliefs and values, practices and rituals, images, symbolic representations and constructive approaches that coalesce to form the historical and cultural past of a nation or group. It puts forward the notion of history, identity and culture as shifting and contested terrains, based on a reciprocal relation of transformation, negotiation, agency and representation. This marks a major reformation of the paradigmatic method and conception of historical and cultural interpretation and investigation. While expanding the traditional boundaries of historical investigation, the three writers simultaneously interrogate the methods of historical analysis.

The three authors taken up for study have faced the demon of totalitarian utopian ideologies in their respective countries. Absolutism entails the forgetting of incompatible and insalubrious aspects of the past. Memory is under constant threat of invasion and obliteration by the forces of forgetting. To combat, these insidious winds of political amnesia, the three writers employ different forms of countermemory. Márquez’s novel uses the peripheral discourse of gossip and rumour to create a carnivalesque that counters a debilitating autocratic rule. The text is suffused by the carnivalesque spirit that manifests in the form of conflicting truths, exaggeration, excessiveness, and profane language, oral or folk culture. The carnivalesque spirit, manifesting in the form of gossip and rumour, undermines the seriousness of the official culture.
It draws attention to the fictionality, the fragmentariness and relativity of the natural and the inevitable. It interrogates the cogency of normative and enforced system of thought.

Similarly, Kundera presents “devils’ laughter” in opposition to the ideological manipulation of memory and history. His novel and the idea of laughter serve as countermemory against the totalitarian drive for historical amnesia and cleansing through overt as well as tacit means. BLF testifies to several lives that have systematically been erased from the discourse of national memory. Kundera’s novel is an attempt to rewrite pages of official history by remembering the silenced and the buried. Organized forgetting is countered by the characters’ personal struggle to recover their fading or forgotten past. Tamina and Mama are actively engaged in recuperating the past from the fallibility of memory, senescence and official amnesia enveloping the nation. Kundera presents many laughable images and metaphors that parody organized forgetting and history-writing. The image of the circle or ring dance becomes an archetype for totalitarian structures.

Rushdie’s SC uses a combination of gossip/rumour, laughter and local histories to challenge the discourses of nationalism, terrorism and globalization. The novel presents new ways of remapping and imagining the past. It articulates “difference” through alternative forms of “subjugated knowledge,” which challenge Western logocentrism and understanding. The countermemories presented in the novel are ways recovering and rewriting a forgotten past, questioning mainstream epistemological exclusion or forgetting of alternate remembrances and underscoring the textuality of the discourse of history. The novel exposes national and international political conflicts and treaties that shape national identities. It questions the idea of a unitary, monolithic history. Through numerous counter-memories, it shows how the past confronts and negotiates with varied political and historical changes in the present.
The different forms of counter-memories presented in this study initiate a process of reading particular historical events against the grain of hegemonic histories. They articulate the silences and gaps in authorized versions of history. They subvert official and authoritative history and undermine the notion of history as a homogenous continuity. The three writers emphasize the poststructuralist and postmodernist view of the consequences of reading memory as a process, as a construct. Their novels foreground the textuality that is inherent in all signification processes and hence the foreboding presence of organized forgetting constantly knocking our doors. However, they do not circumscribe the meaning of “politics of memory” as merely an illustration of memory-power nexus and the ways in which the theme of memory can be anti-foundational for the conventional ideas of knowledge and history. Rather, the writers create new epistemologies of knowledge through laughter, the carnivalesque, gossip and rumour and dialogism as countermemory. Through a creative articulation of the past, the novels undertaken for study are able to move beyond the central ambivalence that lies at the heart of memory—the futility of assuming an escape from its inherent textuality, forgetting and its penchant for power games.

Memory is a ubiquitous occurrence. It is local as well as a global; but in particular it is a cultural phenomenon. Though all living beings have the ability of memory, it is only man who has been blessed with the gift to form histories, create knowledge, and represent reality out of the repository of memory. Memory therefore is linked with historical and cultural consciousness, aesthetics and science. However, mankind lies at the crossroads of forgetting and oblivion. The contemporary milieu overwhelmed with hyper-reality and hyper information is driven towards forgetting the past. This amnesia threatens our very cultural and historical foundations. The significance of memory in literature can be grasped by viewing literature as a site of memory.
Not only do literary writings preserve and advance cultural and historical memory, but can also subvert and transform popular, dominant memory and history.

The present study has social and cultural significance. It contributes to the ongoing research on political ramifications of the psychological and philosophical understanding of memory. Considering memory as a form of political praxis, this research highlights that memory is indispensable to the study of history, culture and society. By investing memory in their literary creations, literary writers like Márquez, Rushdie and Kundera put an ethical demand to remember the forgotten histories and revise the past to its readers. The present study is primarily relevant to the contemporary debates on national and ethnic, minority and gender rights and issues.