

Nadia Butt

**Transcultural Memory and Globalised Modernity
in Contemporary Indo-English Novels**

Media and Cultural Memory/ Medien und kulturelle Erinnerung

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I told you the truth... Memory's truth, because memory has its own special kind. It selects, eliminates, exaggerates, minimises, glorifies, and vilifies, also; but in the end it creates its own reality, its heterogeneous but usually coherent version of events; and no sane human being ever trusts someone else's version more than his own. (Salman Rushdie)

[W]e go back, all of us to the very beginning; in our blood and bone and brain we carry the memories of thousands of beings. (V. S. Naipaul)

They keep pulling things out of the past, each memory like a grappling hook bringing up a question. (Shashi Deshpande)

Memory, Ji Bai would say, is the old sack here [...] Out would come from the dusty depths some knick-knack of yesteryear. (Moyez J. Vassanji)

We are only what we remember, nothing more [...] all we have is the memory of what we have done or not done. (Ramesh Gunasekera)

What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it. (Gabriel García Márquez)

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1 Introduction: Rewriting the Past – Memory, History and the Indo-English Novel of the 1980s and 1990s

The novel has become the leading hero in the drama of literary development in our time precisely because it best of all reflects the tendencies of a new world still in the making; it is, after all, the only genre born of this new world and in total affinity with it. (Bakhtin 1981, 7)

[The novel] tells us there are no rules. It hands down no commandments. We have to make up our own rules as best as we can, make them up as we go along. (Rushdie 1991, 423)

The emergence of a global literature signals a decisive world-historical turn: the prospect that modernity is not merely a transient or provincial Western phenomenon, but instead has become the universal and perhaps permanent condition of humanity and therefore the inevitable subject of any literature that would represent contemporary existence. (Valdez Moses 1995, xii)¹

The emergence of the Indo-English novels (see Afzehl Khan 1993) of memory by writers from the Indian subcontinent defines new literary developments in the genre of contemporary fiction in English, and is the focus of this study. The partition of the subcontinent into two separate nation-states of India and Pakistan in 1947, and the waves of globalisation in the post-partition era are conducive to shaping the literary imagination of the writers from this region – imagination which goads them into recollecting the individual and collective past of different ethnicities and cultures in the face of political change in their writings. In fact, political revolutions on the twentieth-century Indian subcontinent provide the backdrop to the literary representation of transcultural memory, which underlines the dynamics of cultural reconfigurations across national and cultural borders in the domain of fiction. By emphasising the representation of worldwide

¹ Moses adds on the same page, “[T]he very existence of a single and hegemonic Eurocentric conception of literature is rendered obsolete, in so far as Western literature itself becomes part of a larger body of work that is truly global, hybrid, and cosmopolitan.”

cultural communications in examining narratives of memory, I highlight the phenomena of “overlapping territories, intertwined histories” as Edward W. Said observes (1994 [1993], Ch. 1, 3–61).² It is in light of Said’s interpretation of ‘territory and history’ that I elaborate not only the theory of transcultural memory, but also introduce different ways of defining memory and memory cultures in the works of writers from the Indian subcontinent.

In pre-partition times, prominent novelists from the subcontinent such as R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao or Ahmed Ali treated historical memory in their narratives apart from the ethnic differences of Indians. However, the eventual rise of a national movement and the consequent spread of communalism put an end to such perceptions of a common history and changed the map of what had been a colonially united India. Narayan’s trilogy *Swami and Friends* (1935), for example, set in pre-independence days in India, in a fictional town called Malgudi, recounts the story of a ten-year-old school boy at Albert Mission School whose life is dramatically changed when Rajan, a symbol of colonial super power joins the school; Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938), named after a small village in South India, is a text of the Civil Disobedience Movement of the 1930s that takes as its central concern the participation of the village in the national struggle called for by Mahatma Gandhi; or Ali’s *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) nostalgically chronicles the passing of the traditional Muslim aristocracy in light of encroaching British colonialism in the early twentieth century. These examples demonstrate that the political is always intertwined with the private in the fiction of the 1930s and 1940s when the Independence Movement was gathering momentum in the subcontinent. The novelists, previously preoccupied with a mutual memory of colonial India, however, were compelled to experience a ‘split’ in memory after the partition of the subcontinent into two separate nation-states in 1947 and later a third one, Bangladesh, in 1971. How the genre of memory fiction engages with such a sudden ‘split’ in an earlier mutual memory is one of my central concerns here. In the memory novels in English in the post-partition period, major writers such as Amitav Ghosh from India and Bapsi Sidhwa from Pakistan wrestle with ‘divided memories and histories’ in order to ask the reader if it is possible to ‘divide’ centuries’ long mutual cultural heritage by merely dividing territory into two new nation-states. Ghosh raises the question in his novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988): “How can anyone

2 Said calls for a new understanding of culture and imperialism in the contemporary global scene by drawing upon the concept of intersecting territories and histories. He argues: “We need to see that the contemporary global setting – overlapping territories, intertwined histories – was already prefigured and inscribed in the coincidences and convergences among geography, culture, and history that were so important to the pioneers of comparative literature” (1994 [1993], 48).

divide memory?” (2005 [1988], 214) whereas Sidhwa’s narrator in *Cracking India* (1988) inquires: “Can one break a country?” (2006 [1988], 101). Because of their associations with a common history in their narratives of memory, I have brought the Pakistani and Indian novelists writing in English under the umbrella term of ‘Indo-English’ (see Rao 2004, 1–31)³ to address their distinct treatment of memory and history from a variety of perspectives.

The Indo-English novel first received global attention with the publication of Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) and its worldwide recognition through the Booker Award. The novel has not only given voice to the Indians and their history, but generated international awareness among writers and readers that India has to tell her stories from the pre-and post-partition debris of memory. As Rushdie states in *Midnight’s Children*, “There are so many stories to tell, too many, an excess of intertwined lives, events, miracles, places, rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane” (1981 [1995], 9). An important aspect to which Rushdie draws our attention is the interaction of historical and individual forces in fiction through the filter of memory. The oeuvres of writers with heterogeneous ethnic, religious and social backgrounds from the Indian subcontinent such as Bapsi Sidhwa, Amitav Ghosh, Zulfikar Ghose, Sunetra Gupta or Ruth Praver Jhabvala are replete with political as well as private remembrances as their narrators/protagonists go down memory lane, for these literary artists are resolved to present ‘their version of the past’ in our fast changing present, flooded with travel and cultural translation, and transnational and transcultural phenomena. This is why, despite discussing the Indo-English novel with a special reference to the events and the effects of partition, and to the experience of exile and expatriation on the psyche of the writers, I place it in the global setting to gain a broader perspective on the writers’ approach to the connection of the subcontinent with other histories and civilisations, for example, with Africa in the memory narrative of Moyez J. Vassanji’s *The Gunny Sack* (1989) or with the USA in Boman Desai’s *The Memory of Elephants* (1988) or with Europe in Sunetra Gupta’s *Memories of Rain* (1992).

Pakistani critic Tariq Rahman points out that unlike the more established field of Indian literature in English (see also Verma 2000),⁴ which has pioneers such as Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, Pakistani writing in English has a longer tradition in poetry with only two major novelists of international renown: Bapsi Sidhwa and Zulfikar Ghose (1991, 1–14). However, Pakistani journalist and

3 Rao uses the term Indo-English for Indian and Pakistani novelists for “whom partition is the matrix of the plots.”

4 For details on the historical and literary development of Indian writing in English besides Tariq Rahman, see K. D. Verma, 2000.

short-story writer Muneeza Shamsie highlights that a significant number of Pakistani first and second generation expatriate writers in the last thirty years such as Nadeem Aslam, Adam Zameenzad, Kamila Shamsie, Mohsin Hamid as well as their senior counterparts Tariq Ali, Aamer Hussein and Sara Suleri have drawn the attention of the reading public to issues concerning post-partition Pakistan as well as Pakistani diasporic communities abroad (1998, xxi–xxxi). Since writers such as Ghose and Zameenzad claim themselves to be writers with multiple or no cultural belongings, the identity of a ‘true’ Pakistani writer remains a disputed terrain. Arvind Krishna Mehrotra’s opinion on Indian literature in English that its “history is scattered, discontinuous, and transnational” (2003, 25–26) can also be applied to Pakistani writing especially when the roots of most of Indian and Pakistani writers are dislocated as well as relocated.

Meenakshi Mukherjee’s classification of the Indian novel in English gives us an overview of historical developments in the genre of the novel in English on the Indian subcontinent. According to Mukherjee, the Indian novel in English since the 1920s has passed through three different phases,⁵ which are the phases of the historical novel (1920s–1930s), the socio-political novel (1930s–1940s), and the novel of self-identity including the ‘psychological novel’ (1950s and 1960s) (Mukherjee 1971, 21). Viney Kirpal chooses to address novels of the 1980s and 1990s to emphasise different trends and innovative narrative strategies in Indian fiction since she considers these phases to be the most important in the history of the Indian novel. She highlights that “politics – national and international” (1990, xvi) is the central theme of the novelists of the 1980s and 1990s who are the major focus of this study. Kirpal claims that Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* was vital in initiating a ‘new’ phase of Indian writing in English (1990, xvi) as it was after its publication that novelists were inspired to examine the relationship between national issues and the individual from a broader horizon (see also Riemenschneider 2005, 20–41). They looked back on the issues of the freedom struggle, the Independence Movement around 1947, the partition in 1947, the Emergency in India from 1975 to 1977, the India-China War in 1962, the India-Pakistan Wars in 1965 and 1971, the fall of Dhaka and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971 in order to tackle these issues from the vantage point of our changing perception of cultural and national differences pervading the private and public sphere.

5 For a detailed discussion on the representative Indian English novels of the 1930s and 1940s, 1950s and 1960s and 1980s and 1990s, see Leela Gandhi, “Novelists of the 1930s and 1940s,” Shyamala A. Narayan and Jon Mee, “Novelists of the 1950s and 1960s,” and Jon Mee, “After Midnight: The Novel in the 1980s and 1990s” (Gandhi 2003, 168–192; Narayan 2003, 219–231; Mee, 2003, 318–336).

A considerable number of novels from this particular phase take into account contemporary politics as central to individual, family, community and nation. For example, *Clear Light of Day* (1980) by Anita Desai centres on a family in the throes of the partition of India in 1947, and *Shame* (1983) by Salman Rushdie is concerned with the downfall of Pakistan under the yoke of a corrupt ruling elite in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s, Indian writers were once again inclined to set the individual, family and community into a political context to address important political issues in the contemporary subcontinent within the realm of fiction. *Beethoven Among the Cows* (1994) by Rukun Advani deals with the Babri Mosque crisis⁶ between Hindus and Muslims in 1992 (among many other political topics) in narrating the story of two brothers, whereas *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy sets the story of twins against the backdrop of communism in India in 1969 and the state-sponsored perpetuation of the Hindu caste system. On the Pakistani side, Ghose and Sidhwa, writing in the 1980s and 1990s, were engaged with the repercussions of the partition on the various ethnicities of the subcontinent in order to affirm that the political invariably dominates the private sphere. They recollect the roots of political tension between India and Pakistan in their fiction with the aim of reminding the reader to overcome cultural clashes, which only cause more hate and violence.

If we throw a cursory glance at the novels of the 1980s and 1990s (see Singh 1991; Devy 1994, 7–18; Shukla and Shukla 2002, 131–141), we notice that a number of novelists present different accounts of history in the fictional domain. While exploring their accounts of history, we encounter the representation of ‘shared memories’ or ‘intertwined memories’ in fiction with which this study is concerned. I argue that it is through these ‘shared memories’ in fiction that the writers take into account present-day cultural complexity and plurality in their writing in the wake of “disjunction and difference in the global cultural economy” (Appadurai 1996, 27–47). In other words, their treatment of memory reflects worldwide cultural transformations on the societal and communal level. Thus, memory acts as a mode of bridging a) territorial (physical) distances and b) historical (abstract) divisions.

By focusing on memory as a narrative and thematic device in fiction, my aim is to explain how the selected Indo-English novels interrogate the idea and practice of memory as an individual and collective experience. At the same time, I attempt to point out how a survey of these novels demands that we ‘rethink Eu-

⁶ Hindu extremists in 1992 demolished a famous sixteenth-century mosque to build a Hindu temple in its place. The demolition of the mosque led to one of the worst ethnic crises between Indian Muslims and Hindus in post-independence India.

rocentrism' (see Shohat and Stam 1994, Ch. 1, 13–54) in our increasingly trans-cultural world, that is, a world of enormous cultural interaction and exchange, a world in which Europe and its 'Others' are no longer locked in their isolated spheres, but are bound to influence and prevail upon each other. Therefore, this study attempts to revise the more established definitions of the memory novel by introducing the theory of transcultural memory. For the aim of this study is to grasp the implications of mnemonic processes in the narratives of East-West encounters from a different angle, and to broaden the horizon of interpreting the genre of the memory novel itself in contemporary times.

The fiction of the 1980s and 1990s represents the most fertile as well as the most important phase of the Indo-English novels of memory. The narrator and the narrated characters in these narratives look back critically thereby rewriting the past and history. It is important, however, not to look at these representations only in terms of 'colonial' or 'post-colonial' memories as many cultural theorists, such as Simon Featherstone (2005, 167–200), tend to do, but rather as memories rooted in global cultural forms of blending and borrowings, transcending and crossing-over the centre-periphery divide that is thought to be central by post-colonial theorists in their approach to literature. Frank Schulze-Engler warned back in 1992 that postcolonial theory reproduces "the very same binary opposition between 'Europe' and its 'Others' that it actually seeks to overcome" (1992, 322). It is with the goal of thinking beyond such binaries that Arjun Appadurai also clarifies that the "new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing centre-periphery models" (1996, 32). In short, memory narratives demonstrate a space of interconnected memories rather than a world in which the West needs to be seen as set apart from the rest of the world.

The publication of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in the 1980s also coincided with a sudden popularity of postcolonial theory and discourse, mainly initiated by the book *The Empire Writes Back* in 1989 by Australian writers Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. Writers from the subcontinent, like writers from other former colonies, were being discussed within the historical frame of colonisation and decolonisation. In this way, "postcolonial literature" set itself "as a homogenous body of literature" which "defines through the effects of colonialism" (Schulze-Engler 1992, 322). Being aware of the pitfalls of postcolonial theory, Robert JC Young chose to introduce "tricontinentalism" (2001, 204) as an alternative term in his ground-breaking work *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) in order to emphasise the transnational locations and the political implications of the discourse of colonialism and imperialism. However, the term 'tricontinentalism' neither stripes the postcolonial theory of its focus on necessary cultural difference and opposition, nor does it elaborate on the pres-

ent-day flow of cultural images across borders. In other words, the term is likely to interpret the world in clear-cut categories rather than challenging these very categories, which transcultural theory aims to define as porous and changing.

Despite the worldwide popularity of postcolonial theory in international academia and especially the implied 'political' agenda of postcolonial theorists, this approach tends to ignore more contemporary political issues in the novels from India and Pakistan because of their constant stress on linking every political theme, however contemporary, to the times of colonisation or the anti-colonial struggle, hence, ignoring a variety of cultural dynamics present in the age of rapid cultural change. Therefore, instead of postcolonial theory, I have chosen to develop and take up the theory of transcultural memory in this study in order to analyse issues of contemporary politics in the selected fiction from the perspective of present-day cultural encounters and conflicts with the goal of embracing a new paradigm for examining memory and history in the Indo-English novels.

The emergence of the Indo-English novel signifies a literary turn as the Indian and Pakistani writers choose English as the medium of expression rather than their native languages. This turn cannot be easily rendered as "the Empire Writes Back" (see Ashcroft et al. 2004 [1989]), for it deals with a more complex cultural scene today that carries a distinct mark of important developments in literary and cultural theory such as 'globalised modernity,' 'multiple modernities,' 'transculturality'⁷ and 'transnationalism.' In effect, the very term Indo-English is suggestive of a cultural development embodied in the tradition of writing in English on the subcontinent, but at the same time alludes to a distinct development in the works of distinguished novelists who are keen on 'writing' India, Pakistan and Bangladesh against the backdrop of broad cultural communications, and beyond the restricted sphere of (post)colonial cultural trajectories. Consequently, the term Indo-English in the present context carries an entire history of cultural encounter and not merely the role of Empire and colonialism in literature from the subcontinent as popularly imagined. Pakistani critic Sara Suleri's reflections on 'English India,' however, also lead us to revise the rhetoric of 'English India' in terms of the British colonisation of the subcontinent alone. Suleri contends:

English India is not synonymous with the history of British rule in the subcontinent, even while it is suborned to the strictures of such a history. At the same time, English India is not solely a linguistic concept, a spillage from history into language, one that made difficult oppositions between the rhetorical and the actual. The idiom of English India expresses a disinterest in the continuity of tense, so that the distinction between colonial and post-colonial histories become less radical, less historically 'new.' In the context of colonialism,

7 For more definitions of transcultural modernities, see Butt 2009, 167–179.

English India represents an ambivalence that addresses the turning point of such necessary imbrications as those between the languages of history and culture; of difference and fear. As a consequence, its trajectory is extensive enough to include both imperial and subaltern materials and in the process demonstrates their radical inseparability. (1992, 2–3)

In fact, it is a complete simplification to claim that the label Indo-English is only reminiscent of India's (and now Pakistan's contact) with the British. In contrast, the term refers to the subcontinental writers' attempts at interpreting contemporary cultural communication in fiction via a global language. The adoption of English by these writers is not a mere consequence of their interaction with the British and their language or their expatriation in an English-speaking country, but rather a result of their yearning to attribute a local aura to a global language. This is why various writers from the subcontinent, both at home and abroad, use English in distinct ways to make us aware not only of the various flavours and varieties of English, but also of their experiments with English itself in the narrative. Many of these writers incorporate the syntax of everyday speech, or use indigenous words and phrases in their texts. Often, in an effort to articulate place, character, or experience, they employ a certain subcontinental English diction that is marked by a specific jargon. Some of these writers prefer to use a standard, formal version of the language, while others experiment with the normative register and attempt to use the language in brave new ways thereby imparting a new linguistic dimension to English as a *lingua franca*. While rejecting the coinage of Commonwealth Literature for non-British writers, Rushdie highlights how writers writing in English outside Great Britain and the US have actually contributed to broaden the horizon of the very term 'English literature':

I think that if all English literatures could be studied together, a shape would emerge which would truly reflect the new shape of the language in the world, and we could see that Eng. Lit. has never been in better shape, because the world language now also possesses a world literature, which is proliferating in every conceivable direction. The English language ceased to be the sole possession of the English some time ago [...] it's time to admit that the centre cannot hold. (1991, 70)

For several writers from the subcontinent, particularly those who have left their native lands after partition, the act of writing becomes a way to reclaim their homeland and identity. As a result, to use Jaina C. Sanga's words, "[T]he notion of memory figures prominently in such narratives" (2004, x). These writers attempt to record the predicament of displacement, celebrating and at times questioning the act of straddling two cultures and coping with new worlds in a language that is now a unique artefact of 'local and global' reproductions. Cypriot critic Stephanos Stephanides even addresses this recent phenomenon in terms of

the “translatability of memory in an age of globalisation” (2004, 101–115) to shed light on cultural memory and the New Literatures in English (Walder 2000, 149–168) from the perspective of worldwide cultural transactions.

While tracing historical and literary developments of the Indo-English novel, it is highly important to keep in mind that Indian tradition, before or after the partition of the subcontinent, is a “mixed tradition” (Rushdie 1991, 67). It is a fallacy to imagine the Indian cultural fabric in terms of cultural singularity, although the ideals of cultural singularity were seminal to the Ideology of Pakistan and its followers, propagated by the leader of Muslim League Mohammed Ali Jinnah, which led to the creation of a separate state for Indian Muslims. In other words, hodgepodge is the most conspicuous dimension of Indian culture and civilisation. It is justified to say that being an Indian is to possess many identities, even though the creation of Pakistan in 1947 was aimed to dismiss such conceptions of Indian culture. Being a Hindu or a Muslim in India does not mean that one cannot belong to the communities of Christians, Parsees or Sikhs at the same time, a fact central to Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* and Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*. In effect, India has always been a site of heterogeneous cultural contacts because centuries of invasions have woven foreign influences into the very fabric of the ‘indigenous’ culture. These heterogeneous cultural contacts are conspicuous in Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day* (1980) and Zulfikar Ghose’s *The Triple Mirror of the Self* (1992). Thus, these texts bring out the complexity and dynamism inherent in the Indian ethos in pre- and post-partition times. This study demonstrates that the heritage of mixing has, in fact, leaked into the novel from the subcontinent. This heritage of mixing has already been addressed by Raja Rao in his foreword to *Kanthapura* (1938) in the following words: “We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us” (1992 [1938], v) and by E. M. Forster in his novel *A Passage to India* (1924): “Nothing embraces the whole of India, nothing, nothing [...] India is not one, there are ‘a hundred Indias’” (1961 [1924], 135).

Like Ghose, Rushdie considers partition and the creation of Pakistan in the name of Islam to be the beginning of new political challenges in the history of the subcontinent, not because of the constant political instability in the region with Kashmir as a bone of contention between India and Pakistan, but because it propagates false notions of cultural ‘purity’ which are antithetical to India as a domain of multiple religions and ethnicities long before the advent of the Mughal or the British Empire. For Rushdie, India is, indeed, a rendezvous for cultural crossing and cultural mixing, and a fertile ground for East meeting West, which is also one of the central preoccupations of the novelists analysed in this study from India and Pakistan. He believes, “Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at another times, that we fall between two stools”

(Rushdie 1991, 15). Hence, the writers from the Indian subcontinent, anchored in social and cultural mixing, are inclined to understand cultural plurality as part of their cultural heritage, of their life-world which eventually manifests itself in the transcultural memory of the main characters in their oeuvres.⁸

The fictional texts selected here for analysis under the theoretical framework of transcultural memory are not, of course, intended to define in any comprehensive way the enormous output of literary writing from the Indian subcontinent, nor are they necessarily representative of the often varied elements of a particular writer's oeuvre. Exemplary works have been chosen to both highlight certain significant phases in the history of the Indo-English novel such as the 1980s, 1990s and 2000 onwards, and to enable a manageable discussion on the role and function of memory in the fictional worlds of the authors created in Anglo-phone literatures of the Indian subcontinent. With the help of transcultural memory as a theoretical and a methodological tool, I attempt to set out the grounds for a systematic analysis and interpretation of the various metaphors and images of memory in fiction.

* * *

This study, divided into three parts, aims to elaborate upon the theory of transcultural memory with reference to contemporary Indo-English novels of memory. In Part One, Chapter Two, "Memory and Transculturality," transcultural memory is defined in five different ways in light of current research before discussing it as a social practice in the age of globalised modernity. My aim is to highlight first its uses both as a theory and a practice in the present-age of technological advancement, and, second, to connect theory and practice in order to examine memory fiction as it resonates with new cultural realities. With reference to the recent debate on memory and modernity, I explain why there is a need to place and understand memory in the era of multiple modernities, and to comprehend the 'making of modern memory' vis-à-vis transcultural phenomena. Chapter Three, "Literature and Transcultural Memory," investigates the connection between literature and transcultural memory. To support my point, I allude to a number of novels by writers from the subcontinent that deal with memory as a central metaphor or leitmotif for depicting cultural and ethnic intersections such as Moyez J.Vassanji's *The Gunny Sack* (1989), Boman Desai's *The Memory of Elephants* (1988), Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* (1980). In light of these narratives, the transcultural novel

⁸ James Joyce once told his friend Frank Budgen that for him "imagination was memory" (Budgen 1970, 187).

of memory is defined as a reflection of twentieth-century cultural and political transformations.

Part Two comprises six close readings of memory novels, as my objective is to apply the theory of transcultural memory to literature in more detail. It contains two separate sections entitled “Novels of Political Memories: Partition and Reconciliation” and “Novels of Private Memories: Through the Looking Glass” so that a systematic approach to the various facets of memory in the fictional narratives could be developed. As I analyse the novels of memory from the 1980s and 1990s, I trace the impact of the partition and national conflicts, exile and expatriation, and diaspora and displacement on twentieth-century individuals and societies to explore how these individuals and societies remember within the world of fiction. I am aware that, in most of the novels in this study, political and private memories tend to overlap. My separation of these different forms of memories into two broad sections is for purposes of clarity of discussion and of the isolation of key issues for closer examination.

In the section “Novels of Political Memories: Partition and Reconciliation,” I discuss the functions of transcultural memory in the work of three novelists to track the effects of partition on the various ethnicities of the Indian subcontinent. In the first close reading chapter, “‘Chutneyfying’ history and memory: Transcultural India in Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981),” the connection between history and memory as embodied in the metaphor of ‘chutney’ is highlighted to map the odyssey of transcultural India in the novel from pre- to post-partition times. By focusing on the culinary images of chutney and pickle, used profusely in the novel, the art of autobiography and intertwined memories is explored in the development of the plot. The second close reading chapter, “‘Imaginary nations’: Storytelling and transcultural recollection in Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1988),” concentrates on the twin significance of storytelling and transcultural memory. I argue that Sidhwa regrets the demise of the multi-ethnic subcontinent in the wake of the national movement as her child protagonist recollects scattered stories of partition victims. The third close reading chapter, “Recalling or inventing the contact zones? Transcultural spaces in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* (1988),” negotiates the concept of transcultural spaces in the flashback narration with a special focus on the spatiality of memory. My main argument is that the narrator/protagonist seeks a transcultural space through the prism of memory to make sense of the ‘shadows’ of geographical and national borders set against the backdrop of the partition of India in 1947 and the fall of Dhaka in 1971.

In the section, “The Novels of Private Memories: Through the Looking Glass,” three other novelists are investigated to demonstrate how private memories are tied to the processes of globalisation, rendering a complex dimension