

Probing the Conglomerates of Nostalgia on the grounds of Transmuted Terrain: A Study of Nidhi Dugar Kundalia's "The Konyaks of Nagaland"

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Abstract

Identity exclusively plays a prominent role in the life of every human being in the globe as it functions as the inevitable core for the embodiment of one's 'self.' It intrinsically chains its cobwebs with political, cultural and traditional elements in order to vitalize its establishment; following that, not only the physical terrain but also the mental terrain cords with its functions and all other affairs. In such case, ceaseless transition of time drags it to the juncture of mutation which entangles its phenomenal components; thus, the transmutation deforms each individual's political and cultural domains where their violated identity jams in mess, or hangs in void. This scenario constructs unexpected and unpleasant present, as well as uncertain future in which an unprepared man or woman's psyche consciously or unconsciously yearns for their lost past and unadulterated identity of their past life whereas this emotive process or yearning is called as nostalgia; it acts in dynamic ways according to the potency of various crises. The same circumstances prevail in Nidhi Dugar Kundalia's short story "The Konyaks of Nagaland" in which the researcher scrutinizes the transfigured state of different lives and its backwashes. It is to excavate why and how political and cultural conversions direct a person who has experienced his or her so-called utopian past life, and a person who has never tasted that exemplary past life to encounter nostalgia; and it is to detect whether their nostalgias employ as defense mechanisms to soothe their distressed psyches, or they themselves agitate the victims' psyches by making them contemplate over the irreversible and unattainable nature of their past life.

Keywords: Political and Cultural transition, identity crisis, discontented present, uncertain future, defense mechanism and nostalgia

Transition is a facet of nature which no one can seize in the world. The human race should coordinate with its new implements and pace at one point, though it offers an unpalatable change to the society. This is an unavoidable issue that has been faced by the people of all over the world, but it becomes intense when it victimizes the community which concerns its culture and tradition as the core of their livelihood. Tribal communities habitually render great significance to their customs and culture; they never imagine a life without such crucial components. They are such ardent followers of their practices which they believe as

their identity. However, they also get into the traps of natural transition in which one cannot accept the harsh reality, and one cannot get away from that. So, in the transfigured society, they can taste their past life and identity only in the abode of nostalgia; but it may bestow pleasure or pressure that phenomenon may vary at different circumstances.

In this article, the researcher investigates the case of Konyaks who is one of the major tribal communities of Nagaland, a North Eastern state of India where their voices have more authority than the Indian government. Being the largest tribal community, they dwell in almost all the villages of Mon district. Agriculture is their primary lifework; apart from that they do variety of artisan works and handicrafts. Their lineage is distinguished by their unique political and cultural practice that is headhunting which upholds their pride and prestige and their race is renowned for it. Other than that they are citable for their animistic culture which has encompassed multiple animistic ceremonies and rituals.

The invasions, colonization, the spread of Christianity and modernization invoked catastrophic alterations in their ethnicity which has been amplifying till date. Due to the transformation, their entire culture and customs have modified a lot, especially by their adoption of Christianity from their animist culture in which condition they no longer able to tagalong their peculiar lifestyle that is brimmed with number of rites and rituals which constructed their identity. Nowadays, they stumble between their indigenous identity and the novel religious identity, where having hybrid identity each Konyaks endeavor very hard to be as true Christians and strive to desert their indigenous identity; but they still value their past life and their indigenous tradition very much, and carry its nostalgic memories along with them. Here the question is that whether their nostalgic memories ease them or exhaust them.

The ongoing affairs of Konyaks have pictorially portrayed in the short story “The Konyaks of Nagaland” by Nidhi Dugar Kundalia, an eminent woman writer and journalist who is illustrious for her stories which unravel the atypical human lives, and noteworthy for newspaper and magazine writings which unveil diverse socio-cultural issues. The story is from her collection of short stories *White as Milk and Rice: Stories of India's Isolated Tribes* that comprises five interesting short stories of different tribes. The story of Konyaks revolves around two central characters namely Pangshong and his granduncle Wangloi Wangshu. Pangshong who is born in Nagaland, and has brought up by his Christian Konyak parents in Delhi and London. Therefore, he is not that much aware of his indigenous roots. In the funeral of his father, he does not shed his tears as he is not attached with his father; but his young uncle remarks over that attitude as, ““You’re a true Konyak *naomei* or warrior” who retains the robustness at every situations of life and never flares the weak emotions (Kundalia 178). From that moment, he fascinates over his original identity and desires to recognize more about his indigenous race. So, he acquires more knowledge from his young uncle about his tribal

community which fosters him to travel to his native Sheanghag Chingnyu, a village in Mon District to meet his granduncle and grandaunt in the aim of gathering more facts about his true identity. In the native, Wangloi shares the memories of his past life with him where they sail together in the boat of nostalgia.

The present study examines the current state of Konyaks through the lives of Panshong and Wangloi to explore why and how their mutated society navigates them to the realm of nostalgia and to discover an answer to the question whether it alleviates the disrupted self or adds fuel to it by drag it to ponder over the loss. By the way, this paper hypothesizes that the nostalgia takes place in the mind of victims consciously or unconsciously when they suffer under anxieties because of their identity crisis which incessantly pestle the hazards of uncertain present and future life and remind their bisected self; it is to demonstrate that that the victims who feel the discomfiture in the present step into the zone of nostalgia.

Nostalgia is a theoretical concept associated with Psychoanalysis, Sociology, Anthropology and Cultural Studies. Its origin has a lot of historical traces even from Homer's *Odyssey* in which the hero desires to return to his native due to homesickness which is entailed with melancholy, anxiety, insomnia and depression. Till the 18th century, theorists, philosophers and even physicians believed it as a mental disorder and attached only negative connotations to it. In the 19th century only, they found that there are contradictions between homesickness and nostalgia; both are longing but the prior one occurs as a psychological issue because of displacement and the latter is all about the memories of past time. In the psychodynamic approach, it is considered to be, "a subconscious desire to return to an earlier life sage" (qtd. in Cohut). And in the same century, it turned into a field of study called Memory Studies where the pioneer is Fred Davis, a sociologist who illustrates the reasons for the emergence of nostalgia; he believes that it arises when there is a threat to the identity in the present state of living or the identity "bruised by the turmoil of time" (107). And various theorists divide it into different kinds to elucidate it in a better manner. Svetlana Boym, a Cultural theorist distinguishes it into two types; they are 'Restorative nostalgia' and 'Reflective nostalgia'. The Restorative nostalgia is an effort to rebuild the lost time and past memories in a hope to devour it again, whereas the Reflective nostalgia is an acceptance of the irreversibility of time and that it makes one to long for the loss and dwell in the past memories. Davis divides it as Private and Collective; the Private one leads the victim to long for his own past life, but the Collective nostalgia leads one to long for the past period which he or she has not experienced in his or her entire life.

Pangshong crosses the threshold of Collective nostalgia when he got the prestigious remark of his young uncle where his self begins to devour the real flavor wholesome identity

which he did not poses in his past life. His nostalgic mood urges him to savor the quality of his wholesome identity furthermore. So that he goes to his native and try to be one with his native land for a while; and he meets his granduncle Wangloi and fosters him to reveal the Konyak history to enrich his knowledge about his indigenous identity which was not elucidated properly by anyone in his past. Though he senses barbarity in the narration, he desires to be with his indigenous identity which makes him to sense the completeness of his soul ; Kundalia expresses it perfectly as, “He does not want to be anything more but be a part of this land for a while. Perhaps this is what one feels like when they die and become a part of something bigger, something more wholesome” (206).

Wangloi and his wife sail in the boat of Private nostalgia in which they try their best to suppress their memories of past life since because of their conversion into Christianity where thinking about the animistic culture is a sin; but, unconsciously they too wish to go back to the prestigious life which they led by their phenomenal identity; it is all by the nostalgic objects such as heads hunted in their past and things of their animistic culture. However, it is just Restorative nostalgia where they never think to rebuild the past life but savor it at times.

Analysing all the circumstances, it is clear that the characters of the story use nostalgia as a defense mechanism to ease their soul whenever they feel exhausted by the unpleasant elements of present and uncertain components of future life in the pace of transfigured society.

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