

**THE PORTABILITY OF MEMORY: A PSYCHO-  
SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SOUTH ASIAN  
DYSTOPIAN FICTION**

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**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES,  
ISLAMABAD**

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# **THE PORTABILITY OF MEMORY: A PSYCHO-SPATIAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED SOUTH ASIAN DYSTOPIAN FICTION**

By

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## THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read the following thesis, examined the defense, are satisfied with the overall exam performance, and recommend the thesis to the Faculty of Arts & Humanities for acceptance.

**Thesis Title:** The Portability of Memory: A Psycho-Spatial Analysis Of Selected South Asian Dystopian Fiction

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **The Portability of Memory: A Psycho-spatial Analysis of Selected South Asian Dystopian Fiction** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

I also understand that if evidence of plagiarism is found in my thesis/dissertation at any stage, even after the award of a degree, the work may be cancelled and the degree revoked.

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Title: The portability of memory: A Psycho-Spatial analysis of selected South Asian Dystopian fiction**

In this study, I attempt to look into the psycho-spatial orientation of the bystanders theorized as the implicated subject, as a site for the embodiment of their secondary experiences in the form of memory. The memory of the implicated subjects in the selected texts is analyzed in conjunction with prosthetic memory to investigate their role in enabling the oppressive structures that they inhabit in speculative settings. The thesis employs the psycho-spatial lens as a theoretical-methodological tool to reveal the socio-political ramifications of the memories carried into the future by the implicated subjects. The research attempts to contribute to the theoretical debates pertaining to the socio-political strategizing of memory, implicated subject and the spatialization of technological and cultural conundrums in the regions of India and Pakistan. The aim of the research is to examine the role of memory in constructing individual and collective identities within speculative settings, as portrayed in the novels "Midnight Doorways" by Usman T Malik, "Chosen Spirits" by Samit Basu, and "Leila" by Prayag Akbar. The study delves into the ramifications of socio-political conflict and technological evolution in these speculative settings, focusing on the interplay of psycho-spatiality. It investigates how the psycho-spatial orientation of characters and their memories in the selected novels offer a profound commentary on socio-political conundrums. It also explores the indirect responsibility of the protagonists in transmitting socio-political oppressive structures through the framework of the implicated subject. The findings of the textual analysis of the given texts shed light on the transformative impact of individuals in the construction and reimagining of the dystopian societies.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>AUTHOR’S DECLARATION</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>DEDICATION</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Background of the Study</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 Thesis statement</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1.3 Research Objectives</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1.4 Research questions</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1.5 Significance and rationale of the study</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1.6 Delimitation</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2.3 Role of the implicated subject in (Post)memory</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>2.4 The postulates of Psycho-spatiality in South Asian Speculative fiction</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>2.5 From Memory to Postmemory</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>2.6 Speculating the Prosthetic Memory</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>2.7 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3:</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>3.1 Research Methodology</b> .....	<b>23</b>

<b>3.2 Theoretical Framework</b> .....	24
<b>CHAPTER 4</b> .....	26
<b>4.1 The disintegration of the zone of being and the zone of non-being in <i>Leila</i>:</b> .....	26
<b>4.2 The significance of the Implicated Subject in prosthetic memory of cyber-punk dystopia:</b>	
<b>Textual analysis of Chosen Spirits</b> .....	36
<b>4.2.1 Introduction</b> .....	36
<b>4.3 Contortion of memory in Gothic Dystopian fiction: Thematic analysis of Midnight</b>	
<b>Doorways</b> .....	45
<b>CHAPTER 5</b> .....	51
<b>5.1 CONCLUSION</b> .....	51
<b>WORKS CITED</b> .....	54





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## **DEDICATION**

To my beloved parents, without whose unwavering support, love, and dedication, I would not have achieved my academic goals.



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

In today's world, cultural and technological advancements have brought about a new form of structural inequality that affects society in unprecedented ways. In this context, it is crucial to examine the role of memory in transmitting experiences of oppression and resistance against it. This research project delves into the negotiation of indirect responsibility in transmitting memories of oppression and resistance against it through the analysis of three works of speculative fiction: *Midnight Doorways* (2021) by Usman T Malik, *Chosen Spirits* (2020) by Samit Basu, and *Leila* (2019) by Prayag Akbar. The Oxford Encyclopedia of Literature defines Speculative Fiction as “a subgenre of science fiction that deals with human rather than technological problems (Oziewicz)”. It is a blanket term for science fiction which encapsulates the “open-ended version of the real” with its endless opportunities. It also emerged as a cultural tool to dismantle the “Western cultural bias of literature imitating reality (Oziewicz)”. Similarly, the selected speculative texts also build upon the indigenous ideas of fantasy and supernatural elements in the folklore and myth as well as the contemporary technological conundrums confronting the society.

Using a psycho-spatial lens, this study explores the ramifications of cultural conflict and technological evolution in speculative settings, where the creation of speculative spaces is based on fragments of postmemory recollected through indigenous folklore and contemporary instances of violence on both sides of the border. The theoretical underpinnings of the research connote with the transmission of traumatic experiences transcending the temporal and spatial constraints, implicating the memories through technological mediation. Through this lens, this research project aims to analyze the ways in which these works of speculative fiction explore the configuration of remembering and transmitting instances of violent and uncanny encounters with the envisioned past in a dystopian setting. The significance of the implicated subject in transmitting secondary memories under the theoretical framework of postmemory and prosthetic memory will be further elucidated through the psycho-spatial analysis of the selected texts.

It is pertinent that Malik's speculative fiction builds upon the socio-political strife serving as the fault lines in the contemporary Pakistani society. Its speculative nature is not a tool to conceal the reality, however it serves as an instrument to aggravate the fissures in collective memory through the inculcation of folklore and major socio-political conflicts in the speculative settings. Similarly, *Leila* (2019) by Prayag Akbar projects a dystopian world in which inter-religious marriage prepares the ground for catastrophe in the narrative. It follows the story of a mother looking for her abducted daughter after witnessing her kidnapping and murder of her husband by the extremists. The individual tribulations are depicted in the backdrop of collective environmental and cultural disasters. While *Chosen Spirits* (2020) by Samit Basu articulates the

horrors of a society in which humanity is overruled by technological advancement, particularly the culmination of the social media platforms such as the metaspaces. Basu's narrative provides a riveting account of mass censorship, highlighting the conflict between private and public disintegration in the wake of technological advancement and hyper surveillance in a world envisioned ten years from the present. The common fabric running through the selected texts is the configuration of the ways of remembering and transmitting the instances of violent and uncanny encounters with the envisioned past in a dystopian setting.

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Marianne Hirsch zooms into the notion of postmemory as "inherited memory, belated memory and prosthetic memory" (Hirsch 2). She defines postmemory as the transmission of traumatic experiences transcending the temporal and spatial constraints (Hirsch 6). Postmemory extends to the notion of prosthetic memory as a form of "public cultural memory that emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative of the past...such as a movie theatre or a museum" (Landsberg 2). While postmemory pertains to the recontextualization of memories, prosthetic memory serves as an "artificial limb" implicating the memories through technological mediation. However, in the present study, Hirsch's theorization of postmemory, combined with prosthetic memory plays an instrumental role in unraveling the significance of the implicated subjects in transmitting the secondary experiences into the future through mediation of cultural and technological structures. The implications of memory in the technological dystopias unravel the contemporary conundrums of the society. The distortion of technological advancement is imperative, as the structural inequalities take on a new form in the technological aspects in the form of dystopian settings in the given texts.

To explicate the role of the implicated subject in the study, I borrow from Michael Rothberg's abstraction of the term as "neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator" (Rothberg 1). The implicated subjects provide an insight into the origins of structural injustices as bystanders perpetrating and inhabiting the oppressive social structures. In the framework of the current research premise, the implicated subject can be defined as the passive facilitators of the oppressive social structures. The role of the implicated subjects in transmitting secondary memories under the theoretical framework of postmemory and prosthetic memory will be further elucidated through the psycho-spatial analysis of the selected texts. "Reading Science Fiction Novels As An Architectural Research Method: The Case Study Of J. G. Ballard's High Rise" by Zeynep Tuna Ultav elucidates the importance of reading science fiction as an architectural research method, as it "notifies the relationship of the human being to its environment by extrapolating through language" (Ultav 2). Ultav further justifies the significance of the literary spaces in architectural research by foregrounding the concrete connections between "sociality" of spaces (Ultav 4) and its discursive implications. Although, her

interdisciplinary approach focalizes discourse in architecture, she establishes that spaces are abstractions constituted at the “locus of intersections, contacts, tensions, and relationships”(Tally 20), while places “have to be recognized in a temporal depth in order to uncover or discover multilayered identities” (Tally 176).

Furthermore, the scope of psycho-spatiality in the current study will be delineated through Edward W Soja’s concept of the “Thirdspace” as a “space of extraordinary openness, a place of critical exchange where the geographical imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives” (Soja 5). The proposed research aims to analyze the speculative spaces as an intersection of social class, individual reception and transmission of cultural memories in the thirdspace between the envisioned past and the incumbent socio-political events, by the implicated subject. Walter Bosse in his chapter “Oh man, I am nowhere: Ralph Ellison and the Psychospatial Terrain of Mid-Century Harlem” unravels the productivity of Edward W Soja’s “thirdspace” to explicate “how fragmentation, ruptures, deviation, displacements and discontinuities can be politically transformed...to a political source of opportunity and strength” (Soja 117). He explores how the inhabitants of Harlem invent a productive space by “circumventing the center/periphery binary”. Similarly, I will be exploring the role of the implicated subject and postmemory in imagining the future on the premise of contemporary socio-political fault-lines in both India and Pakistan. The thirdspace becomes pertinent here as an intersection of memories in a speculative space, mediated through cultural and technological interventions.

Traditionally, speculative fiction produced by writers from postcolonial nations has been employed for two purposes; to explore the possibilities of a future through scientific prediction and the revival of the cultural past in a setting liberated from the oppressive subconscious. The selected texts also deal with the themes of speculative fiction by projecting the present onto a projected future, while putting forth the questions of remembering and erasure confronted by the outcasts in the society. For this purpose, I will be borrowing from Frantz Fanon’s explication of the zone of non-being as a racial concept underlying the incomprehension and misrecognition of oppression due to the hierarchical structures. However, the fluctuation between the zones of being and non-being will pertain to the implications of indirect responsibility in the subjective memories of the implicated subjects in these dystopian settings.

## **1.2 Thesis statement**

The psycho-spatiality of the implicated subjects reveals their responsibility in the cultural and technological conundrums that they endure in dystopian settings of the selected texts. Their socio-political position in enabling the structural inequalities has been materialized in the speculative settings, derived from real spaces through their memories. Furthermore, the dissertation delves into the notion of postmemory as a

transformative recollection of memories contextualized in these speculative settings, unraveling the complex interplay between postmemory and its significance in shaping the selected dystopian narratives.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

- To explore the interaction between the spatial theory and psychological repercussions as an intermediary between memories and the socio-political conditions of the characters.
- To analyze the significance of the memories of the secondary participants in creating speculative settings in the selected literary texts.
- To access the socio-political conditions of the characters as a way to unravel the structural inequalities rampant in South Asian societies in the wake of technological advancement.

### 1.4 Research questions

1. How does the interplay of the spatial setting and characters' memories lead to a commentary on contemporary socio-political conditions, specifically in Pakistani and Indian societies, encompassing the settings of the selected works?
2. What role does the implicated subject play in constructing speculative settings through the mediation of prosthetic memory, particularly in the selected cyber-punk novel *Chosen Spirits*?
3. In what ways does the intricate relationship between technological advancement and cultural conundrums impact the oppressive regimes and the resistance against the socio-political marginalization by the characters?

### 1.5 Significance and rationale of the study

The research aims to analyze dystopian fiction from India and Pakistan with various configurations of memory studies. It premises upon the role of memory in foregrounding socio-political fault-lines. It aims to explore how contemporary social dilemmas play out in futuristic and uncanny dystopian settings. Furthermore, it illuminates the holistic nature of memory and its crucial role in highlighting the fissures between collective and individual experiences. While postmemory and implicated subjects are researched in the area of holocaust studies to a great extent, the phenomenon of cultural violence among inhabitants of the same space has rather been an under-researched area in the domain of literary studies. For this purpose, I aim



to study three works of Indian and Pakistani speculative fiction, to explore the consequences of cultural and technological intervention in the transmission of memories. The selected works include Usman T Malik's short stories collection *Midnight Doorways*(2021), Prayag Akbar's novel *Leila*(2019) and Samit Basu's novel *Chosen Spirits*(2020). The requisite of the scope of present study follows the pretext of speculative fiction with socio-political connotations, set in India and Pakistan. Although the study includes two novels and short stories collection, the similar themes of configuration and re-configuration of memories borne by the bystanders or the implicated subjects, links the research premise. Furthermore, Patricia Leavy in her book *Fiction as Research Practice : Short Stories, Novellas, and Novels*(2016), defines short stories as “a way of making an impact in a relatively short read” and novel as “effective for telling a complex story or multiple intersecting or overlapping stories”, particularly “when deep characterization or plot development is needed to communicate the thematic content, or when the story unfolds over a period of time” (Leavy 57). Although, the short story and novel are both subgenres of fiction, they vary in length and complexity.

The choice of South Asian Speculative texts also becomes slightly hindered on account of the emerging position of the genre in the literary canon. However, in the scope of the given research, the texts have been selected on account of their complexity of narrative in envisioning speculative spaces. In the given case, the short stories collection also spans over a period of time, ranging over the memories of the characters. Moreover, each short story in the collection enunciates a specific event through flashbacks and witnessing, while the novels deal with a chain of related events with the same intensity and complexity of narrative. Initially, the selection of the two novels *Chosen Spirits* and *Leila*, and the short stories collection *Midnight Doorways* was purported by their categorization as South Asian Speculative Fiction and their pertinent themes of memory, cultural violence and technological advancement. It also adds multi-faceted insights into the intersection of memory, complicity, power dynamics and physical spaces by including narratives from both India and Pakistan, offering a profound commentary in the domain of literary research on South Asian Speculative Fiction. Moreover, the analysis of each of the texts offers a unique commentary on the socio-political conditions. For instance, the analysis of *Leila* delves into the overture of social class hierarchy intertwined with technological advancement and personal loss. The analysis of *Chosen Spirits* explores the interplay between memory, complicity and power dynamics in the interstitial space between the real and virtual world. Whereas, the textual analysis of the selected fables from *Midnight Doorways* explicates an elaborate commentary on social conundrums in Pakistan, encompassing religious intolerance, remnants of the colonial past and apathy in the wake of technological advancement. However, the collocating elements between the selected texts are the recurring themes derived from the given research questions, encompassing the speculative setting, the interplay between cultural conundrums and technological advancement and the congruence with contemporary socio-political conditions.

The study aims to expand the debate on cultural memory and literary spatiality, into new dimensions through the inclusion of the notions of prosthetic memory and the implicated subject. It also

attempts to analyze the nuances of resistance against oppressive regimes and historical evidence against the marginalization of the outcasts, as witnessed by the implicated subjects or the bystanders. Furthermore, the proposed research project combines the fields of literary studies and memory studies as an attempt to redefine the role of literature in not only pronouncing social dilemmas but in foregrounding the monstrous progression of current dilemmas into a future catastrophe. It posits the role of the implicated subjects in exploring the various dimensions of memory in dystopian settings by analyzing the role of the implicated subjects in the making of speculative spaces through postmemory in culturally stratified societies. The portability of memory from individual to collective spaces, and vice versa, as mediated through technological and cultural conundrums will be explored in the present study through a psycho-spatial lens. The psycho-spatial dimension aims to explore the representations of the intersection between real and virtual worlds, through the memories of the implicated subjects.

## **1.6 Delimitation**

The research project has been delimited to speculative and gothic literary works from India and Pakistan. The three selected texts fall within the genre of speculative fiction, however a few instances *Midnight Doorways* can be categorized as gothic fiction. Since it aims to explore the notions of postmemory, implicated subjects and hybrid spaces enabling the performance of memory and its implications, the theoretical framework has also been delimited to the aforementioned dimensions of literary theory. It is also pertinent to consider that the parameters prescribed for the current research project were quite specific, therefore only three literary works with relevant themes from India and Pakistan have been selected for the study. The theoretical lens has been triangulated with the framework of memory studies, the implicated subject through the psycho-spatial lens supplemented by the congruence of Soja's thirdspace and Levi's gray space.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The Literature Review encompasses the historical progression of the genre of speculative fiction from Mythology, gothic fiction and science fiction to its contemporary research implications, particularly in the domain of Postcolonial Literature. It also sheds light on the various dimensions of memory, ranging from Marianne Hirsch's postmemory to Michael Rothberg's implicated Subject. It draws upon the connections between the postcolonial socio-political repercussions and its interpretations in the genre of science fiction and related genres. Furthermore, it also explicates the research implications of Michael Rothberg's theorization of the Implicated Subject in post-atrocity literature. The discussion will be focused on research manifestations of contemporary South Asian Fiction. It also aims to summarize the literary research in the area of trauma studies emphasizing memory and the role of spaces, both virtual and real, in the construction of these memories. The notions of complicity and indirect responsibility in literary research will be discussed. The notions of postmemory with its classification into photographic memory and prosthetic memory will also be delineated and further explicated in the relevant research conducted on the selected novels.

#### **2.2 Science Fiction and related genres in the Postcolonial world**

According to Northrop Frye, all literature emerges out of myth. Mythology transfigures rituals and traditions in the contemporary world of science and objectivity. According to Frye, myths are based on the crucial elements of a society and therefore provide a compass for the culture and values of a certain society. Although, modern mythology is believed to have been derived from religious myths, religious myths differ from literary myths in many ways. Religious myths are dominantly premised upon the emotions of the believers and the journey of self-identification, through the themes of "birth and renewal, honour and courage, temptation and devotion, good versus evil"(Rukeyser 2). Similarly, the selected texts also deal with the themes of death, birth, courage and violence. Science fiction, like myths, enables the readers to imagine and consider the future(Rukeyser 3). Hence, speculative fiction allows the readers to interact with the future

and experience it as an individual, rather than passively contributing to the collective regimes of violence and silence. Furthermore, speculative fiction provides ground for the interaction of potential bystanders with the non-beings in the society in a futuristic setting, that eventually reflects on their role in enabling various forms of mass violence by projecting cultural and social events in a new light through implications of science and contemporary fault-lines. Therefore, speculative fiction unravels the possibilities for the future and dystopian fiction reveals the implications of contemporary threats in a futuristic setting. It is also inevitable to isolate mythology from dystopian fiction, as it is troublesome to divorce contemporary science fiction from religious myths of the past. H. G. Wells, who is known as the father of science fiction predicted the “shape of things to come” (Rukeyser 10) through his speculation of the future in the light of contemporary conditions. Most of his works can be termed as science fiction “future histories” (Rukeyser 12-13), which are defined as the story of the future emerging out of present conflicts, challenges, achievements and losses. Similarly, the selected stories and novels also fall into the domain of future stories. One of the fundamental aims of speculative fiction is to depict the present horrors in a future setting, as a warning of their gravity. Both selected texts deal with inter-religious and ethnic discrimination along with the socio-political implications of the contemporary conundrum. It is also pertinent that the current study has been delimited to violence and discrimination against religious minorities.

Horror pulp fiction provides a fertile ground for the dissemination of stereotypes and the national narrative, particularly in the case of India and Pakistan. "Nationalism in Pakistan's pulp fiction" explores the demarcation between good and evil, based on religious differences. The demonization of Hindus has been instrumentalized through the Urdu pulp fiction widely read among the masses to solidify the differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, particularly the Hindus. The paper concludes how stereotypes are conveyed through uncanny elements in literature by emphasizing undecidability and the inability of a group to move across place and time. The author has analyzed stereotypes through Bhabha's theorization of ambiguity as an assertive entity. Furthermore, the uncanny elements in the selected stories have been dissected through their undecidable nature and disruption of binaries in Derrida's terms. Stereotypes are further analyzed through the concept of abjection, constituting familiarity and repulsion of an object or idea, which proves to be crucial in identity construction.

Masao Miyoshi in his article “A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State” argues that the memory of “Occupational and administrative Colonialism” persists in the form of resistance postcolonial discourses (Miyoshi 727). He further reinforces that colonialism has taken on a new face in the form of “transnational corporatism” in developing countries (Miyoshi 728). After the independence of these nation-states, the “old compradors” or the collaborators took over the government of the newly independent states and perpetuated the postcolonial deterioration as “inextricably enmeshed” processes of Decolonization and colonization (Mayashi 729). This postcolonial deterioration dominantly relied upon the newly found national identity that Mayashi defines as the “counterfeit reproduction of and by its former

conqueror in many places” (Mayashi 730). The inter-religious discrimination and cultural violence resulting from it, can also be categorized as one of the implications of this postcolonial deterioration of identity and culture. The new national coherence and identity were structured in such a way that the opposition "articulated their identity"(Mayashi 730). As a result, the quest for a liberated nation-state as a "utopian dream" was soon relegated to a "bloody nightmare", because the resistance was adequate for the liberation movement, but not enough a chart out a concrete national identity for its inhabitants" (Mayashi 730). The nation-state went on to inhabit an ideal version of an “Imagined community” based on “the myth of civilastrice” reinforcing the superiority of one race over another (Mayashi 732). Although the hierarchy of the British over the Indians was replaced by a new form of a hierarchy of religious and national aspirations, the ideology was based on the same idea borrowed from the previous masters. While India upheld the caste system as the defining feature of national interest, Pakistan upheld the religious system of hierarchy. He further diverges into socio-economic implications of Neo-colonialism by charting out a case study of TNCs and MNCs operating in East-Asian countries, as compared to economic progress in the West. He establishes that only a small group of privileged class benefits from the appropriation of the nation-state by the transnational corporations. He also criticizes the idea of nationalism arising out of newly liberated states, being synonymous with “the ethnic cleansing, neo-racism and neo-ethnicism”, particularly in the sub-continent (Mayashi 744). He further disregards the cultural and intellectual debate under the guise of "post-colonialism" as a "secret nostalgia...collaborating with the hegemonic ideology" of Colonialism" (Mayashi 751). The thesis that he has introduced in the paper is quite corroborative with the premise running through the given research project, however, I will be focusing on the creation of an alternative imagined community filled with the fears of the present dilemmas projected on the surrealistic canvas. His premise is dominantly centered on political and socio-economic notions, though I aim to extend the debate in the domain of socio-political and psychospacial implications of dystopian fiction. Moreover, the old comprador or privileged class will be replaced by the implicated subjects in the proposed research.

### **2.3 Role of the implicated subject in (Post)memory**

In contrast to the ideal victims, perpetrators, and bystanders of the violation of human rights, the implicated subjects are morally compromised and most definitely attached—often without their conscious knowledge and in the absence of evil intent—to consequential political and economic dynamics (Rothberg 33). They are often complicit with the oppressive structure to maintain their comparative privilege that gradually becomes the bane of their existence. In most cases, implication may be derived “from those continuities and intimacies” in historical accounts, but also especially from a structural position in relation to groups, classes, and modes of production that makes some people the beneficiaries of histories “not their own” and disadvantages others (Rothberg 79). Thus, the implicated subjects become a significant categorization in analyzing the historical responsibility and secondary guilt of the by-standers. The

fluctuating conditions they face in the dystopian shift and their privilege or its loss thereof reveals the structural injustices or background conditions faced by the characters in the given narratives.

The theorization of the Implicated subject in literary studies has been explicated in Oliver T. Jones in their article “READING IMPLICATION: MORAL INJURY IN HEINRICH BOHLL’S BILLARD UM HALB ZEHN AND VASILII GROSSMAN’S VSE TECHET”. Jones enunciates the significance of implication theory in conducting comparative literary research in post-atrocity literature, in transgressing the conventional victim-perpetrator binary and “to fashion new prisms to investigate narratives that thematize other historical subject positions to expand our understanding of the multi-faceted role that literature plays in memory formation” (Jones 154). Jones analyzes Post-Stalinist fiction from Spain and Post-Socialist Fiction from Germany to explicate the role of implication in the complexity of memories in literature across societies (Jones 157). Jones inculcates the trauma theory in conducting a memory studies research in comparative literature by emphasizing the therapeutic testimony i.e. “vocalizing of an account of the traumatic experience” (Jones 157). She further argues that the “trauma paradigm” restricts “our ability to understand texts that describe the ramification of complex, morally ambiguous experiences of violence”(Jones 157). Moral injuries like trauma or PTSD are not considered like “mental disorders, but rather as a psychological or emotional response to a moral transgression” (Jones 158). Thus, moral injuries or implication offers diverse avenues of interpretation and theorization, as compared to the trauma paradigm, and enables the researcher to look into related areas of psychology and memory studies. Moral injuries, like PTSD also encapsulates the phenomenon of re-experiencing of past events through fragments of memories, secondary guilt and witnessing, however it is isolated from the “experience of victimhood” (Jones 159). Similarly, implication also coincides with secondary encounters with the past events in the form of recollecting or witnessing. Pederson distinguishes trauma from moral injury as the former carrying traces of absence or “unspeakability” of the pain and suffering, while the latter is marked by the “excess of emotions such as shame and demoralization” (Jones 159). Jones also builds upon the recent scholarship of Lucy Bond and Stef Craps in the field of trauma studies, suggesting that the study of implication emphasizes the individual responsibility in the “systematic forms of injustice” as compared to the psycho-analytic strategies of traumatic studies, inducing a “depoliticizing effect” emphasizing individual victimhood (Jones 159). Thus, the study of post-atrocity fiction through the lens of implication explicates the connection between individual responsibility and collective oppression as well as the productivity of witnessing and memory beyond the victim-perpetrator paradigm. It incorporates the implication of secondary emotional penetration in instances of moral transgression enabled through collective structures of oppression.

While the Implicated subjects will be analyzed through the lens of memory studies, the victims will be projected in the zones of non-being, as theorized by Franz Fanon. In the given case, the minorities are placed in the zone of non-being or a black hole due to the inarticulation and misrecognition of their experiences. The state of non-beings distorts their identities, and they adopt superimposed identities as a

coping mechanism. It also ascribes them to a liminal state of being. With the inception of Pakistan, the Muslim minorities formed a majority, while other religious identities organically fell into the domain of minorities. The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah was aware of the incumbent change and charted out the ideology of the newly established country as a space for everyone under the “image of an idealized, cohesive, near- homogenous view of national identity” (Cilano 11). Cara Cilano’s article “All these angularities” analyzes the spatialization of non-Muslim minorities in an Islamic country in five Pakistani Anglophone texts. It focalizes the movement of non-Muslim characters through the space of a country established on the notion of a distinct Muslim identity while unravelling the nuances of an appropriate city as contrasted with the "inappropriate ones" (Cilano 14). Cilano's premise is focused on the material manifestation of social imaginaries created out of the national ideology of Pakistan. While Cilano’s premise is dominantly concerned with the material spatialization and transformation of the material state after the partition, the current study will deal with the abstract remnants of the legacy of violence and discrimination against the outcasts. She further portrays the gendered and religious spatialization of minorities in a Muslim majority state. While Cilano sheds light on the erasure of material spaces previously occupied by the non-Muslim minorities, I aim to draw attention to the role of implicated subjects or indirect participants in projecting the zones of non-being through a psycho-spatial lens. The Inhabitants of the zone of non-being, as theorized by Franz Fanon, are subjected to oppression, violence and discrimination by the people in power. The distinction between the zone of being and the zone of non-being is articulated by the layers of violence they are subjected to. While the individuals occupying the zone of being are acknowledged and their sufferings are recognized, the individuals occupying the spaces of non-being are silenced, erased and scrutinized in terms of their memories and experiences. Furthermore, the implicated subjects, who are neither the victims nor the perpetrators, witness the demarcation may often occupy the dynamic role at the interstitial space between the zones of being and non-being. Their experiences as bystanders will be analyzed in the given research project while emphasizing their role as inhabitants and upholders of zones of violent cycles. The respective zones are not only material spaces but markers of power structures and abstract negotiations and notions of violence as well. Although Fanon establishes the thesis that there is a concrete demarcation between the zones of being and non-being, Rothberg’s conceptualization of the present and the past and memory as a cyclic process expands the notion. My premise zooms into the entanglement between fantasy and ground realities, present and the future, and the simultaneous histories of violence against minorities on both sides of the border. The integration of the zone of being and non-being enhances the theoretical framework by providing a holistic understanding of the implicated subjects within the dystopian settings. .



## 2.4 The postulates of Psycho-spatiality in South Asian Speculative fiction

Jessica Langer in "Postcolonialism and Science Fiction" theorizes the notion of the transgression of boundaries, hybridity and trauma in her genesis. She draws upon the "forced collapse of boundaries by a strong and violent force", particularly as depicted in works of science fiction produced in postcolonial nations (Langer 110). She further classifies the transgression of the boundaries of "the city, body and mind" that are often overlapping and connected. Her thesis follows the forced activation of hybridity and its implications in the postcolonial context and focalizes the point where the boundaries transgress, also termed the site of hybridity. She theorizes hybridity in the city as a "microcosm of stratification and subalternity", as the material space offers a combination of imperial aggression, technological progress and Multicultural richness (Langer 111). The utopian idealism connected with cities, like the dream of an ideal nation-state, is inverted and its memories are corroborated onto a dystopian canvas. The metropolitan myth is therefore ruptured and provides space for dystopian imagination in the absence of protection and certainty. Similarly, the ghost of idealistic aspirations lurks in the background of the selected dystopian texts. While the spaces of cities may be characterized as sites for enabling hegemonic structures, the "cultures of these spaces" provide "an active resistance to a racist society" (Langer 112). Langer concludes the chapter about hybridity by suggesting positive implications of radical spaces opened by the notion of ambivalence. She also includes the novel concept of "heterotopia" as the combination of dystopia and utopia as a dialectical entity through which one enables the existence of the other. Her theorization of the role of hybrid spaces in science fiction is significant here, as it opens the scope for analyzing the performance of postmemory in the space of the city. Speculative fiction offers space for converging the present into the past, and future into the present, as well as the resulting radical material spaces inhabiting the abstract futuristic and fantastical ideas of being and non-being.

The literary studies on speculative and utopian South Asian fiction have dominantly been limited to feminist perspective. Rokayya Sakhawat Hussain's *Sultana's Dream* has been one such seminal feminist speculative text that has recently become popular in the literary discourse. Barnita Bagchi in her article "Speculating with human rights: two South Asian women writers and utopian mobilities", analyzes Hussain's "Sultana's Dream" and *Padmarag* and Vandana Singh's "Delhi" as utopian and speculative texts exploring mobilities of the characters and temporal boundaries. The texts grapple with the themes of gender equality through the construction of simultaneous utopias and dystopias. "Sultana's Dream" posits an alternative reality in which gender roles are reversed, as men are secluded in their homes to ensure freedom of women. She constructs "an urban female-led utopia" in which women are free to pursue their scientific and educational interests (Bagchi 75). Similarly, Singh's "Delhi" also builds upon the metropolis of Delhi, as a dystopian setting intensifying the class divide with the flyovers for the privileged class and the slum areas for the poor class. Bagchi concludes that both writers "reimagine the South Asian megapolises" unraveling "complex realizations" of their societies and its structural inequalities, particularly gender inequalities. Singh's "Delhi" also extrapolates "non-Eurocentric

reconceptualization” of western elements of speculative fiction (Bagchi 78). Therefore, both women writers from South Asia have constructed utopian and dystopian accounts of post-colonial conditions while emphasizing on feminist themes. The selected texts in the current study also build upon the South Asian metropolis, however these encapsulate the diverse themes of ecological and social disruption, particularly the structural inequalities arising out of class differences and encompassing climate change, totalitarianism and censorship. It is also pertinent to consider the transgression from post-colonial themes and retrospection of inter-religious and inter-cultural conflict within the individuals sharing class privilege.

Nudrat Kamal in “Dreaming Futures: The Risks and Rewards of South Asian Futurisms” defines postcolonial science fiction as “that particular kind of science fiction that acknowledges and then subverts, in different ways, the genre’s genealogical and ideological debt to colonialism” (Kamal 18). Kamal situates South Asian Science fiction within the resistive domain of African futurism, as both “draw on their unique histories and culture” and challenge the western centric ideas related to science fiction (Kamal 19). African and South Asian science fiction are also similar in the notion of challenging western ideas of modernity, which has now been transformed into neocolonialism and global capitalism. The article extrapolates texts from Pakistan and India that provide “a futuristic vision...where existing divisions along class, caste and religious lines are only exacerbated and intensified in the face of technocracy and climate change” (Kamal 25). Kamal argues that *Leila* draws upon the “interconnectedness of the ideas of utopia and dystopia (Kamal 25), as the social segregations are exacerbated by the social structures that benefitted Shalini, the protagonist of the novel, before the dystopian elements take over her life. Kamal also refers to two Pakistani texts, *Shehr-e-Tabassum* and *Swipe*, along the same vein as *Leila*, dealing with the themes of totalitarianism and religious extremism. *Shehr-e-Tabassum* or The city of smile is a short film in which the inhabitants of the city are prohibited to feel any emotions except happiness. Their emotions are monitored by a device called Hasmukh and their freedom of speech and expression is also constrained through the use of flying bots. Similarly, the short story “Swipe” grapples with the futuristic repercussions of religious and ideological conflict in the domain of cyber expression and surveillance. The writer of *Swipe*, Mazhar, inculcates the notion of cyber-khilafat defined as the “modern forms of Islam, technology and power combined to corrupt language and dictate political and social norms to mute individual identity”. It follows the narrative of an app iFatwa which monitors and issues religious death sentences and monitors and displays the levels of sins committed by the citizens to regulate the state based on ideas of religious purity and censorship.

Speculative fiction in the given study will be analyzed through a psycho-spatial lens by incorporating Edward W Soja’s notion of the “thirdspace” derived from Henry Lefebvre’s conception of “representational spaces” as “space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and users', but also of some artists and perhaps of those, such as a few writers and philosophers,” (Lefebvre 39). Speculative fiction in general and dystopian fiction in particular, pertains to the imagination of the writers, and envisions a strategic future based on contemporary conditions. Therefore, the given works of literary fiction will be explored through the notion of Lefebvre’s representational spaces, and its extrapolations by various theorists,

such as Soja. While, Homi K Bhabha's conception of the "third space" carries significant traces of "a colonial or postcolonial provenance" (Bhabha 56), the thirdspace, in the current framework, refers to the locus of experiences mediated through psycho-spatial displacement as an outcome of technological and cultural conflicts in the speculative settings. Soja's Thirdspace explicates the lived experience of the individuals in a locus of geographical space, or imagination and reality. Similarly, Bhabha's third space may be defined as the interstitial cultural and political experience of the colonial subjects who are constantly negotiating between their own culture and the culture of the colonizer.

Although Soja's and Bhabha's conception theorizes the thirdspace as a productive space at the locus of representation of lived and imaginary psychological and spatial identities, Michael Rothberg alludes to Bhabha's problematizing of "proximity to the dispossessed" and argues that Bhabha "overlooks the structure of spectatorship created in this procession and thus the problem of implication" and focuses instead on the "precariousness of the other" (Rothberg 115). Michael Rothberg borrows from Primo Levi's conceptualization of the gray zone as a space lying beyond the black and white as "the process of victimization in the camps does not only produce victims who are clearly set against perpetrators, but in addition creates a whole cast of characters marked by shades or degrees of complication who are not easy to place on either moral or juridical maps" (Rothberg 39). The positionality of the key characters in the three selected texts breaks away from the theorization of the "innocent victims", but coincides with the complicated moral and socio-political choices. Levi particularly focalizes the moral and juridical politics in the "concentrationary spaces", similar to the virtual and dystopian spaces in the selected texts of the research (Rothberg 39). Consequently, the concentration camps have been analyzed as the physical spaces facilitating the psychological manipulation of the inmates and grooming victims who act as facilitators of the oppression by the perpetrators. Rothberg refers to Primo Levi's concept of "the gray zone" as a space of "complexity and ambiguity" borne by the subjects in highly oppressive structures (Rothberg 37). He derived the gray zone from the "world of concentrationary universe" through his observation of the nazi camps, in which the enemy "was not only outside but also inside"...because of the blurred borders, perhaps countless, one between every person and every other"( Rothberg 38). Levi is primarily concerned with the enclosed spaces in his theorization of the gray zone, as he breaks away from the "stereotypical notions of the innocent victim", and problematizes the boundary between the victim and the perpetrator. In his study, he is concerned with the complicated characters who cannot be classified by the notions of conventional morality (Rothberg 39). The gray zone is quite pertinent in analyzing the role of the implicated subjects in the spaces of physical and psychological concentration in the selected texts. In *Leila*, the purity tower where she has been confined after being separated from her daughter, can be analyzed as the gray zone. While in *Chosen Spirits*, the flow can be analyzed as the gray zone between the real and virtual world of experiences. *Midnight Doorways* addresses the gaps between public memory and individual perception through the inculcation of dystopian elements in the fables. The spectre of personal history lingers over the fragments of the colonial past and a dystopian future in Malik's fables. The analysis captures the ways in which

memories are mediated, and their potential to reshape personal, familial, and collective history through the intervention of psycho-spatial orientation of the characters.

Björn Krondorfe in his article “Hunger: Testing Testimonial limits in the gray zone” analyzes the role of the implicated subjects or individuals who were complicit with the violence imposed on their fellow prisoners during the Holocaust and World War II. He unravels the notion of complicity by utilizing a triangulated lens encapsulating Rothberg’s theorization of the Implicated Subject. Krondorfe zooms into the “limits of testimony in the gray zone” by dissecting the limitations of witnessing and empathizing capacity of the individuals inhabiting the gray zone (2). He problematizes the expression of certain events of subjugation and oppression, by the secondary participants. The testimonials of both the victims and accomplices reveal their moral responsibility and fragmented empathy (Krondorfe 3). Krondorfe’s study focalizes the notion of hunger in the extreme circumstances of Nazi Germany and World War II, and by doing so, it opens up an avenue of ethical complexities around physical distress and moral compass. He also contextualizes the suffering and empathy of the accomplices during times of extreme duress and injustice (Krondorfe 6). According to Primo Levi, the individuals who occupied the gray zone in Nazi Germany were “assigned administrative duties...in exchange for limited privileges such as promises to protect their families from deportation, extra food, clothing, shelter, etc.” and were made to “compromise their morality to the point of culpability” (Krondorfe 8). These accomplices enabled the enforcement of “order...lamented their inability to help in meaningful ways, and zoomed in on particular incidents with pained sensitivity and empathy” (Krondorfe 9). In this case, the victims are confronted by the “ethical loneliness”, a philosophical term coined by Jill Stauffer as the isolation felt by the violated person “when one feels abandoned by humanity...a condition undergone by persons who have been unjustly treated and dehumanized by human beings and political structures” (Krondorfe 11). In this case, the victims are oppressed by the political structures imposed through other human beings, particularly their fellow prisoners acting as accomplices to the oppressors. Thus, Krondorfe concludes that the actions of accomplices are an outcome of their “limited control” and they express their empathy with the victims by articulating their testimonies in writing (Krondorfe 12). While Krondorfe’s article deals with distress of hunger and resulting control entrusted upon the accomplices, the texts in the current study deal with the lack of accessible resources, freedom of speech and the varying role of the accomplices revealed through their memories in a dystopian setting.

“Pakistani Speculative fictions, origins, contestations and origins” deals with the current trends rising in Pakistani Anglophone Speculative Fiction and its association with Urdu folklore and speculative fiction. It also foregrounds the elements of “multi-layered past and region’s future in general” by including oral folklore tradition in speculative narratives (Kanwal 245). The article further explores the implications of introducing the elements of Urdu popular speculative fiction into the mainstream Global Speculative to mark the domain of Pakistani Anglophone Speculative Fiction, as well as “writing back to the Western jinn narrative fiction”(Kanwal 246). Another work of Speculative fiction by Usman T. Malik *The Pauper Prince and the Eucalyptus Jinn* also

reflects on the themes of exile and belonging through the trope of superstition and folklore. The article concludes on the premise that PASF utilizes the indigenous folklore even to re-appropriate the Western tradition of Science fiction, and eventually creates a space for introspection into the last while advancing towards an alternative future. Henceforth, the genre of speculative fiction becomes a medium for articulating resistance against oppression and psycho-spatial displacement, particularly in the postcolonial context.

Since the current study revolves around the behavior of people in their treatment of the outcasts, or those who are considered as sub-humans, the deep insight into the study of human behavior in relation to cultural violence, could also prove to be useful here. In this case, the memories of the violence of the subjects will be explored both from an objective and a subjective insight into the cultural violence. Cultural violence can be defined as “aspects of culture and social life – exemplified by religion, ideology, language, art, law and science – that could be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence, making direct and structural look, or even feel, right – or at least not wrong (Galtung 291). Cultural violence encompasses the legitimization of violence in a society, based on religion, ethnicity, ideology and other forms of being. Galtung argues that a “violent structure does not only leave marks on the body but also on the mind and the spirit” (Galtung 294). It is also crucial to consider that the structural violence in the selected works dominantly arises out of the non-identification of the bystander with the victim, therefore ascribing a state of non-being to their identities, while the indigenous myths and familial memories provide space for recognition. Nicholas Webber in his theoretical essay about Fanon's concept of the non-being establishes the premise that “his performative *identification* with the collective identity of the black man—remains trapped by untruths, myths, stereotypes, and neuroses”(Webber 4). The individual status of non-being leads to a culture of erasure and non-recognition internalized and passed on in the society. Silence or erasure plays a significant role in enabling violence, mediated through the acts of forgetting in cultural and technological conundrums.

## 2.5 From Memory to Postmemory

Marianne Hirsch's work explores the role of postmemory as a means of transmitting memories across time and space. She theorizes the interaction of traumatic memory with “intergenerational acts of transfer” (Hirsch 104). She establishes the notion of “postmemory” beyond the notion of a “temporal delay, location and the aftermath” (Hirsch 106), as an abstract focal point of interconnection and interaction between the bystanders and the victims. Postmemory comprises the memories passed down through “stories, images and behaviors among which they grew” (Hirsch 107). The scope of the research dissertation establishes that the authors of speculative fiction craft a form of reverse postmemory by envisioning how the

future generations will interact with historical events. The process corroborates the mediation of the contemporary crisis through creative construction, attributing the past into the theory of postmemory.

Hirsch's theorization of postmemory builds upon the work of Jan and Aleida Assmann in memory studies. Jan Assmann's seminal work signifies a shift from individual to collective domain of memory perception. However, in speculative fiction, the shift reverses with individual memories interacting with collective memory in the public domain, as it becomes a continuous act of speculating in constructing individual and collective narratives and the blurring demarcation between the two. Moreover, the given research project diverges in the direction of the significance of the memory of the implicated subjects in cultural violence against marginalized groups, as depicted in speculative fiction. Hirsch also emphasizes the significance of public history in overshadowing personal interactions with the same events (Hirsch 158), wherein she explores family photographs by individuals sharing a particular historical context. Just like the family life "mediated through Collective imaginary shaped by the public, generational structures of fantasy" (Hirsch 114), the memories depicted in the selected speculative fiction are also mediated through national and social imaginary transmitted across various communities. Although a photographic memory differs from a piece of literature in many ways, the horror and anticipation offered by speculative fiction corroborates with the effect of a photograph. Through this process of super-imposition and self-identification, memory converges with "fantasy to be social and political", as it traverses across spatial, temporal and psychological boundaries (Hirsch 159). The photograph thus becomes a site of "layered present on which various pasts are projected" (Hirsch 166), which splits the viewer into the role of "actor and spectator", in turn creating the space for the role of the implicated subject.

The images produced through the narrative of (post)memory in Malik's fables, the recollection of a peaceful world in the wake of socio-political doom in *Leila* (2019) and the memory of a forgotten normal life in *Chosen Spirits* (2020) articulate the distorted and traumatic memories, as an observer and participant of the holistic journey of moving across time and space. The reader therefore becomes a performer of a certain postmemory by immersing in a new world with all their senses, rather than a passive observer. While the moment according to Jan Assmann, is when personal accounts transform into cultural artefacts and recordings and move from the individual domain to the domain of collective memory. In speculative fiction, such a shift reverses, and the individual elements of memory play out against the collective memory. This memory is enacted at an individual level, rupturing the boundaries between individual and the collective. Performative memory delineates how remembering is an ongoing process of speculation. Particularly, photographic memory can be instrumental in the construction of memory, as it facilitates individual memory through the collective focal point. Thus, each instance of remembering corroborates a chain of individual and collective memory. As Bertens argues that the spectator of an artwork becomes a performer of memory by speculating their own version of a particular memory. Similarly, speculative fiction also materializes the memory in a futuristic setting by building upon the points of contention in the contemporary world. The

participants and spectators of the video-walk play a significant role in constructing the memory and emphasizing the dynamic nature of memory, by elucidating an uncanny state between reality and performance. Similarly, the readers of speculative fiction will also experience this uncanny state between the present and the future, by recognizing the elements from real life and speculating on their transformation into unfamiliar, grotesque and futuristic elements.

## 2.6 Speculating the Prosthetic Memory

Alison Landsberg coined the term “prosthetic memory” as a form of “inauthentic memory” that is mediated through artistic medium and empathy as a form of connection with the past, transcending race, class, ethnicity and gender. The artistic mediums explored in the prosthetic memory include film, visual representations and digital worlds. Celia Lury further expands the notion of prosthetic culture as the space implicating complications between “body, memory and consciousness”(Lury 5). The prosthetic culture provides space for “indifferentiation and Outcontextualization between the subject and object and cause and effect”, minimizing the difference between the two phenomenon(Lury 18), since photographic images can both be frozen in time and framed in such a way that they can be “seen from all positions at once, as if in a spatial continuum” (Lury 3). Henceforth, the spatial continuum in the selected speculative texts can also be perceived as a phenomenon congruent to the images, in which the historical and personal events can be seen from the perspective of the present as well as the past in the backdrop of the secondary memories or virtual representation. Lury also utilizes the case study of photographs for her theorization of the prosthetic future. Moreover, she inculcates the notion of the prosthetic biography as a "biography mediated through spatial and temporal specificities of the image" (Lury 190). Lury in her seminal text about the prosthetic culture and memory focuses on the role of photographic image in “re-assembling the relations between consciousness, memory and the body”, while the current study deals with the notions of virtual reality and secondary accounts by the implicated subjects to reconfigure the relations between space, psychology and society. She also defines the prosthetic culture as a form of intervention providing room for "indifferentiation...between the cause and effect, the subject and the object"(Lury 18). Similarly, the depiction of the prosthetic culture in images and fragments of memories will be analyzed in the selected texts through the lens of indifferenciation and rupture between the cause and effect. Although the text that she builds upon for her premise includes film, and photography, the given research project aims to analyze the memories as witnessed and recollected by the bystanders, mediated through their own spatial and temporal limitations and reconstructions. The interplay between public history and personal memory also purports the challenge to maintain a balance between self-identification and the threat of over-appropriation with the victim, while mediating with the past in a speculative setting. While the abstract notion of the moral and psychological burden of a bystander can be adequately gauged through the latter, the spatial dimension

plays a crucial role in connecting the various dimensions of the dystopian narratives with one another. Their individual responsibility and secondary guilt comes to the forefront by dissecting the instances of censorship, control and images of witnessing traumatic events. Political headlines and cultural rites are transfigured into speculative spaces and psychological frameworks of dystopian settings. The prosthetic culture also colludes with the “thirdspace” as the space of complexity and ambiguity, capturing experiences at the crossroads of imagination and reality. Similarly, speculative fiction offers for transporting present challenges into the future as individual and collective memories, mediated through cultural rites and cyber intervention. Furthermore, the memories as witnessed and recollected through accounts of the by-standers are mediated through their own spatial and temporal limitations and past experiences.

“Postmodern Deconstruction of Grand Narratives in Post-Cyberpunk Fiction through Thematic Analysis” elucidates the rising of post-cyberpunk as a genre concordant to post-modernist literature. The researchers establish post-cyberpunk literature as an implication of the “blurring of once defined boundaries” through the postmodern identification of human and machine (245). Wiener (1948) defines cybernetics as a “field of control and communication theory whether in the machine or animal through a continuous flow of information”, as a form of science that disrupts stability and dissolves meaning in human existence (Weiner 245). Similarly, the virtual worlds in cyber-punk literature also disrupt the notions of reality by destabilizing meaning and stable identities. Virtual reality enables the construction of realities that “seem more real than real experiences” through literature and deconstruct the notion of stable identities in the post-cyber world (Weiner 246). The post-Cyber punk fictional texts in the study suggest that stable human identity exists only in the mind, when speculated against a “transhumanist stance” in the realm of virtual reality, including but not limited to the social media networks (Weiner 247). The article discusses the deconstruction of stable human identities through the analysis of related themes in the selected novels surrounding the notion of posthuman/transhuman and trickling down to more specific practices of producing such circumstances through genetic modification and socio-economic globalization. The transhumans are formed through either genetic modifications or by occupying a virtual space beyond the capacity of human beings (Weiner 249). Similarly, technological advancement and the resulting multinational culture have been deconstructed as factors leading to “hyper casualization” in the research (251). Through the thematic analysis of technoglobalization, the study also focuses on the “decentered race” by enabling communication across various cultures, ethnicities, and religions (253). The study concludes that post-cyberpunk literature has been established as a “representative of the present-day technology and technological progress in the form of narratives”, bridging the gap between the technological and social culture (255). The post cyber-punk literature also unravels the gaps in authenticity of memories perceived virtually. The selected literary works also deal with perception of memories and witnessing through virtual and secondary accounts of certain instances of historical and familial trauma. Following the role of participants of memory, the current research project will focus on the role of implicated subjects in enabling violence against religious minorities. Implicated subjects can be defined as the bystander in regimes of violence, as theorized by Michael



Rothberg. Rothberg placates the implicated subject beyond the innocent bystander and ascribes the responsibility of structural violence to their passive actions or inaction (Rothberg 1). Rothberg expands on the notion of the Victim/perpetrator binary and grapples with the spaces of privilege and indirect enablers of violence and discrimination. He goes beyond the “individualist and legalistic assumptions of liberal culture and inadequate to the systemic forms of violence that surround us” (Rothberg 7) and analyzes the role of indirect participants or the bystanders in perpetuating structural violence. He also establishes that the distinction between the synchronic and diachronic aspects of an implication that it is an “ongoing, uneven, and destabilizing intrusion of irrevocable pasts into an unredeemed present” (Rothberg 9), thereby suggesting the dynamic and fluid nature of the role of memory of the implicated subjects. The implicated subjects are also often unconscious of their contribution in the oppression and violence against minorities (Rothberg 11). The theorization of implicated subjects simultaneously probes into the “legacies of violent history and the sociopolitical dynamics that create suffering and inequality in the present (Rothberg 11). The premise of the past intermingling with the present is crucial here because the research project aims to explore the transfiguration of the present into the past and the future in dystopian and fantastical settings. Furthermore, it will also analyze how individual and collective memory plays out in histories of violence. The literature from the sub-continent delineating themes of violence against religious, ethnic and other forms of minorities has been often studied through the lens of the victim/perpetrator binary. The present study aims to fill the space inhabited by implicated subjects lying between the concrete binary and expands the scope for literary research in the concerned area.

In the article “Prayag Akbar’s *Leila*(2019) as a tussle of the humane to survive in the reign of subhumans”, the novel has been analyzed through a Cultural Marxist lens, while focusing on the cultural aspect of class disparity. The authors have built upon the tension between the slummers and the protagonist of the novel, Shalini to illustrate the implications of false consciousness of safety. They also argue that her illusion of safety and privilege is later shattered when she finds herself at the other end of the spectrum. The authors also juxtapose the beauty of the landscapes in the narrative with the hierarchy of power. The article elucidates the consequences of moral negligence and benefitting from one’s privilege in the backdrop of oppression of the downtrodden and the marginalized class of the society. Thus, *Leila* has been read as a social and political allegory of the Indian society. However, my thesis builds upon the significance of the socio-political complicity of the implicated subjects in enabling the oppressive structures that they inhabit and derive their privileges from. It explores the shift in their social positions as the narrative takes a consequential turn, as a productive fissure unravelling the structural injustices within class and caste differences in the society.

## 2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the Literature Review provides a comprehensive overview of the evolution of speculative fiction, tracing its roots from mythology and gothic fiction to contemporary science fiction, with a specific focus on its relevance in the realm of Postcolonial Literature. It has delved into the multifaceted aspects of memory, incorporating Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory and Michael Rothberg's notion of the implicated subject. This review has illustrated the connections between postcolonial socio-political consequences and their interpretations within science fiction and related genres. It has also summarized the research employing the theoretical concepts of the Implicated Subject, Gray Zone and the interplay between trauma studies and spaces of confinement. It has particularly focused on literary research in the realm of South Asian Fiction, highlighting the rationale for formulating the given research premise.

## **CHAPTER 3:**

# **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.1 Research Methodology**

The research method for this qualitative research is textual analysis. As Katherine Belsey writes in her seminal work *Research Methods for English Studies* that 'pure reading' does not exist without the "extra-textual knowledge"(163). Therefore, the selected works can be considered as the field of research, analyzed through the theoretical underpinnings laid out above. The methodology utilized in the project will be textual analysis through which the specific themes aligned with the theoretical lens, and explored in detail. The research also draws upon the triangulation of theories from the field of literary studies, memory studies and spatial studies. The short stories collection and novels will be explored under the lens of the three variables laid out in the research questions, which include the implicated subject, postmemory and psycho-spatiality. The research methodology centered on textual analysis will also follow a top-down approach; as it will classify and organize the narrative running through the short stories collection and the novels, according to the themes to be explored, and then analyzed according to the specific notions in the theoretical delimitation of the research. The analysis of the selected works will be substantiated through the external theoretical framework to add validity to the research project by inculcating Belsey's notion of a "language that pre-exists us"(Belsey 167). In this way, the texts will be interpreted through the cultural, spatial and psychological understanding of the speculative settings in the light of the research questions. The choice of textual analysis also specifies the "historical moment and...culture"(Belsey 169), narrowing down the scope of the research project. While considering the multiple interpretations of the selected texts, the textual analysis entails the reading of a "specific culture" through a triangulated theoretical lens by configuring the psycho-spatial analysis of the implicated subjects and their role in transmitting memories in the given speculative settings. I will be extrapolating the premise as a theoretical-methodological tool to explore the discursive transformation of familiar spaces into speculative places. The psycho-spatial premise of the research focalizes the connections between real and imaginary spaces and the social places occupied by their inhabitants.

### 3.2 Theoretical Framework

The research work reposes on an amalgam of theoretical debates ranging from Michael Rothberg's concept of the implicated subject, Marianne Hirsch's theorization of postmemory, Alison Landsberg's definition of prosthetic memory and Primo Levi's conceptualization of the gray zone along with Soja's thirdspace, utilized to develop the theoretical-methodological lens of psycho-spatiality. Although Jessica Langer's work in the domain of postcolonial science fiction is mainly concerned with narratives of science fiction from postcolonial nations, I aim to expand the theoretical debate towards speculative fiction, including Gothic and dystopian literature from the sub-continent. Furthermore, the role of the implicated subjects as witnesses of socio-political memory, as a consequence of cultural and technological intervention, has been coupled with the theoretical premise of postmemory and prosthetic memory. The theoretical foregrounding of the given research purveys the role of the implicated subject in the transmission of postmemory and prosthetic memory, through the psycho-spatial analysis of the selected texts.

In the domain of the given dissertation, Marianne Hirsch's postmemory has been employed as the fragments of traumatic and cultural memory "not recalled but mediated through imaginative Investment, projection and creation"(5). The imaginative investment and projection play out as a space for the possibility of coping with such experiences in the future. Her expounding of photographic memories of the holocaust as "cropped, enlarged, projected onto other images...re-framed or de or re-contextualized, embedded in new narratives, new texts and surrounded by new frames"(Hirsch 52), will be explored in the given thesis. As Hirsch's theoretical exploration of photographic memory of the holocaust triggers the construction and recalling of the past at the same time, speculative fiction also creates room for re-contextualization and mediation of memory through individual reception of the past in a speculative future. However, the conjectures of photographic memories will be replaced by the nuances of mediation through individual reception in the thirdspace.

Edward W Soja's conceptualization of the Thirdspace as a space "of political choice that is also a meeting place for all peripheralized and marginalized "subjects" wherever they may be located", has been inculcated in the analysis of the selected texts (Soja 35). The gray zone as a psycho-spatial category is pertinent in the current study as it can be seen as a categorization of the space occupied by the implicated subjects. The psycho-spatial lens derived from Soja's Thirdspace and Levi's Gray zone will be utilized in analyzing the memories of the implicated subjects in the dystopian settings of the selected texts. The memories of their envisioned past will be dissected at the locus of imagination and reality under the lens of the thirdspace.

On the other hand, Rothberg's theorization of the implicated subject provides an insight into the "background conditions" or "structural Injustices" beyond the victim/perpetrator imaginaries(Rothberg 51-

52) by dissecting the role of the spectators in enabling historical conditions. It delves into the rather under-analyzed aspects of violence and conflict, in the form of the by-standers. The implicated subject has been speculated on, both through the spatial and psychological lens. The implicated subjects occupy the "place where Privileges are exercised, and historical Legacies shunted aside "(Rothberg 42). The "genealogical connection" of the implicated subjects with the past "propagates the past into contemporary social life" and reveals that their privilege is "derived from shared, structural conditions of inequality" in the present as well as from the past. (Rothberg 80-81). Rothberg's concept of the Implicated subject has been applied in the domain of literary research, as a source of historical guilt and unconscious complicity in legacies of violence and oppression, as discussed in the Literature Review chapter. The memories of the Implicated subjects and their encounters with their layered experiences of privilege and loss thereof, provides insight into the theoretical debate around the notions of memories, privilege, and identity in the physical as well as the cyber space. Along the same vein, the current study incorporates a psycho-spatial lens in the analysis of Speculative Fiction from India and Pakistan to materialize an interdisciplinary theoretical dimension encapsulating the role of implication of the socially privileged individuals and witnesses of certain historical legacies. As the theorization of implicated subject emphasizes the need to "right the historical wrongs", and to pave a way forward, the research aims to analyze the present as the past in the light of dystopian settings, while focusing on the role of the implicated subjects in the facilitation of oppressive structures that they inhabit or organizing resistance against them.

The representation of memory in the digital landscape will further be explored through the lens of prosthetic memory, as "mediated through spatial and temporal specificities of the image", as elaborated in the literature review chapter (Lury 190). The threat of over-appropriation has been eliminated through the emphasis on the implicated subject in the analysis of the selected texts. As the memory of the implicated subject can be analyzed as a narrative of their envisioned past, the notion of prosthetic memory has been incorporated to explore the inauthenticity and distance from the objects of experience in their projections, erasures and representations of experiences. The research project builds upon the theoretical constituents of memory studies through the inculcation of postmemory, prosthetic memory and implicated subject, and literary spatiality by drawing upon Soja's notion of the thirdspace as a theoretical-methodological tool premising the psycho-spatial analysis.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

#### **Exploring the interstitial spaces between memory, complicity and power dynamics**

#### **4.1 The disintegration of the zone of being and the zone of non-being in *Leila*:**

##### **4.1.1 Introduction**

*Leila* by Prayag Akbar is a dystopian account of a woman struggling to reunite with her daughter under an autocratic regime. Shalini gets married to a Muslim Man, Rizwan and Leila is their only daughter. They live a life of luxury in a gated community. However, things take a traumatic turn, when Rizwan is murdered, Leila kidnapped and Shalini confined in a tower for rehabilitation into purity. Shalini, belonging to an upper-class Hindu family, is subjected to physical and mental torture, as a rehabilitation to regain her purity. In the analysis of Prayag Akbar's *Leila*, the character of Shalini, the protagonist, will be dissected as the implicated subject, inhabiting and facilitating the status quo in the society. Her character analysis, closely cognized with the theoretical analysis of the text aims to reveal the social responsibilities borne by the individuals that are neither victims nor perpetrators but serve as secondary participants in the modes of oppression. The analysis will further emphasize upon the spaces of imprisonment and their psychological repercussions as well as the shift in Shalini's personal relationships and her perspective towards her social habitat. The theorization of the implicated subject will be based upon Michael Rothberg's seminal work *Implicated Subject*. Rothberg defines the implicated subjects as individuals occupying the space "where privileges are exercised and historical legacies shunted aside" (Rothberg 42). His premise of the implicated subject further provides insight into the "background conditions" (Rothberg 51), which will be explored in the context of the shift in Shalini's social conditions as a result of her abduction and separation from her daughter.

Moreover, the descriptions of the physical spaces in the narrative, such as the Purity camp, the officers' compound and the slums are significant in explicating Shalini's psycho-spatial positionality as the implicated subject. The physical structures will be explored in elaborate detail to draw connections between the theoretical nuances of Rothberg's implicated subject and its concrete manifestations in the narrative. Her

physical occupation often reiterates her psychological conflict and the memories also appear at the cross-roads of the demarcation between the living spaces of the haves and have-nots in the new society.

#### **4.1.2 The shift in Shalini's social positionality**

Shalini lives a guarded life before the decisive incident. She occupied a space of socio-political privilege before being forced into the Purity one tower. Therefore, she goes through a psycho-spatial displacement, as she confronts a massive shift in her physical space as well as the mental space. She negotiates with the psycho-spatial displacement by recollecting the fragments of her past life in the dystopian setting of her prison. In one of the instances in the novel, she remembers Rizwan talking about the flyroads as a source of their distance from the “Slummers on the side of the road, trash hurtling down the sector walls” (Akbar). The filth is also an outcome of the class disparity as he says that “No one will pay to clean the common roads. They have flyroads so they don't have to see what's down here”. These lines suggest the stark difference between the haves and have nots in Shalini's society. Now Shalini has been forced to join the class of people that she deliberately overlooked, to enjoy her own luxuries. Michael Rothberg defines the implicated subjects as individuals who “contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control them” (Rothberg 1). At another instance in the novel, she joins a protest by the lower class, against the water crisis and eventually turns away from it, feeling sick and “desperate to move to the better section. Where at least the men weren't all wearing this stinking polyester” (Akbar 117). Similarly, Shalini and her husband occupied a privileged social position in their past, that led to the conditions that haunt her present life in the dystopian setting of the novel. She becomes a part of the section of the society that she did not even wish to see, let alone identify with it.

According to Rothberg, these acts of “disidentification...open up a new political space for examining unwelcome forms of implication” (Rothberg 2), similarly these acts of disidentification assign the role of an implicated subject to Shalini, a woman previously belonging to an upper-class Hindu society and now shunned for marrying a Muslim man and contaminating her pure blood, according to the totalitarian regime. The conception of the implicated subject surpasses the “individualistic and legalistic” (Rothberg 7) frameworks of theories related to violence. Rothberg also establishes that the implicated subjects are not frozen “in proximity to power and privilege” but are “dynamic” (Rothberg 8), in their relation to power. The role of the implicated subject keeps on fluctuating, according to their positionality in the system that they inhabit at a certain moment in history. Henceforth, Shalini and Riz occupy the position of the implicated subjects in the society, as they enable and often benefit from the conditions that lead to violence in the society, rather than originating them. Joshi, the fascist leader, instigating the notion of cultural purity, says that the people living in the East-End “think they're better...know better than our respected ancestors. They

think they know better than the rules that governed us for centuries” (Akbar 119). He also reinforces that those who violate the purity of the society must “feel the strength of history” (Akbar 120). Joshi perpetuates the notion that the privileged class residing in the East-End has somehow caused the havoc of the water crisis and chooses to remain oblivious while a major fraction of the society suffers alone.

The Physical spaces in general and the walls in particular play an imperative role in upholding the hierarchy of the system. The spaces, whether imaginary or real are substantial in marking differences between the outcasts and the implicated subject. When Riz enters Shalini’s residential complex for the first time, the tension arising out of an inter-religious love affair comes to the surface. In the beginning, Shalini and her family settle into the society divided by walls, and even start feeling protected inside the walls: “By then my family had settled down as well, in accordance with the new way. Living inside the Arora sector left you with a subtle- not always unpleasant feeling of enclosure” (Akbar 57-58). As Rothberg indicates that the “implicated subjects are morally compromised and most definitely attached—often without their conscious knowledge and in the absence of evil intent—to consequential political and economic dynamics” (33), Shalini also keeps benefitting from her privilege of living in a gated community, until Riz has to struggle to see her in her house. Although, Riz manages to enter the Arora sector with a fake I.D. and some trickery, Shalini bursts out in tears and feels embarrassed that he had to hide his identity just to meet her. When Shalini’s father died, Riz also had to bribe the repeaters or the gatekeepers to get inside the sector. Henceforth, the spaces of enclosure permeate through the psychological and social boundaries. The violations of physical boundaries and trespassing of walls of the sectors are an outcome of resistance against the social and political hierarchy.

After their marriage, they were made to feel like they had done “something terrible”, even though “it wasn’t against the law” (Akbar 75). For this reason, they decided to leave both their parents’ homes and move to the East-end, where they were more openly accepted and could live freely: “The rules were so strict that it was impossible now to live in his sector or mine in any kind of peace” (Akbar 75). Riz’s brother Naz describes the East-end as “godless” where one can do whatever they want, without any restrictions (Akbar 78). Riz tells him that they have left their home because of the new rules that impose the regulations of religion upon both of them. The East-end also did not have a wall, which Naz found alarming and warned that they might feel too “exposed” (Akbar 80). Although Riz and Shalini believed that all residents of the East-end get to decide what they want and hence are free, Naz intervenes and tells them that they would not have even been allowed to enter if they “had come waliking or...were dark disgusting from spending our lives on these rotting roads” (Akbar 81). Riz and Shalini were only able to move out and make their decisions because of their social and financial stability. They escaped from their family homes to make a home in the East-End after violating the unwritten rules of the society that they extracted their privilege from.

The East-end emerges as a privileged bubble, isolated from the sufferings of the world that they have abandoned. It is a place without walls and restrictions, and enables them to live freely in the society. When



Sapna joins the household as Leila's caretaker, Shalini treats her well and as an equal in the beginning. Later on, she felt "somehow less" by the increasing nature of her independence (Akbar 86). Since water was getting scarce because of climate change, day by day, they had to bribe the authorities to get a limited supply. Another obstacle that she faces is the trees and parks turning yellow and brown from green, when they first moved. Although it was a summer of crises with "wailing Slum women, banging brass pots, dragging reporters by the wrists to see the insides of the dark huts" (Akbar 88), all they cared about was their supply of water and the changing color of trees. The poor people wept and cried for help "asking why their family had been ignored so long" (Akbar 88), despite the never-ending suffering. Ironically, after overlooking the sufferings of the deprived people around her, she finds hope for a better future for Leila in a series of painting of "round-headed figures...joined to one another by their outstretched arms, a world of people holding hands" (Akbar 94). Naz replies to this idealistic notion by suggesting that Leila, like her mother is "Clueless about how the world really works(Akbar 95). Rothberg in his theorization of the implicated subject, suggests that their privileges are "derived as much from shared, structural conditions of inequality as from determinate links to the past" (Rothberg 81). Hence, the privileges that Shalini enjoys in her insulated residence are an outcome of her class privilege that enables her to evade the oppression of the authorities.

They are only subjected to the suffering of the have-nots through the television screen or from under the fly-overs. In other words, the implicated subjects have the privilege of choosing their exposure to suffering of others. Their safety and privilege in the society correlates with the economic inequalities. Shalini never confronts her implication into the system that brought about the drastic conditions that she has to endure now, instead she dwells into the trauma of the loss of her family. The class privilege of Shalini and Riz protects them from the violence going on outside the East-End. During the climactic attack on their party, Shalini is worried about her "daisies and petunias and the low halogen lamps lining the pathway" (Akbar 129). The whole scene seems "surreal, as if a scene from the Slum is being acted out from us(them)" (Akbar 129). The attack of the repeaters implicates the shattering of their imaginary walls, and the loss of a place, where "their privileges (are) exercised, and historical legacies shunted aside" (Rothberg ) The suffering of the less privileged class here evades the television screen and the slums. Their shelters of privilege are stripped away as Shalini keeps wishing that she could "go back to the party, to Riz and Leila and how things were" (Akbar 138). She feels that the place where she is imprisoned looks "separate from everything else", because she had always looked at distant suffering as something that was "strange and unreal" (Akbar 140), since she had never been a primary subject of a catastrophe and had often witnessed others being subjected to it. When she gets abducted by the repeaters, the man who catches her says that they have met before and says: "I kept you safe as a child. Kept all the filthy people out. Guarded your walls. We have the same blood" (Akbar 134). Her past protectors have turned into her violators and she finds herself entrapped in a circle of violence she had always been a part of. The dystopian narrative also takes a

new turn by shattering the walls of safety, as Shalini loses her husband and daughter after witnessing a few attacks on the neighbours and other people belonging to her social class.

The water crisis in the novel emerges as a recurring theme highlighting the structural inequalities that lead to the catastrophic conditions that Shalini faces later in the second-half. She remains skeptical and indifferent to the gravity of the water crisis, as she says: “They tend to magnify their woes, hoping for some kind of sympathy” (Akbar 112). She thought of the council, which later emerges as the authoritarian regime, as a mafia restricting her freedom after her marriage and responsible for “producing these surgical vibrations of violence” (Akbar 114). On her first day in the purity camp, she gets no water and feels “the blisters on the pads of her feet” (Akbar 138). The sense of unreality prevails as her new life reveals itself with each passing moment. She feels that her life will change if only she “could make it back to the party...to how things were” (Akbar 138). The flashbacks from the party enunciate her “sense of distance” from the life she lived (Akbar 139). Dr. Iyer tells her that she has been imprisoned to face these “unfortunate measures”, to “end these cycles of violence. Restore equilibrium” (Akbar 143). After getting acquainted with the other women in the camp and listening to their stories, Shalini’s illusion of safety in her privileged past is shattered: “I thought we were safe because we were well off, because we knew important people” (Akbar 153). She belongs to no community now after coming to the Purity Tower, and her connections and class privilege can no longer benefit her. Henceforth, the structural inequalities that shaped her privileged lifestyle in the past, have now been exacerbated and intensified in the miserable living conditions that she has to confront in her new life.

During the birthday party of Leila, in which they are attacked, Riz bribes the water officials to “fill the pool” (Akbar 121) while the slum-dwellers are protesting on the streets and losing their jobs because of the shortage of water. One of the attacker bursts out: “Everywhere we are dying of water and you will like this?...Rules don’t apply to you” (Akbar 133), expressing his despair on Riz giving bribes to enjoy a birthday party, while being indifferent to the lower-class masses living in slums, protesting against the shortage of water. The instance reinforces their complicity in the gray zone, as privileged individuals who bribe the higher officials and get benefits others are deprived of. They compromised their morals “without the conscious knowledge without evil intent to consequential economic and political dynamic” (Rothberg 33). They were only focused on their luxuries and the birthday party, without considering the suffering and misery of the underprivileged people belonging to the lower class. Shalini disregards her maid’s concerns about the shortage of water when passing through the protest, because it does not directly affect her. However, later on, she is also made to feel the duress of the shortage of water.

After her abduction by the Repeaters, she feels a “sense of unreality” (Akbar 133), that only keeps intensifying throughout the narrative. However on certain occasions, Shalini and her family witness an act of violation and move past it, feeling safe in their own privilege. When the Repeaters come knocking at the gate of their sector, Naz witnesses the spectacle saying: “I want to see. Don’t worry. They’re not bothered about us” (Akbar 100). Similarly, at another instance, Shalini escapes closely from a man lingering on her

car and then watches him push a woman out from another car. She also sees the people from the lower-middle class protesting for provision of water and gets annoyed that “they’re allowed to block the road like this, the main road leading to the East End” (Akbar 111).

Her friends also became alienated after her disappearance. When she gets in touch with Dipanita, She realized that what happened to her was “too much...for them to accept”, as “Things like this didn’t happen to them...her existence was now a threat to their idea of home” (Akbar 180). She now became a symbol of the vulnerability of the class privilege in her former community, henceforth her friends did not want to see her and confront the temporariness of their own safety. Shalini’s encounter with Dapanita is the closest she can get to the memories of her past life, and guilt like she was now inching “closer to Leila” (Akbar 185). It makes her feel like she “was again part of things, present in the moment, as if the years were an interlude, a false loneliness” (Akbar 181). Her meeting also takes place in a restaurant because she is an outcast in their homes, yet she can enter their residential sectors, occupying the gray space. Dipanita asked her to meet outside the house, because her husband thought Shalini would “bring the outside in..., disease, filth, immorality” (Akbar 182). The encounter is also significant as it unravels a series of memories in which “Leila still had the comfort every child needs, it hadn’t been taken,” (Akbar 185). The space outside the home and inside the higher sector provides a mirror to her past as the “sunshine turned the polished black gate into an enormous mirror” (Akbar 185). Her pathway to Dapanita’s sector had “the flyroad...directly over their heads” (Akbar 186). She observed that all the rich communities had a “Slum roosted at their walls”, so the miser workers could be easily available in their proximity. Dipanita was now “a reminder of the difference, the chasm between that old self” and the person Shalini had turned into (Akbar 194). Shalini also expressed her remorse for all her friends, particularly Dipanita for not helping her, and Dipanita replied: “There were so many of them...No one can do anything. These people. They’re running things in this way. We have to accept it. For the children...We can’t take risks” (Akbar 196). They justified their indifference and complicity with the prevailing injustice and oppression as a way to safeguard their own children from it. She also tells her that she won’t “bring any risk to her kids”, by seeing Shalini again, since it threatened her sense of security and violated the community walls that supposedly protected them from the wrath of the power structures (Akbar 203). Shalini observed that Dipanita succeeded in becoming the “successful protector, her nest undisturbed”, while she blamed herself for losing her security and her old life at the hands of the repeaters (Akbar 202).

The women in the political sector were also marked by threads that let people know where they were from (Akbar 209). However, the “slummers or...Tower women weren’t accorded a thread”, because they occupied the gray space as the outcasts who could move in and out of the other sectors. Shalini observed the “ridged gray bonnet of a parked sedan...a channel of bulbous white cars”, and noticed that the people who “walk into this snippet of shining white sun is untouched, blithe, unburdened by what transpires around them” (Akbar 210). Shalini also previously occupied this white space along with her family, and

wished Leila was still under the white sun of privilege and safe from the repercussions of her sins. She also remembered that her mother never approved of her holding her nose while passing through slums, and would say “Think of the people who live here...what if they did that to you? Would you like it?”, while she always justified it by saying that they couldn’t see her (Akbar 211). She remembered such encounters with slums and people living in slums often on her journeys, henceforth she also occupied the gray space between her memories and what became of her life now.

#### **4.1.3 From the spaces of being to the spaces of non-being:**

The spaces of physical imprisonment in *Leila* also coincide with the psychological oppression that the subjects are exposed to. The Purity Camp where Shalini arrives after her abduction is “an L-shaped structure, four floors—from the evenly spaced windows and doors, up and down, clearly a dormitory. A water tower with an enormous crack along the equator of the cylindrical concrete tank...a stand of thorn trees, a gabled shed like a barracks, with dozens of windows almost kissing the ground” (Akbar 143). The office building is also “an open-air corridor with a number of shuttered green doors” (Akbar 142). The physical space facilitates the psychological repression of the inhabitants of the purity camp. It also mirrors the role of the implicated subject as windows to their socio-political conformity in the conditions of the past that have now taken the current shape of events. The open air office building symbolizes their vulnerability and the green shuttered doors may be seen as a symbol of their shattered doors and windows to privilege and protection in the past. The crack in the water tower is also pertinent, as it alludes to the psychological and social repercussions of the water crisis in the novel. When Dr Iyer takes her on a tour to the purity tower, they move through a “small enclosure...overgrown with brambles, various nettles. Someone had dumped long twists of barbed wire. Iyer stepped carefully through the vegetation, pointing out the half-buried wire jags as he went. Staircase...steps cracked and sooty with age” (Akbar 146-47). The old and ragged structure can be read as the fault-lines of the conditions that Shalini confronts after her imprisonment. The “long twists of barbed wire” may allude to the complex structure of oppression and social repression enabled by the class difference that Shalini benefitted from in the past. The stairs they walk through ‘had a “missing crutch” and they “had to jump without looking at the dizzy emptiness below,...trusting the concrete not to crumble underfoot” (Akbar 147). The defective and unstable structure of the building can be interpreted as the fault-lines beneath the system that she benefitted from in the past. She was compelled to trust the crumbling structure and the repeaters who abducted her, as Dr Iyer says: “we’re the only ones left. The only ones you have” (Akbar 144). The realization also increases her sense of “unreality”, and her walls of past privilege start crumbling in front of her, just like the structure that surrounds her in the purity camp. Walking on the stairs feels like a hazard “because the railing was higher than” here(Akbar 149), and she had no source of physical as well as emotional support in her journey through her new life. He tells her of her

distinguished social position among her fellow inmates: “You grow up thinking you are already aboard. Some TV-world you live in...But see these girls you came with, girls from different places, ask them,...They don’t act so shocked, like you do” (Akbar 149), revealing her privileged past and lack of awareness of the supposed rules of the society. As Rothberg elaborates his conception of the implicated subject, as subjects lying beyond the “ideal victims, perpetrators, and bystanders of humanitarian and human rights dramas, implicated subjects are morally compromised and most definitely attached—often without their conscious knowledge and in the absence of evil intent—to consequential political and economic dynamics” (Rothberg 33). Similarly, Shalini finds herself in an ethically and morally complicated space at various instances in the novel. For the most part of her life, she has been comparatively privileged and protected from the woes of the society, even after violating the rules. Now, after being caught by the repeaters, she has confronted what happens beyond her walls of privilege for the first time. Before that, she had always managed to escape the consequences of violating the supposed social and political boundaries, explicated through her memories. Even after being confined in the Purity tower, she enjoys certain privileges over the rest. On her quest of finding Leila, she comes across another Sapna, who tells her that “Even when they break the rules they’re too good to be put out her with us...Our crime is being born” (Akbar 234). She also accuses her of causing the fire and being part of the system that increases their distress and misery, as she says: “When you build a roof you keep something outside. You put airconditioners...Pumping out hot air all day...One hut caught fire...That’s how they lost their homes...They only listen when you people complain. From inside the walls” (Akbar 234). She confesses that people like Shalini are responsible for their deprivation, even after being punished by the repeaters. Dr Iyer also tells her that the people who attacked her were merely “a consequence of that moment” (Akbar 215). They were only responding to the social injustice imposed upon them because of the class inequalities. Sapna further reiterates the fault-lines emerging out of social inequality by saying: “you people build fancy things, you don’t care what happens to us.” (Akbar 235). When Shalini finds out that Sapna, her previous maid is living in the officers’ compound along with Leila, she cherishes that Leila has been brought up under “clean air, wide roads...playmates from good families,” (Akbar 238). She feels happy that Leila was fortunately saved by Sapna and lived a life that Shalini would have provided for her otherwise. She also envies Sapna for saving Leila and living “inside” the system, while she survived “outside the system, outside the sectors” (Akbar 239). She also fears that Sapna might reject her for having he “outside dirt...under her skin” (Akbar 239).

Similarly, the structure of the political structure also carries a symbolic significance. She decides to go to the tribunal when she feels that “everything...feels random, without real purpose. Like a balloon unstopped, zipping one corner to the other, every moment...weaker, lesser” (Akbar 158). She notices that the “tribunal room is dark wood, fusty, oblong. There are no windows” (Akbar 169), suggesting that getting validation from the tribunal would require her to be purified from her past memories with Riz. She would have to prove her innocence by cleansing all her memories and repenting for her past sins, as she confesses: “I know my mistake. I have learnt my lesson” (Akbar 173). Ironically, the tribunal offers a hint of normalcy

and a little hope to recover Leila and fragments of her past life, and yet she has to prove her alienation with her past sins. The political sector, like her residential sector with Riz, is also distinguished from the “outroads” and holds a privileged position among other areas under the new regime, as her investigator, Mr. Vijay, tells her that “the walls are important”, and the areas outside the walls are “Lawless. Filthy” (Akbar 173). She feels “a fathomless distance from the place I live, on a mountaintop, perhaps, locked away” (Akbar 164), inside the political sector. He reinforces the role of walls in building a safe community and separating “One community from another, above all the mess” (Akbar 174). The living conditions in the political sector are much better than the tower, where she has been imprisoned to pay for her sins. He further extorts that the miserable living conditions that she has to endure in the towers, as compared to the ideal life here in the political sector is her own fault, and if “she respects the walls, there will be no problem” (Akbar 175). After entering the political sector, she feels like a “specimen, requiring study and support” (Akbar 167). She has now been reduced to a spectacle of oppression, as she used to witness people suffering from the structural inequalities in the society that she benefitted from in the past. Dr Iyer also reinforces the importance of these walls and tells her that “Things were worse before the walls...People fought each other, burned each other...With the walls we have order” (Akbar 215). He conditions her mind to believe in the walls and play her role in sustaining them. She has now escaped the Purity tower and entered the political sector, occupying the gray space between the miserable conditions borne out of the purity tower and her former privileged life. The “order and hierarchy” of the new system is also maintained through the physical structure, as she is shown “A stage erected on the grass upon which senior members of the Council stand...up a series of tunnels...into the open the audience below look like ants” (Akbar 216). Shalini perceives that people hide behind the walls to conceal their shame: “Anyone who can afford it hides behind walls. They think they’re doing it for security, for purity, but somewhere inside it’s shame...How they’ve made the rest of us live...They don’t want to see who lives here” (Akbar 244). The walls thus serve as a shelter against the shadows of inequality and injustice lurking outside their privileged lives. The walls serve as a bubble concealing the realities outside their protected lives. Shalini has now accepted the Skydome as a provider of the air that takes her back to the life as “it used to be before the walls”(Akbar 245). Although Riz reminds her to consider the impact of “these filters...to the air outside”, to which she replies that its “hard to think about that once you’re under the dome” (Akbar 245). However, the walls were always there, between her and Sapna, as she remembered warning Sapna against kissing Leila, for the sake of “propriety” (Akbar 229). Now, the tables have turned and Sapna has managed to occupy the inside sector, while Shalini lurks in the gray zone, struggling to accept her lost place in the society. When she proceeds to enter Sapna’s mansion, she remembers once warning her to fire her and make sure she would not be able to find another job, and even uttering extreme words: “You can go back to the gutter you came from” (Akbar 247). Sapna lived in a gated mansion with “forbidding metal gates, enormous black rust, maroon panels dead in the sun” and Shalini had to go through an intense and humiliating scrutiny to meet her (Akbar 249). The instance of scrutiny exhibits the vulnerability of the social structures and the fluctuation of Shalini into the zone of non-

being, from her previously ascribed privileges, as she is repeatedly humiliated after being stripped naked with “legs trembling, knees losing strength” (Akbar 251), and yet she had no other option but to be treated as an inhuman object to pass through the security checks to reach Sapna’s home. Sapna’s life serves as a reminder of Shalini’s past life “like a ship that’s been grounded a ways from shore” (Akbar 253). The erasure of her past privilege does not only inscribe her into a state of non-being, but it also enables her to inhabit the position of the implicated subject in the shadow of her memories.

Shalini’s climactic encounter with Sapna is imperative in revealing the social shift that she confronts to see her daughter again. Sapna reminds her that this was the first time that they were “Sitting face-to-face” because of the strict rules she had at her home about the furniture and coming in contact with her daughter (Akbar 254). Sapna has now occupied the gray zone, as her boyfriend Ashish works for Mr. Joshi, who holds a decisive position in the new system. Sapna tells her that Joshi promised them that “he’d take care of them” after saving their family from the Slum (Akbar 255). They had become the facilitators of the system that oppressed the likes of Shalini, while in the past Shalini benefitted from the social inequality. She tells Shalini that the repeaters fulfill her commands now (Akbar 257). Similarly, Shalini also gives in to the system and order to get promoted to the political sector to reach her daughter, as she says: “It took me some time to accept...To understand that everything has an order, a place” (Akbar 256). She has also internalized that she has been paying for her sins, and her indifference towards the misery unfolding outside the walls, where she once felt safe with her family.

The detailed analysis delves into the shift in Shalini’s social position as a privileged individual to a lower-class individual. The character of Shalini has been explored under the lens of Rothberg’s theorization of the implicated subject along with an emphasis on the physical structures in the novel. It also reveals Shalini’s recognition of the indirect responsibility in facilitating the social structures that led to the unexpected catastrophe at the prime of her life.

## **4.2 The significance of the Implicated Subject in prosthetic memory of cyber-punk dystopia: Textual analysis of Chosen Spirits**

### **4.2.1 Introduction**

The textual analysis of Samit Basu's *Chosen Spirits* foregrounds the intricate interplay between privilege, complicity and memory in a world where the reality and digital realms are perpetually entangled with one another. The key characters grapple with the erasure and fabrication of memories in the virtual worlds. The concept of Primo Levi's Gray space has been utilized to reveal the nuances of a complicit system wherein the individuals become both the oppressed and the oppressor to uphold the totalitarian regime. The analysis unravels the repercussions of their complicity in facilitating the oppressive structures in the wake of digital advancement. Henceforth, the given section of analysis will focus upon the intersections of digital spaces, complicity of the implicated subject and its impact in perpetuating the power dynamics in the society.

### **4.2.2. Digital Dystopia: Surveillance, Privilege, and Memory in Chosen Spirits**

*Chosen Spirits* is a post-cyberpunk dystopian text set in India. The protagonist, Joey, is a professional reality controller and feels like "her whole life is a montage of randomly selected, algorithm-controlled surveillance cam chips, mostly of her looking at screens or sitting glazed-eyes at meetings" (Basu 1). Her life is merely a collection of digital images, hashtags and cyber surveillance, allowing her to look at things from all positions at once, as if in a spatial continuum. As a worker of the cyber-punk dystopia, she is often subjected to heavy surveillance, however she learns her way around it by checking that the "cam is disabled" (Basu 2), placating her in a gray zone between the victims and the perpetrators, as she exploits her position of power in the cyber discursive practices to protect herself from penalties of the higher-ups. By doing so, she decodes the message disseminated through "embedded hashtags drawn on a cement patch" (Basu 2), underlying an invitation to the protest against the police and builder mafia for evacuating yet another slum. The app also indicates the potential "extremely high" bloodshed rate at the protest, rising her stress rate and the app displaying "loving emojis and virtual hugs" to calm her down (Basu 3). Later, when she shares with her maid Laxmi, that she wants to join the protest against the



evacuation of her slum, she warns her that there will be too much “bloodshed and no cameras” (Basu 7), so she must wait for a safer protest to join. She also starts remembering the first protest that she attended with her parents, even though her mother wanted her to stay back for her board exams, but her father insisted that she should participate in this “historic moment...against the first wave of discriminatory citizenship laws” despite the fact that their privilege had “kept them perfectly safe” from its impacts (Basu 3). As Joey belonged to the relatively privileged class, attending protests was a matter of choice for her, rather than necessity, since she had the privilege to pick and choose the ongoing protests without “police brutalities and illegal detentions” (Basu 4). Earlier, the decisions were made through news and media, which was replaced by flows as “the future of hard-hitting journalism and activism...to completely transform the nation” (Basu 122). Due to the nature of her job, she could detect the risks of going to a protest with an app on her phone, and decide to distance herself from the oppressed class, as convenient. During her first protest at the Shaheen Bagh, against the new oppressive citizenship laws, she felt “more strength and solidarity and heartbreak in the air” than she could endure (Basu 5).

The recollections of the resistance exercised by her parents have been archived in the form of “screenshots of her favorite posts...the unwise outpourings of the whole generation, the collected, unfiltered rants” (Basu 14). As Hirsch defines postmemory as recollections of the past “not recalled but mediated through imaginative Investment, projection and creation”(Hirsch 5), the digital fragments of the past have ascribed the memories to a spatial and temporal continuum in which they are appropriated under the cyber-surveillance of the totalitarian system. Thus, Joey occupies the position of the implicated subject as she is responsible for filtering, censoring and scrutinizing the digital content as an employee of flow. Although her mother said that she is not going to just sit and watch other people...too scared to do anything”, however she gave up the idea of taking to the streets after the daughter of her close friend disappeared (Basu 18), by exercising her privilege of distancing herself from the oppression outside her social class. Although, the difference between their experiences was not across generations, but the variation in freedom of expression and the mobility of their opinions had drastically shifted because of the prevalence of cyber totalitarianism. She also filters the TV content at her home, so her parents are “sheltered from seeing “climate change refugees clinging on to the deckles craft like ants in the rain...images from a concentration camp in Assam and a lynching near Kolkata” (Basu 8-9). She protects her parents from the “epidemic of rage and confusion” taking over the country as long as their guards keep them free from bloodshed in the city. While her parents lost their jobs over “a Facebook rant” and for not giving in to the oligarchs, they now conformed to the system when their daughter started working for “mid-level oligarchs” for their safety and financial stability (Basu 9). As an employee of the oligarch system, she occupies a safe space where “privileges are exercised and historical legacies stunted aside” (Rothberg 42), as she becomes an organ of the machinery that aims to silence the historical resistance that she once endorsed and participated in as an observer. Although she previously participated in protests that were considered safe, now she was responsible for surveillance of the oppressed class who resisted against the

power structures. She feels safe in the totalitarian system because of the nature of her job, as a group of boys that would have made her “very nervous on the streets...saluted her as she passed” (Basu 23). The resistance and protests have been silenced under the archives of “Years not to be discussed” by her parents, who still thought that “their privilege keeps them safe” (Basu 15). Although Joey fails to even imagine the “freedom to criticize the powerful and corrupt in your own home”, her parents found it hard to conform to the new oppressive structures revealed through the “blasphemy laws...mass de-citizenings, the voter-list erasures, the reeducation camps...stories of data-driven home invasions” (Basu 14-15). The differences in their freedom of expression also reinforce Joey’s implication in the cyber-surveillance, asserting a new form of privilege exercised through digital authority. Her father, Avik confesses: “We sit around and do nothing, and history will remember us as oppressors, as traitors”, and Romola replies: “History won’t remember us at all” (Basu 251). However, their conformity brings into being the oppressive structures, even though Romola believes otherwise.

As Hirsch inculcates photographic memories of the holocaust to build up her case of recollections “embedded in new narratives, new texts and surrounded by new frames”(Hirsch 52), the prosthetic memory is also an explication of the photographic memory as a narrative “mediated through spatial and temporal specificities of the image”(Lury 190). Prosthetic memory is concurrent to the digital images in the given text, for their spatial and temporal continuum, as well as the de-contextualization and re-contextualization of the narrative due to erasure and censorship. Joey reflects on the absence of any memories of her parents during their formative years as “they just appeared on the cloud in their 20s...with no photos, no videos” after their childhood, and she believes this is why they have easily conformed to the “nostalgia algorithms” (Basu 28). While it is harder for her to accept absences and erasures in the memories on digital landscapes, her parents have found a way around it by “cropping, enlarging and and projecting onto other images” (Hirsch 52). Since they have lived through those and stored them in their “innerhouse”, Joey struggles with censoring and surveilling her own thoughts and guilt as a result of her implication in the oppressive structure.

Moreover, the flow cognizes with Edward Soja’s concept of the “thirdspace”, as the locus of experiences at the crossroads of geographical space, imagination and reality, reveals the intricate implications of suppressed memories in the cyber-space. Her geographical positioning and her secondary digital authority at flow, the digital space she works for, reveal her implication in the oppressive machinery at work. When she gets out of her “gated neighborhood” and witnesses “men and women in rags” being taken away by the militia, she knows enough to look away “as a skill everyone she knows has learnt since childhood because not looking away means seeing terrible things” (Basu 28-29). Similarly, she exercises the digital power ascribed to her at the cost of her individuality and becoming an organ to the oppressive structure, to keep herself and her family sheltered from the atrocities occurring outside their gated community. She also delves on the notion that the punishment for the rebels, who prefer not to look away,

“is no longer that linear” but they gradually “fade or disappear from the industry” (Basu 29). Their presence in the thirdspace in the form of “photos of millions of protestors fighting the same battles, braving police brutality, fascist mobs and harsh weather” serve as a warning as well as “Daily reminders of her cowardice”, by becoming a pawn of the fascist machinery (Basu 29). Here, Joey prominently occupies the position of the implicated subject, as defined by Rothberg as a tool “inhabiting and upholding regimes of violence” by becoming a bystander and a secondary participant through her own silence. Moreover, these places of residence are also isolated from the deprived class through the construction of flyroads, as Joey “stares out the window, through the haze, at dust and dead trees and more cars and flyovers, always more flyovers” (Basu 139). Here, flyovers emerge as a physical tool of social segregation, as they did in Akbar’s *Leila*. Like Shalini and Riz, Joey, Indi and Rudra “contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control them”, by occupying the position of the implicated subject (Rothberg 1). Similarly, the flyovers as architectural spaces unravel the “sociality” of spaces (Uttav 4) and its discursive implications by juxtaposing their social position as compared to the have-nots. Uttav further establishes that spaces are abstractions constituted at the “locus of intersections, contacts, tensions, and relationships”(Tally 20), while places “have to be recognized in a temporal depth in order to uncover or discover multilayered identities” (Tally 176). Therefore, the flyovers reveal the fissures of structural inequality embedded in the society in the past as well as in the present. The architectural spaces here transcend their materiality and uncover the contacts, tensions and relationships between the occupants of the zone of non-being and the zone of being in the society.

### **4.2.3. Physical structures and psychological confinement**

The walls also emerge as a pertinent motif in the analysis, which like the flyovers, are not just concrete structures separating the two spaces physically, but they serve as a tool of psycho-spatial reorientation of the individuals belonging to different social classes. For this reason, Rudra’s brother, Rohan convinces him to take up a rivalry against Nikhil, because “only one of us (them) pass through a gate at a time...We have to make sure our family is inside the wall when each new storm comes” (Basu 169), reiterating the notion of their positionality as the implicated subjects. Rudra and his family, like Joey, also contribute to and benefit from the regimes of domination under the totalitarian rule. When Rudra mocks him, Rohan further explains: “The walls are isothermal. You can see who’s inside and who’s not “ and that they are marked by “Anything marking class” (Basu 170). Rudra is capable of seeing through their complicity with the system, as he confesses to his brother: “We might not believe in caste, but caste believes in us...How many Dalits or Muslims do you think have jobs like hers?” (Basu 171). He is also looking for ways to seek shelter, once “The walls are going to crack, because a tide of people will try to

break them...People who are angry and desperate to survive” (Basu 173). Although Rudra holds up a mirror against his friends and family, who are aware of their privilege and refuse to break the chain of complicity in oppression, he also decides to conform to the structure when his brother makes him realize that they will lose their right to safety once the walls break. The privilege of their class enables them to occupy a place like the “film city...a favorite destination for cultural outrage scandals, rape gangs, crowd-sourced flash mobs, and fundamentalist lynch mobs” due to the “concrete bunkers...packed with armed guards” (Basu 40). However, Joey, as a reality controller, also controls the oppressive system and regulates the information reaching the masses through the platform of Flow. For her, Tara’s memories of oppression are merely an intervention in their job to conceal historical accounts of collective trauma by distracting the masses from the real roots of oppression and bloodshed through the luxurious structures and their projection on flow. Joey consciously participates in the silencing and erasure to maintain her position at flow as a loyal employee and a privileged member of the society.

Tara, the alter-ego of Joey, impresses him with her “shapeshifting abilities...who grew up with a better sense than he had of how feudal world actually is and how much they’d have to do to fit in” (Basu 93). She knows how to escape the oppressive structures by shifting her own actions, rather than exploiting social privilege like Rudra. The zone of being and the zone of non-being again emerges as a relevant premise to delineate the contrast between the two essential characters, as Tara belongs to a middle-class family and comes to work for Flow after escaping a forced marriage, while Joey and Rudra work for Flow to uphold their privilege in the society and escape the fate of the non-beings. When Tara shares her struggles of “getting assaulted by the police at a student protest...terrified of getting caught in another mass student killing” (Basu 131), and Joey as a flow regulator does not approve “Because of dipping numbers and increasingly irritated live feedback” (Basu 131). At another instance, Tara wants to speak up without being censored and Joey intervenes Joey thus becomes a perpetrator of the system by silencing Tara for her popularity on the platform of flow. She is responsible for suppressing the history of “Delhi’s most prestigious post-grad university, demolished after demonstrations, terror strikes and bloodshed the city pretends hard to forget” (Basu 131). On the other hand, Tara rekindles the memories of student protests, rupturing their “attempt at dazzling the city into distraction” by building a “mall and religious amusement park” over it (Basu 131). They choose to stay silent and erase the selective memories to sustain their fixed position in the society. It is also pertinent that employees of flow are not only sheltered in their gated homes, but digital communities as well. Joey loves attending Virtual Reality meetings as she does not have to “worry about body-language signals or enemy-turf micro-emotion facial scanners” (Basu 100), suggesting that they are only able to escape physical and virtual scrutiny, at the cost of their complicity with the oppressive structures.

As Rothberg argues that the implicated subjects are morally compromised and most definitely attached—often without their conscious knowledge and in the absence of evil intent—to consequential

political and economic dynamics (33), Rudra and Joey, as well as their parents are consciously complacent with the oppressive power dynamics. They choose to seek shelter in their silence and deliberate erasure of the suffering of the victims of the system that rewards them for it. Joey's mother, Romola, remembers one instance of "bloodbath...in north-east Delhi" where she went to do some "relief work" (Basu 126). The smell of burning tires brings back the memories of "bloodthirsty mobs...families who'd lost everything...asking journalists and aid workers what would happen next" (Basu 127). Although she had been a bystander to the traumatic incident, yet the "smell of burnt rubber, from the tyres they'd lit to set the girl's room on fire" haunted her after years of the incident (Basu 127). The key characters are aware of the consequences of their silence and Joey is even actively participating in the erasure, surveillance and censorship of voices of resistance, as a part of her job. Zaria, a privileged Muslim activist, participates in a secret safe space called the "New Tion" on flow, on which the outcasts unite to share stories one another (Basu 189). Her story features "the children who have escaped the mobs of enchanted citizens whose for the king has inspired them to remorseless bloodshed" (Basu 190). When the children are finally captured by the king, they realise that the king is not bad and "help him build even stronger magic...gift to all the nation's people, city and village alike" (Basu 190). She also shares cryptic links to stories of "trafficking, mass abductions, organ-growth sweatshops...gene-testing prison camps", sterilizing and commodifying the human body for the use of privileged class (Basu 193). The story coincides with the positionality of the children as the implicated subjects, while their "magic" may be interpreted as the laws they make for the have-nots to appease the king as the powers that may be. Rudra and Joey facilitate and in turn, benefit from the networks of power, while Zaria learns to evade the censorship filters to connect with people carrying similar memories and experiences. Thus, Rudra and Joey, like the children can be termed as inmates acting as perpetrators as theorized in Levi's gray zone. When another member shares their concerns about overcoming "these dystopian times" (Basu 194), Zaria snaps in return and says that dystopia "requires distance. Some of us are actually in the middle of it and we may never learn to care in time. This isn't Dystopia. This is reality" (Basu 195). Zaria also occupies the position of the implicated subject or secondary victim, as a Muslim "upper-class rebel icon" (Basu 145), witnessing the trauma of others from a distance, as dystopian narratives and only accepting it as reality when it happens to her.

Similarly, Indi's job as a flowco star is to entertain the "high-end, trend conscious people, who are "always looking for the next big thing" (Basu 110). He maintains his relevance by "customizing his content" according to the preference of his upper-class viewers (Basu 110), who would instantly move on to the next big thing. Therefore, his identity is shaped through the "spatial and temporal specificities" of their desires (Lury 190), as the "immigration categories and border controls" in the dystopian world of the narrative, transgress the physical constraints of his body, into the spatial continuum of vulnerability and ambiguity due to the status quo (Basu 109). One of the investors of flow, Nikhil, reminds him of his privilege as a flow star, while he would be "measured, tested...and put in a box, if it was not for his celebrity status. He also confesses to him that he lives in a "bubble and he's not real", rather a simulation of

his flow content and the filtered information that he manages to acquire under the totalitarian censorship (Basu 115). Nikhil also reprimands complete control under the new contract, under which he will “own” his “digital bodies”, and make those do whatever he wants to, even when his real body will be “free” according to his own will (Basu 124).

One of the recurring themes in the selected dystopian texts is the deprived class gaining control over the upper-class. Raja, the husband of Joey’s maid, Laxmi, “is clearly a man of power” at the Cyber bazaar, which “runs half the city” because the systems come to a halt if the networks are shut down” (Basu 212). She walks to meet him among “Screams, smashing glass...gunshots” (Basu 209). He ensures the safety of her family, by confessing that he is friends with “all the powers” and they need him, because they need “the cyber bazaar” (Basu 212). Even when they are talking, she forgets about the riots that she has just walked through, and is only reminded of the atrocities taking place right outside their safe space as “A bomb goes off nearby” (Basu 214).

Rudra, another prominent character occupying the role of the implicated subject in the novel, is introduced in the middle of the narrative, after his father dies and he goes back to his abandoned family for the funeral. He is unable to enter the Colony Culture, where his family house is located because of his lower class appearance, since “he hasn’t arrived at these forbidding gates in a car” (Basu 52). Although he has abandoned the gated community and the lifestyle of his family, he still pays the auto-driver more money to make him “forget the risk” of getting “beaten up” in another posh sector (Basu 53), exploiting the vulnerability of the socially deprived driver for his own convenience, providing an insight into the “structural injustices” prevailing in the society (Rothberg 52). As an implicated subject, rebelling against his upper-class family, he is also willing to use his upper-class privilege when needed, as in the instance discussed in the previous lines. His father wished to protect him even after he left, and often shared the news of atrocities happening around in the country, since he lived outside the compound and could be mistaken for a lower-class Dalit or Muslim living in the ghettos whose houses were burned and their families targeted with “pinpoint precision” (Basu 62). He assured his father that he was safe because he was not going to participate in any of the relief work and “wasn’t even saying anything on the internet or out loud”, so he would be safe from the fate of the Dalit taxi drivers or Muslims living in ghettos (Basu 62). Even as a rebellious son of a rich man, living away from home, he was sheltered by his privileges due to his social and ethnic identity in the society. When his flow rival, Sharmila, threatens him of destroying his career by spreading rape allegations, he and his team including Joey are relieved when another national crisis emerges. Indi’s reputation is saved by “another lynching in Uttarakhand, which isn’t really news, but a prominent industrialist’s son was among those killed” (Basu 140). They prefer the “burnt corpses” flashing on the screen rather than accusations which could potentially ruin his Flow career. Henceforth, the cyberspace of Flow transforms into a “gray space”, as a concentrationary space in which the inmates turn against their fellow inmates to facilitate the cycles of oppression. Primo Levi theorizes the gray space as a

“complex and ambiguous space” occupied by the enemy who is “not only outside but also inside” (Rothberg 38). The flow also provides people like Indi and Joey comparative privilege as a reward for maintaining the status quo. After the rape allegations arise, Indi asks Joey to testify in his favor, however she confesses that he abused his power and she looked away, becoming a part of it. She also reminds him that he will get away with it because “There are whole systems lined up to help (him) out...There’s no police. There’s no process. There’s no system” (Basu 151). The instance reinforces the notion that their privilege is derived from collective efforts to sustain the structural injustice in the form of status quo (Rothberg 80). Although Joey and Indi are enslaved to the same oppressive structure that is responsible for lynching and killing the innocent, their complicity protects them from the suffering.

Like Joey’s parents, his father also belonged to the older generation and discredited the digital entities, as he told him: “Photos fade...but digital disappears-companies shut down, drives get hacked, bank accounts get locked, governments erase you with one stroke” (Basu 63). As Rothberg analyzes how practices of memory intersect with power dynamics, forms of complicity, distancing and risks of forgetting, they also become complacent to the structure by choosing to stay silent when the lower class is subjected to oppression by the oppressive power structures.

The gated compound, that was once his home, now seems to be at “a great distance”, when the guards stop him at the entrance (Basu 54). The compound becomes a thirdspace for him, as a collusion of his imagination and the reality that restricts his access to his family home because of the choices he has made in the past. While he is struggling to convince the guards to let him in for his father’s funeral, he keeps “wondering how he’d get into the compound in each of his six different genres of game...he’d have been more in command barking out orders to his teammates” (Basu 54), suggesting he would have better control over other’s actions in a simulated game than in reality. He is dissociated from reality and disillusioned by the grandeur of the life of his family, and rather would “disappear into his phone” (Basu 58).

#### **4.2.4. Conclusion**

The textual analysis of *Chosen Spirits* delves into the multi-faceted notions of privilege and social oppression through the digital realm and spatial structures. It provides an insight into the complicity and the misery of key characters, Joey and Rudra, in the totalitarian digital regime. The analysis encompasses both the tools of digital and spatial oppression and offers commentary on the blurring of boundaries between victimhood and complicity in cyber-punk dystopia. The manipulation of historical events in the digital realm also contributes to the perpetuation of the dystopian setting, building upon the contemporary socio-

political conditions. The erasure of collective memories also provides a profound commentary on the notions of censorship and suppression of freedom of speech.



## **4.3 Contortion of memory in Gothic Dystopian fiction: Thematic analysis of *Midnight Doorways***

### **4.3.1 Introduction**

Usman T Malik's *Midnight Doorways* will be analyzed by exploring the notions of postmemory and the thirdspace as a locus of shared experiences of marginalization in the Pakistani society. The scope of the given research project zooms into the selected fables to build upon the intricate relationship between individual memories and its collective reception and disruption in the shared psychological spaces. The linguistic expression and the imagery will be explored to reveal the connections between the psychological positioning of the implicated subjects and the spaces inhabited by them during the recollection of certain memories. Since the analysis constitutes the literary reading and theorization of five different fables, it is also pertinent to note that it will pave the path for emergence of various themes, including religious intolerance, personal loss and grief and major socio-political changes, such as the 1947 Partition.

### **4.3.2 Exploring the shadows of postmemory in the selected fables**

In the first fable "Ishq", the narrator's mother recollects her past through memories of her old home with meagre details of the political and national history of that time, in such a way that her personal history is superimposed on the collective or national history. She cherishes the stories untainted by history, reinforcing the notion of personal memory as a counter-history, while sharing the tales of her childhood in Lahore, the place where she grew up with her son. These personal memories are expressed through her reminiscences of the street vendors chanting through the "narrow alley" and the "smell of her handiwork" in henna, as it reminded her of Lahore's flower gardens and lush lawns in the summer" (Malik 19). She also laments the houses "modeled on Mughal Architecture...destroyed (due to) tile-work successive owners replaced with lime and mortar, rendering these historical homes as ugly and listless" (Malik 21). Oral storytelling has been inculcated as a medium for inter-generational transmission of memories.

Her glorious memories are often interrupted by fits of history, when she reflects: the Independence War of 1857 against the British left these Muslims and their descendants destitute" (Malik 20). Hirsch

establishes that postmemory comprises the experiences that a generation perceives only through remembered accounts such as “stories, images and behaviors among which they grew” (Hirsch 107), however the mother’s memories in the given narrative are fluid and subject to skepticism by the narrator. As he reflects: “Was she subtracting pain from her childhood and adding uncanny narcotic details best explained by longing and fear” (Malik 22). His mother superimposes the memories of her sister and the street vendor, as well as the grand architecture of the old city, over the “worst monsoon to ever hit Pakistan” in 1967 (Malik 24). The narrator confesses that “Through calamity and governmental negligence many people died that year. The official account of the missing and the dead ran into the thousands. One of them was Khala Parveen” (Malik 40). However, she emphasized the tale of the love between her polio-ridden sister and the street vendor, even after her death. Her feelings towards her sister were “mixed with that was admiration and awe at the crippled girl’s ability to transcend her”, in the form of Hashim’s love for her and their tale (Malik 35). This process of super-imposition and self-identification, enforces the role of “fantasy to be social and political”, as it traverses across spatial, temporal and psychological boundaries (Hirsch 159). However the narrator considers this flight for realism as “Confabulation...cancer metastases were in peculiar parts of her brain, they could make her cook up surreal histories” (Malik 21). Although Hirsch ascribes the role of the “spectator and viewer” to the witnesses of postmemory, the narrator in the given narrative finds himself “longing to see the alley, the narrowest of streets, where decades ago two people drowned in love or misery” (Malik 41). The narrator occupies the position of the implicated subject as the spectator, however the distance is not maintained deliberately but is imposed through the temporal and spatial boundaries.

In “The Fortune of Sparrows”, the narrator expresses her familial connections and its longing in an “orphanage haunted by birds” (Malik 80). The fable is haunted by a plethora of eerie recollections ranging from “Angels, jinns and martyrs” to trivial matters of the orphanage (Malik 81). The imagery of the birds and the cat enlivens the orphanage as “a house of many doors” of memories of the British Raj. The inhabitants “pretended that people from the past still stayed within our rooms” (Malik 82). The narrator also relates the story of the “mythical bird huma” as a bird that “cannot be taken alive. Whosoever captures in will die in forty days” (Malik 85). The public and private recollections, combined with the familial postmemory through the hauntings of her fellow orphans, reinforce the psycho-spatial mediation of memories. The structure of the orphanage reeks of the images “the smaller building with limited rooms for dying contagious patients, as if they were the same” and her “sisters...statues frozen by the chasing team” simultaneously (Malik 82). The structure of the building has been occupied by the “passing ghosts” (Malik 83) and “people from the past...between places of someone else’s making” (Malik 100). The structure of the orphanage transmutes into a space “of political choice that is also a meeting place for all peripheralized and marginalized “subjects” wherever they may be located” (Soja 35).

Similarly, in “The Vaporization of Enthalpy of a Peculiar Pakistani Family”, Malik analogizes the loss of the family members of the narrators with the phases of physical matter from solid to liquid to gaseous

state. The grief of death runs through the family as a cycle of loss, as the narrator relates: “We were gone when she was gone. We were shattered with her bones” (Malik 148). The network of memories mediated through the grief of death of loved ones has been compared with the “Liquid Phase of Matter...by dint of the vast spaces between its molecules, fills any container it is poured in and takes its shape” (Malik 151). The memories here are like the liquid phase of matter which can be “cropped, enlarged, projected onto other images...re-framed or de or re-contextualized, embedded in new narratives, new texts and surrounded by new frames”(Hirsch 52). The traumatic loss of lives of her loved ones in bomb blasts are imprinted on her mind as they continue to haunt her wherever she goes. She conforms to the cycles of violence and natural disaster, embedded in the “towering steel-and-concrete structures, this restless liquid death that had come to the city, ripped out their underpinnings and annihilated everything in its path” (Malik 155). She occupies the “thirdspace as a meeting place for all marginalized subjects” (Soja 35), in which the terror attacks make “the City come apart....They exploded and fell in burning tatters, survived only by a quivering bloodhaze through which peeked the haunted eyes of their ghosts” (Malik 158). The collective memory of loss in suicide attacks manifested itself in “countless human eyes that flicked each moment to an unforgiving sky” (Malik 163). The collective trauma of terrorist attacks and its ensuing grief correlates with Hirsch’s conception of postmemory as “mediated through Collective imaginary shaped by the public, generational structures of fantasy” (Hirsch 114), The generational structures of fantasy can be witnessed in Tara’s interaction with her late brother as a “potent heat, a shifting locus of time-space with infinite energy roiling inside it” (Malik 163). Thus, Tara takes on the role of the spectator and actor of traumatic memories of suicide bomb attacks, by reconciling with her mother whose smile was preoccupied with the “heat-deaths of countless worlds” (Malik 166). The supernatural occurrence of the dead coming back to life pertains to the locus of lived experience of the individuals in a locus of geographical space, or imagination and reality, according to Soja’s conception of the thirdspace. It is also pertinent that Tara inhabits the role of a victim here as she reconciles with the trauma of the loss of her brother in the form of his apparition.

“The Wandering City” follows the narrative of emergence of the “Enchanted city” and “Whoever climbs up the wall “leaps off...and into the City. Moments later there is a thud” (Malik 46).The crowd watching and cheering the person is astonished at this. The young boy who is lost to the relocation is Subhan, whose crushed skeleton, lies covered in tatters of fabric and skin” (Malik 48). The spectators of the enchanted city cherish its magnificence, while his corpse lies “Next to them on blood-darkened ground, which shimmers to look like water” (Malik 48).

The enchanted city also gradually conforms to the status quo, and it is only accessible to the upper class society as the VIPs are led through “perfectly formed gardens, past carved marble gates, and into a market square” (Malik 49). They have learned about the enchanted city through “fanzines and web blogs and Youtube channels”, and now are witnessing it in front of them, henceforth their perception is clouded by fragments of recollections from their exposure to cyber information (Malik 46). After the emergence of the

city, the masses start “taking photos of the tombs, sepulchers, palaces, houses...fill up with bird’s-eye views and selfies and filtered renderings. Nighthawk photos show automatons busily surveilling the City”, turning the cyber-space into a reservoir of their interaction with the city (Malik 51). Hence, the spectators turn into performers of memory of the city by expressing their version of it through acts of transformation, such as taking photos (Bertens). Moreover, the director describes it as “A city haunted by its own people. Forever alive in death...descendants of Nomadic tribes who converted to Islam and built a city in which to settle- but were trapped in space-time rift”(Malik 49), reinforcing the “spatial continuity” of the city in memory, as a space speculated from “all positions at once” (Lury 3).

The government declares a “national day of mourning, expressing grief, for those lost to the City’s relocation ...and hope that it adds to that legacy. Imagine the untapped tourism potential” (Malik 47). The people whose lives and livelihoods were destroyed during the emergence, are soon forgotten and digital advertising campaigns are initiated to tap its maximum potential. The emergence of the enchanted city is celebrated, despite the loss of lives. The people “revere the Enchanted City. Flower garlands and ceremonial threads are hung from barricade and barbed wire” (Malik 51), transforming the city into a gray space at the crossroads of freedom, celebration and death, simultaneously. The authorities turn it into “Lahria Gardens: in the form of “The Community of your dreams” (Malik 52). On the other hand, the religious extremists consider it as a “City of Infidels” and a threat to their faith (Malik 51). After the city disappears, the opportunists turn it into a “shrine”, with the corpses of “Subhan and others lost to the city martyrs”, with “Pocket Quran sellers, shoe-shiners, shoe-keepers to watch your chappals when you take them off to pray...build a circle of commerce around Subhan” (Malik 52). This transformation into a shrine coincides with the “indifferentiation between the cause and the effect, the subject and the object” (Lury 18), as the remnants of the enchanted city are ascribed a new role with each passing day, from a residential complex to a shrine (Malik 52). The enchanted city remains in memory even Years later, when a little girl finds “a brass marionette no bigger than her ring finger” and is “pleased at a shared secret or a promise”, transforming the legend of the enchanted city into a concrete manifestation of collective memories (Malik 54).

The macabre imagery serves as a recurring motif in Malik’s collection of fables. “Resurrection Points” grapples with the sensitive and urgent themes of blasphemy and inter-religious conflict in Pakistani society. The narrative also features the speculative and fantastic story-line of man and his son, Daud, possessing the power to resurrect the dead. Daud’s father resists the “fatwa stating that since the dead boy was Christian he cannot be buried in a Muslim cemetery” (Malik 63). He is warned and told that he “might be Muslim but blasphemy is blasphemy...The boy is Christian, that cemetery is not” (Malik 64). Daud’s father, occupies the position of an implicated subject, as a bystander, however he refuses to “inhabit and benefit from the privilege “derived from shared, structural conditions of inequality” (Rothberg 80-81). He delineates an alternative version of the implicated subject, as compared to the mass by-standers contributing to the regimes of violence and upholding the religious and social status quo. He also warns his son against

visiting his friend, Sadiq, in the Christian Mohalla, since “Someone vandalized a church in Lahore yesterday. Someone found feces strewn in a mosque in Quetta. As a result two people are dead and tens more injured in riots around the country...This will only get worse” (Malik 68), anticipating even more aggravating conditions in the future. However, when the Mohalla or residential colony of Christians is set ablaze and labelled as “an accident” (Malik 73), he chooses to report about the dead boy’s mutilated body. He is later killed because he “reported the Christian boy’s mutilated body” and as a response “some people discovered his old marriage certificate” revealing the Christian identity of his wife (Malik 73). The burning of Christian houses kills “Twenty people” including Sadiq’s father, “who survived tuberculosis and the 99’ Kargil war” but could not survive this wave of religious bigotry (Malik 71). After the murder, Daud visits the remnants of the burned houses, and “jolted the Christian mohalla back to life” with his gift of resurrection (Malik 77). I interpret the resurrection as the awakening of his consciousness, after his mother’s reality is revealed in front of him. The “faces (of his people) shining with blood and fervor...unafraid, joyous and visible” (Malik 78) reveal his interaction with the abstract focal point of interconnection and interaction with the victims, as a by-stander. However, he is not merely a by-stander, but attempts to liberate the victims of religious extremism after their death, in a speculative turn in which he leads them “on their final pilgrimage through this land of the dead” (Malik 78). Daud and his father have evaded the notion of “ethical loneliness” by resisting the oppressive social structures which enable the minorities to be “unjustly treated and dehumanized by human beings and political structures” (Krondorfe 11). Although Daud and his father are not perfect or innocent victims, they refuse to comply to the system that they have evaded to survive as outcasts in the society. Their positionality complicates the role of the implicated subjects as passive by-standers, contributing to the structural cycles of violence (Rothberg 1).

### 4.3.3 Conclusion

In the three fables “Ishq”, “The Fortune of Sparrows”, and “The Vaporization of Enthalpy of a Peculiar Pakistani Family”, the author, Usman T. Malik, explores the complexity of memory and its role in shaping personal and collective identities. Each fable is unique in its setting and characters, yet they all highlight the fluidity and subjectivity of memory. The first fable portrays personal memory as a counter-history to national history, while the second one shows how memories can be shaped by familial and communal connections. The third fable, on the other hand, highlights the cyclic nature of memories in the context of grief and loss. The author’s use of language and imagery reinforces the psycho-spatial mediation of memories, and how they transmute into a space of political choice that can be a meeting place for all peripheralized and marginalized subjects. The analysis of the “The Wandering City” highlights the apathy of the spectators of the destruction of the old city as an aftermath of the emergence of the enchanted city.

The fable also inculcates the elements of technology as a tool of psycho-spatial speculation of the enchanted city. Moreover, “Resurrection Points” grapples with the dilemma of dehumanization of religious minorities and its resultant speculation and implicated participation by the spectators.

## CHAPTER 5

### 5.1 CONCLUSION

The research explores the notion of Marianne Hirsch's post-memory through the lens of Michael Rothberg's implicated subject within the nuanced positions of socio-political fault-lines in South Asian dystopian worlds. The research aims to re-assert the role of memory in constructing individual and collective identities, in corroboration with the speculative settings in *Midnight Doorways* (2021) by Usman T Malik, *Chosen Spirits* (2020) by Samit Basu, and *Leila* (2019) by Prayag Akbar. The ramifications of socio-political conflict and technological evolution in speculative settings have been explored through the lens of psycho-spatiality.

The first research question deals with the interplay of psycho-spatial orientation of the characters and their memories in the selected novels and their role in offering a profound commentary on socio-political conundrums. The textual analysis of Prayag Akbar's *Leila* reveals the nuanced societal shift and challenges that Shalini faces after losing her shelter of privilege. The analysis explicates the theoretical concept of the gray zone, and the shift in power dynamics, demonstrating the complicated nature of the socio-political landscape. The interplay of spatial setting and memory has played an integral part in exposing the socio-political fault-lines. The character of Shalini demonstrates her struggle in her search for her abducted daughter. The gated prisons and residential areas depict the psychological conflict; particularly the architecture of the Purity Camp reflects the psychological subjection of Shalini and her struggle in navigating through the socio-political shift. Similarly, in Samit Basu's *Chosen Spirits* the psycho-spatial orientation of the characters is manifested in the form of digital landscapes known as the flow. The interplay of psycho-spatial orientation and the virtual spaces in the construction of the dystopian settings has been further explored through the lens of Soja's thirdspace, by analyzing the significance of geographical and social positioning of Joey in facilitating her digital authority. The motifs of walls and fly-overs play a crucial role in delineating the social segregation in the analysis of both the narratives. Furthermore, the narratives of the fables in *Midnight Doorways* inculcate the speculative aspects of the dystopian settings, in which technology and spatial transformations play integral roles in shaping the characters' experiences and the societies they inhabit. Moreover, the analysis of *Midnight Doorways* emphasizes the complexity of memory and its subjective nature. Each fable presents a unique perspective on memory, highlighting personal, familial, and communal connections mediated through the spatial construction of dystopias. The textual analysis reinforces the psycho-spatial mediation of memories, emphasizing their transformation into spaces of political choice as the point of intersection for marginalized subjects.

The dissertation explores the indirect responsibility of the protagonists in the transmission of the oppressive socio-political structure in conjunction with the second research question. The politics of distancing, deliberate silencing and forms of complicity have been explored under the theoretical domain of the implicated subject. Through this, the significance of the implicated subjects in the construction of dystopian settings has been investigated in the given texts. In the vein of the second research question, Shalini's actions highlight the impact of individual choices in the construction of the dystopian society that she occupies. The indirect responsibility is a result of her dynamic proximity with power and privilege, as her character occupies both the positions of the privileged class contributing in the oppressive cycles and the oppressed class carrying the brunt of the social inequalities. Shalini occupies the space of an implicated subject, and her complacency in the oppressive socio-political structures unravels, when she is forced to occupy the position of the have-nots in the society. The textual analysis of Samit Basu's *Chosen Spirits* explicates the nature of complacency and individual implications in the grand cyber structures, perpetuating oppressive structures and suppressing political resistance. The theme of secondary victims as the silent witnesses of social injustices has been magnified in the narrative of cyber-space politics. The pertinent element of the shift in social position has also been explored in the lower class facilitating the oppressive structures to gain safety in the wake of incendiary social frameworks. The concept of thirdspace has been demonstrated in the gated compounds as well as the cyber spaces mediated through the "customization" of content (Basu 110), manifested in the intricate forms of censorship, ranging from erasure to physical, emotional and psychological conditioning for survival in the social structures. Similarly, in Malik's *Midnight Doorways*, the fables of "The Wandering City" and "Resurrection Points," uncover the apathy of spectators in the face of destruction and the dehumanization of religious minorities. The distance from the victim is maintained through spatial and temporal boundaries, as the memories are narrated by the witnesses from the past. The fables also inculcate the fluid subjectivity of the characters between the victim and the secondary participant, as the implicated subject. It also provides the social commentary on the passive participation of the majority in the society when the minorities are subjected to oppression.

Conclusively, this research illuminates the significance of the interplay between spatial setting and memory in South Asian dystopian fiction. By examining the fluidity and subjectivity of memory within these speculative narratives, this study provides valuable insights into the socio-political implications and the broader commentary on contemporary society. The findings of this research demonstrate the complex relationship between memory, spatial settings, and socio-political conditions in South Asian dystopian fiction. The analysis of the selected texts highlights the transformative impact of dystopian societies on individuals, the speculative elements embedded within the settings, and the role of memory in shaping personal and collective identities.



## 5.2 Recommendations

This research contributes to the understanding of memory studies, cultural analysis, and exploration of dystopian narratives. Further research may be advanced into the socio-political dimensions of memory and spatial settings in literature, particularly in South Asian Literature and provide a foundation for future investigations into the implications of speculative worlds and their commentary on contemporary society. In the socially fragmented and political volatile societies of South Asian countries, the role of memory in dystopian literature provides a pragmatic framework for literary investigation. It also reinforces the power of literature in providing socio-political commentary. By exploring the interactions between memory and spatial dynamics, South Asian dystopian fiction provides a platform for critical engagement and reflection on the challenges and possibilities of our contemporary challenges. The specialized theoretical framework in the domain of memory studies may be employed to analyze dystopian texts as well as other sub-genres in contribution to the proliferating debates around socio-political positioning of the characters and its significance in the settings of the narratives.

The research corroborates the emerging debates in the field of memory studies from Michael Rothberg's *Implicated Subjects* to Marianne Hirsh's *Postmemory with South Asian Dystopian Fiction*. It contextualizes the socio-political fault-lines in the politics of ethical loneliness, distancing and power dynamics. The theoretical framework may be further developed through the incorporation of debates around political texts from South Asia as well as various other region confronting political instability and its projection in dystopian literature. Moreover, the psycho-spatial framework developed for the current research thesis may be utilized in analyzing other texts to advance socio-political analysis through the lens of spatial investigation in literary studies. The intersection of social class, individual actions, and geographical positioning may be employed as a tool to analyze the politics of indirect responsibility and secondary participation in the oppressive structures. Furthermore, the shift from the victim-perpetrator dichotomy in the form of theorization of the implicated subject may also prove to be a pragmatic subject for literary research.

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