

Research article

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Topoanalysis and the City Space in the Literary Writings of Amitava Kumar

<https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2022-0143>

received April 27, 2021; accepted February 22, 2022

Abstract: In the postmodernist transnational moment, the “city” is a “distinctive location of diasporic dwelling, belonging and attachment” and that the city as home is rooted in “city-specific memories” (Blunt and Bonnerjee 237). Emotions and feelings are not static in nature; the very place where one is born becomes a memory house once the individual moves out. Thus, with dispersion, the spaces of “home” transcend to other physical aspects related to it, i.e., the “locality, town or city spaces” (Roy 141) where one has spent a considerable amount of time. Gaston Bachelard in his formulation of “topoanalysis” analyzes the subjective phenomenological expression *vis-à-vis* “home” and contends that memories of it are not something remembered, but rather, are entwined with the present. From the literary writings of Amitava Kumar, whose major setting is his hometown “Patna,” the article considers the “city” as a sentimental space of “home” that often forms the core of his varied literary works and manifested through the diasporic consciousness of the author. His literary writings, such as *Passport Photos*, *Bombay-London-New York* and *A Matter of Rats*, showcase the author’s constant negotiation of Patna. The literary texts under consideration explore how Kumar extrapolates through his “sense of place” (Agnew in Creswell 7), where “home” becomes an instrument of “topoanalysis” (Bachelard 8). Using Kumar’s literary texts as a literary example, this article offers new ways into thinking of the associated concerns of diaspora, home, city spaces and topoanalysis.

Keywords: topoanalysis, city spaces, Patna, spatiality, double consciousness, immigrant life

Introduction

In the diasporic context, dispersion is intrinsically linked with leaving “home.” But this, in itself, poses a cardinal question: does an immigrant ever really leave home? It is pertinent to note that emotions and feelings are not static in nature; the very place where one is born becomes a memory house once the individual moves out. This subjective intimacy correlates with what one develops for one’s home or a place which he/she remains constantly attached. So, the question arises as to what is “home” for an immigrant? Is it the dimensional structure of one’s house or is there more to it? In the postmillennial transnational global space, diasporas’ affinity toward their homeland has been constantly evolving, where they continue to maintain a “strong sentimental as well as material link” (Sheffer 3). The diaspora manifests a “multi-locale” attachment which is not mainly defined by a particular geographical locale but also there is “ambivalence about physical return and attachment to land” (Clifford 248). What critics point out is that

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diasporas even today continue to maintain their connections with their “homeland” and that it remains a core feature of diasporas globally. Martin Bauman in his article “In Diasporas: Genealogies of Semantic and Transcultural Comparison” suggests that the idea of diaspora in contemporary sphere is that of mixing and heterogeneity. It is also about expressing the notion of “fragmentation and reconstruction, double consciousness, fractures of memory, ambivalence, roots and routes, discrepant cosmopolitanism, multilocationality and so forth” (Bauman 324). Khachig Tololyan in “Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Moment” asserts that diasporas “don’t chastise to return to homeland”; however, a connection to homeland is maintained and diaspora can feel and care for it while living in the transnational space as they are no more “aligned” to a specific home. He argues that “home” and “homeland” are important binaries on which the contemporary idea of diaspora is realized. It is not pertinent that a diaspora’s ancestral home become their “natural” home. Since they acquire a new citizenship, often the ancestral home becomes a “myth” for future generations. He argues that diasporas need not apologize for their alleged lack of authenticity or for their hybrid diaspora identity as if it represented a decline from some purer homeland form. Diaspora today exists “neither in opposition to their homeland nor in servile relationship to them” (Tololyan 7). A “homeland” or the ancestral home is based on how the diaspora perceive and have lived with it. Robin Cohen argues that it is the memories and shared thoughts that connect them with their former “home.” In the transnational global space, the diasporas provide much of analytical and descriptive power where their ideas of “home” and their “inflection of homeland remain powerful discourses” (Cohen 2). In the realm of diasporic literature, the centrality of “home” becomes that which forms the core of the diasporic literary imagination and these spaces of home are delineated oftentimes through the course of their narratives. Research has shown that literary writings about “home” are often the personal subjective expression that emanates from deep intimacy and attachments among diasporic writers. Thus, their narratives allow the readers to comprehend their psycho-corporeal affinity toward these spaces of “home” through which they connect and construct the narrative. Today, “diaspora” subsumes both involuntarily or voluntarily dispersed, displaced and de-territorialized ethnic communities. In the ever-changing social and political global scenario, these disparate groups spread across the globe have been thriving. They have experienced significant changes in their social, political and economic experiences and their notion of “home” has changed along with it. It is this notional aspect of “home” that needs to be analyzed through the prism of contemporary thoughts concerning space and time to analyze how these individuals often connect to their former “home” via nostalgia and remembrance where it remains congealed into their consciousness.

Gaston Bachelard in his seminal work *The Poetics of Space* postulates the theory of “topoanalysis.” He argues that places often become sites of intimacy and attachment and this leads one to experience nostalgia when these sites are revisited or recalled. Taking a childhood home as an example, he argues that thoughts and dreams evoked by the house often play a role in the psychology of the individual and gradually these spaces get congealed in their consciousness. He defines “topoanalysis” as “the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives” (Bachelard 8) and asserts that the space of home is specified by its intimacy and so it remains congealed in an individual’s consciousness. It is a sort of initial universe, asserting that “all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home” (5) while examining locations in the house as places of intimacy and memory which are manifested in poetry. For Bachelard, a house or home has both unity and complexity, it is made out of memories and experience. In the spaces of home, he argues that objects are charged with mental experience and with every habitual action we open endless dimensions of our existence. All this integrates and constructs the subjective consciousness of an individual which also constructs a poetic image of how one discovers their individuality, i.e., intersubjectivity. It is in this state that an individual can be traced back to one’s childhood home, as he puts it, “we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost” (6), asserting that emotions come out through writing, i.e., poetry. Thus, it is through writings that one affirms repose.

In the domain of diasporic literature, Indian diasporic authors have often negotiated and placed importance on their place of birth or home cities in their literary writings showcasing a deep intimacy toward former places of dwelling. The city or one’s place of birth becomes the location of both departure

and settlement and so becomes an important site for diasporic belonging and attachment. This intimate relationship with their place of dwelling is often described as the shared feeling and attachment of an individual toward their “home.” Anjali Gera Roy argues that in the diasporic imaginary, “home” is not only confined to the spaces of a structural abode alone, where one is brought up or resides, but also is located in “desh”¹ which may be translated as a region, village or a city” (Roy 141). Therefore, when diasporic authors evocate city spaces in their narratives, it is as the site of intimacy or a “home.” Critics have long argued that the personal experiences of these city spaces pertain to the author’s own subjectivity and that these narratives often display the psychological attachment of the author in a literal sense. In his seminal work, *Places: an Introduction*, Tim Creswell quotes Agnew who formulates the physical and subjective dimension of a place as “locality,” “locale” and “sense of place.” Locality and locale refer to the physical dimension of the place where sense of place corresponds to the “subjective attachments or feeling” (Agnew in Creswell 7) that one develops toward a place where one has spent a considerable amount of time. It is tantamount to the experience of “lost” space where one is born and raised. The constant city evocation by diasporic authors like Salman Rushdie (Bombay), Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (Calcutta), Bharati Mukherjee (Calcutta) and Tabish Khair (Gaya) portends to that “sense of place” which the author never ceases to write and explicate their experiences of lost times. From the literary writings of Amitava Kumar, whose major setting is his hometown Patna, this article contends that the “city” represents a sentimental and nostalgic space of “home” in his writings, manifested via the diasporic consciousness of the author. What is unique in Kumar’s writing is that despite having produced a vast number of nonfiction works where the stories are based on the author’s interpersonal experiences, the city consistently frames as a major part in the narratives. His literary writings, such as *Passport Photos* (2000), *Bombay-London-New York* (2002) and *A Matter of Rats* (2014), showcase the author’s constant negotiation of the city spaces of Patna. The constant representation of city spatiality reflects the author’s “sense of place” and the subjective attachments vis-à-vis Patna. The narratives of the city in his writings aren’t just built on the author’s anecdotes of his earlier stay but also reflect the current social and political reality in a way these narratives become a mirror to the “lived” reality of the city. The author throws light on the various transformations of Patna in all his major writings where they are not just a personal memory exercise but also a documentation of the social and political reality, that is, a kind of exploration of the city’s historical and cultural aspects. Oftentimes, making a comparative analysis of its past to its present, the manifestation of how it “was” and how it “is” today, all integrated and vividly portrayed by the author while he visits the city as an “immigrant.” The narratives are autobiographical, reflecting the emotional bond he shares with the city. A bond that is often laden with dissent and displeasure toward the current political apathy and neglect that have led to modern-day Patna. As a journalist turned diasporic author, his narratives aren’t just confined to the nostalgic and memory spaces of his former land alone. Instead, the narratives showcase a shift from the conventional diasporic narratives to a bolder and assertive kind of narrative that is often marked by diasporic politics. However, people and places remain at the core of his writings. Sushmita Sircar argues that Kumar explicitly foregrounds the imagined nature of place in his introduction, saying that “[t]he places of place is also in writing. In other words, the writer arrives at a ‘sense of place’ not by mere accident of birth or habitation but by creating, again and again, a landscape of the imagination” (Sircar xix). What Sircar argues is that Patna is so closely represented in Kumar’s work that it seems either the city constructs the literary writings or his writings construct the city. The literary texts under consideration explore how Kumar extrapolates through his “sense of place,” where city as “home” become an instrument of “topoanalysis” that drives the consciousness of a displaced author like him. This article contends that Patna isn’t just a city for the author but is also a “home” to which he shares an intimate relationship. Using Kumar’s literary texts as an example, this article offers new ways into thinking about the associated concerns of diaspora, home, city spaces and “topoanalysis.” This article seeks to explore how the city spaces serve as the site for a personal space for nostalgia, longing and belonging which can be construed as the “intimate” spaces of “home” by the immigrant author.

¹ Desh: The idea of “desh,” in Indian vernacular languages, implies a nation as homeland, and place of origin as home.

City Spaces as “Home” and “Topoanalysis”

In postmodernist Indian English literature, the depiction of a city has often occupied a prominent place in the literary narratives. The authors have often showcased a transitional shift in their explication due to urban reforms in the postindependence era wherein literary writings became a medium to study and analyze these city spaces. For instance, the longings for pre-independence Lahore, Karachi, Lucknow, Dhaka or Kolkata by those who migrated before the Indian Partition of 1947 show a transformational shift to the new urban professional migrant's nostalgic reproductions of Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi or Bangalore – these demonstrated how the urban spaces have acquired an equally strong symbolic affective meaning as the spaces of “home” in the narratives of diasporic writers. The multiple dimensions of “home” have transcended the stable physicality and are now “fixed” in the diasporic consciousness as opposed to the ever-shifting “actual geography” (George 11) and are instrumental in streamlining the emergence of a disconcerted space of multi-locational belonging and state of “in-betweenness” for the immigrants living abroad. Thus, the notion of “home” has always been a tricky point of discussion through the lens of modern transnational global space. While working on the Greek communities in London and New York, Myria Georgiou accentuates that “home is a special, intense and emotional space and symbol for diaspora” existing across the varied gridlines of belonging and affixation. She further adds that “home” could be a “domestic natural space” or a “private” home, it also pertains to the “immediate family” or “the local space where everyday life evolves ... It can also be the country of origin, the symbolic Home, the source, or the highly symbolic and mediated transnational context, which shelters diaspora against exclusionary national spaces” (Georgiou 160). Based on these works, Kumar's expression of the city spaces of Patna is a reflection of his own emotional space for the place he remembers fondly with much affection and intensity.

The city space invades a significant part of the writings of Amitava Kumar. In his literary works like *Passport Photos*, *Bombay-London-New York* and *A Matter of Rats*, there is a constant evocation of “Patna” as he “dwells on mention of Patna in the literature... the city is at the ‘heart of the narrative’” (Pakanati 236). The first novel published in the year 2000, *Passport Photos*, highlights and narrates Kumar's departure from Patna to the United States in the early 1980s. The author was going to pursue higher education and leaving India for the first time. The author's own alienation in America led to his writing about the city that he often “missed” and longed for. The anecdotes also reflect upon the issues and challenges that an immigrant faces in their new country, in this case: racism and social exclusion as well as other discriminatory practices pertaining to class and social status. It is these experiences of alienation that form the basis of his first novel that also integrates the memories of his Patna that he left behind. The second novel, *Bombay-London-New York*, deals with the author's early years growing up in Patna. The author admits that as a child, he used to dislike the city, and like any child growing up in a small town in India, he harbored an obsessive desire to leave and travel to global cities like London and New York as he believed that these global cities “offered innumerable opportunities and a bright future” (Kumar 56). The fascination and enchantment of global cities had been instrumental in prompting him to move out of India for his studies abroad. But after two decades, the alienating experiences in the host land led him to writing about the “city” he left behind. In the prologue, the author emphasizes that it was in America that he first began writing about Patna, “I began to see myself and the place Patna as two different, distinct entities. But I also learned how both of them had always been very close if not also the same” (58). What he suggests is that it was through writing the memories of his good old days in the city that he gradually found himself closer to his former “home” and found comfort in his new country. In *A Matter of Rats*, the author delineates the current sociopolitical reality of Patna while also reminiscing about his years growing-up there. The narratives take readers through the varied alleys of city structure, such as the libraries, museums, hospitals as well as the social and political reality of modern day Patna that illustrates how the city has grown and transformed itself over the years. Noticeably, the narratives evince his own subliminal attachment to his “roots” and memories via writings. Critics often argue that the representations of the city in the literature are the personal impressions of the author that are derived from their life experiences. For instance, Indian diasporic authors like Salman Rushdie and Chitra Divakaruni have constantly written about Bombay (*Midnight's Children*, 1981; *The Moor's Last Sigh*, 1995) and Calcutta (*Arranged Marriage*, 1995; *Sister of My Heart*, 1999), respectively, in

their writings. But their construction of cities is purely based on the memories of their childhood, while in the writings of Amitava Kumar, the representation of city spaces differs in many respects. What is discernible in his literary writings is that the city spaces are represented and delineated not only through memories but also through “lived” spaces as the author often frequents between Patna and New York, the city where he resides. It is through these negotiations of the past and the present that the author constructs the spatiality of the city emanating from his own phenomenological experiences. There is a constant vacillation of Patna in the course of his literary narratives that is mainly brought about through memories. These memories are a reflection of the close intimacy that he shares with the city. In “topoanalysis,” Bachelard writes that, “after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of ‘Motionless Childhood,’ motionless the way all Immemorial things are” (Bachelard 5). The memories of home are not something remembered, but rather, are entwined with the present; “home” is a site where an individual frames his/her way of thinking and construct their persona as part of their ongoing experience in the present. He adds, “memories are dreams, because the home of other days has become a great image of lost intimacy, ... for ... human returning takes place in the great image of human life, a rhythm that reaches back across the years and through the dream, combats all absence” (Bachelard 99). It also subsumes their physical and subjective self thus it becomes the site for phenomenological intervention. For Bachelard, the memories of “home” are engraved in one’s flesh and he regards it as the space and not time that brings back those memories, and therefore, all really inhabited spaces bear the essence of home. An individual can comfort themselves by reliving memories of protection; by recapturing an image that moves us at an unimaginable depth. This is the chief benefit of the house: “it shelters daydreaming, it protects the dreamer, it allows one to dream in peace” (6). Through “topoanalysis,” Bachelard searches for experience and this theory adds new dimension to the study of these intimate spaces of city, as city occupies an intimate space for an individual who connects to it as home while living away in a foreign land.

Bachelard’s critical approach to “topoanalysis” evolved while he was working on the phenomenological aspect of spaces to analyze how spaces affect an individual and how one develops “intimacy” toward a particular place. Before the conception of the intimate spaces of “home” was theorized by Bachelard, other writers, academics and poets had attempted similar work. However, they lacked specificity. For instance, in “topoanalysis,” Bachelard discusses “topophilia,” a term that was first coined by W. H. Auden. In his *Thanksgiving for a Habitat* (1960), Auden celebrated the domestic contentment of his Austrian Cottage that was structured around the rooms of his house. Bachelard’s “topoanalysis” was used by Colin Ward in *Child in the City* (1978) to explore how the author’s “experienced reality” of childhood was evoked in his adulthood. Charles Moore in *A Pattern Language* (1977) showcases his love for inner spaces of “home” like porches, shelves and nooks. But more salient for this discussion is whether the spaces of “home” can ever transcend the confines of a house. Gera Roy asserts that “home” is not only a compact structure consisting of bricks and walls, but it subsumes those spaces where one has grown up, thus one’s locality or city becomes the “home” for the individual. In the case of Kumar, the memories of Patna become the site for “topoanalysis” in his writings through which the subjective intimacy is explicated. It adds a new dimension to comprehend these subjective expressions of the city as a city that isn’t just defined by its historiography or geographic physicality. The subjective impression of the author becomes an important aspect to understand the essence of the city and “topoanalysis” facilitates in understanding those nuances of subjective interpretation of the author via the home or city.

Patna as “Desh”: A Landscape of Memories

A person’s childhood house holds a symbolic affective power, which also becomes his/her place of origin and return. Sara Ahmed in her essay “Home and Away” writes that particular locale and landscapes of memory are also analyzed in relation to nation and often in terms of “home” and belonging and considers these personal memories within the imaginative and material spaces of “home.” Therefore, when Kumar writes about these spaces, they eventually emerge from those personal memories of the “city” that is also

the site of author's nostalgia. Anjali Gera Roy argues that in diasporic imaginary, "'home' is not only confined to the spaces of a structural abode alone, where one is brought up or resides, but also is very much appropriately located in 'desh' that may be translated as a region, village or a city" (Roy 141) that transcends to the spaces of "home," and therefore, when these diasporic authors evoke city spaces in their narratives, it connects to their writing about the spaces of "home" with whom they are forever attached. Alison Blunt and Jayani Bonnerjee argue that the "city" is a "distinctive location of diasporic dwelling, belonging and attachment" and that the "city" as home is rooted in the city dweller's "city-specific memories" (Blunt and Bonnerjee 237). Sharing the notion of city spaces as home in the context of Anglo-Indian writers, Laura Bear advocates that for them, "desh" was located in the "railway colony," which also became a site of "memory and conceptual space" that gave families a "foundational point of origin" (Bear 180). It also implies that the rural or city spaces, rather than an entire nation, create this sense of home and belonging. The constant negotiation of the city spaces of Patna evokes the sense of "desh" in Kumar's literary works, thereby also making it a landscape of memory.

In "topoanalysis," Bachelard disseminates how these spaces of memory or nostalgia remain congealed in the consciousness of an individual. Through this approach, he speaks of thought and dreaming invoked by the house that resurrect the past and connect it with the present, stressing the fact that when one enters a new house, they are flooded with experiences of prior homes which aren't just memories but rather something else altogether. It is in this state that an individual reaches back to the early house of one's childhood, or as he puts it, "we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost" (Bachelard 6). He further argues that the author writes through his experiences wherein "home" becomes a primal space that acts as a first world or first universe, which then frames our understanding of all the spaces outside, "A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space" (2). It also underscored the domain of intimacy and stresses – which, along with imagination and memory, plays a significant role in creating real images. Kumar writes about the city spaces sharing a deep intimacy to it like a home where memories play a constructive role in his writings and provide mental solace to the writer. On the constant evocation of Patna, the author professes, "the reality, however, was that I was still living in Patna. I felt trapped in that city and in what I was convinced were only the shallow struggles of the large family" (Kumar in *Bombay-London-New York* 65). The intensity of his attachment is a reflection of his psycho-corporeal attachment with the city of Patna. This also suggests that diasporic authors like Kumar have left their place of birth in physicality but are forever trapped in them psychologically. The author confesses that it was through writing that he began to return to his "home." The author explains that even today he constantly read newspapers to keep himself updated about the social and political happenings concerning Patna:

The world was rich with experience. This knowledge had freed me. It had also made me remember the unremarked intimacies of my childhood, its joys and sorrows. In what I wrote and read, I began to return to Patna. This habit has grown in my self-imposed exile from Patna: I still write about it as if I knew very little else. (66)

Another important theoretical aspect of "topoanalysis" that Bachelard proposes is "topophilia" which corresponds to the relationships between love or intimacy and particular objects within the confines of "home" that arouse emotional feeling in an individual. For example, Bachelard imagines a room which has drawers, tables, cupboards, etc. to which an individual attaches certain memories and later gets nostalgic thinking about it. Kumar's delineation of his own locality, the small shopping stores and the book stores that he briefly brings up in the course of his literary narratives is an expression of his own topophilic spaces within the city. These act as a nostalgic site for him and bring back memories of his childhood. For example, in *A Matter of Rats*, he fondly recalls the stores where he used to buy his books in his childhood, "There was a bookstore in Patna called Tricel ... there were excellent bookstores for Hindi books near the Patna College" (Kumar 62), remembering how he used to accompany his sisters on bicycles while his sisters hired auto-rickshaws to go to their friends' house or cinema (59). He exhibits a psychologically drenched consciousness that evolves from his deep nostalgia and concealed intuitive feeling which emerges randomly in his literary narratives.

Bachelard is one of the earliest theorists to have worked on the phenomenological aspect of space and the concept of “topoanalysis” delineates the phenomenological expression of space through individual mediation. His conceptualization of space has been cardinal in the domain of spatial studies and its influence can be observed in the works of critics like Henri Lefebvre (*The Production of Space*), Jacques Ranciere (*Dissensus: On politics and aesthetics*) and Jean-Luc Nancy (*L'expérience de la liberté*). These critics however stressed more on the social factor related to spaces rather than on individual expression. Henri Lefebvre worked on the production of space and postulated that space is not a “neutral” container. It is through interactions in the social context that spaces acquire meaning. An “abstract” space always exists in homogeneity rather than accommodating social and representational spaces as in “exchange-value” wherein it culminates to the “use-value,” i.e., “differential” space through social relations; advocating that “differential” space is the one that embraces and enhances difference. “Space” in relation to others is both a product and producer as they are “produced and reproduced daily through the connection of mind, body and physicality” (Lefebvre 32). Jacques Ranciere further works on this aspect of “differential” space to situate his analysis on the “politics” of space. He argues that “politics inaugurates space and specialization is central to politics as a constitutive part of it” (Ranciere qtd. in Mustafa 670). He connects space to aesthetics and art. He argues that politics revolves around what is seen and said and who has the ability to see and speak themselves into being through the properties of space and the possibilities of time. Even art becomes political because of the way it frames time and space. Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy places emotions at center-stage while suggesting that much emotion results from the human struggle to come to terms and experiences of singularity. His theorization of “being singular plural” argues that the emotive “affect” is politically manipulated by theorizing a common basis for anxieties experienced by human beings. He puts more emphasis on the plural “We” rather “I,” suggesting that “one’s existence is essentially co-existence” (Nancy qtd. in Welch and Panelli 350). However, Bachelard’s conceptualization of “topoanalysis” remains crucial as it is through individuals that these social relations are connected and formulate other aspect of spaces. Lefebvre argues that it is through the interaction of spaces that the city is constructed. To make his statement clear, he postulates a trialectic of space to showcase how one’s thought (perceived), creative act (conceived) and “materiality of social practice” (lived) interact with each other and construct a new “space.” The subjective delineation of “city” through “memories” and “lived” moment is often the product of these interactions. The concept of the spatial triad formulated by Lefebvre, i.e., *Spatial practice*, *Representations of space* and *Representational space* (originally in italics), alternatively referred to as the “perceived,” “conceived” and “lived” space, respectively, showcases an interconnectedness to each other which is vital to an individual’s social relations. He terms the subjective experience of an individual as “lived” space or the *Spaces of Representation* (Lefebvre 33) which are fundamentally the spaces that are “experienced” and also have a bearing on the individual’s memory through which the spatiality is brought forth. *Representational space* (lived) “embodies complex symbolism, sometimes coded, sometimes not” (33). These spaces are “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 writers and philosophers, who describe and aspire to do no more than describe” (39). In that sense, *Representational spaces* are the daily spaces lived and experienced by the people where their cultural memories are a product of certain images and symbols. On the other hand, Lefebvre argues that these are also the spaces of writers and artists where their experiences and subjectivity are perceived and reflected through their works. These spaces are the symbolic ways where one comprehends and experiences one’s physical space where they also become the space of memory. The city in Kumar’s writing is often delineated through these *Representational spaces* where the author not only connects to his past but also delineates the present.

Kumar lives in a self-imposed exile and juggles between the United States and India. This state of in-between-ness makes it possible for him to render an objective critique of political and social conditions. Critics note that the author focuses on the “less noticed changes taking place in Patna and the nostalgia that ultimately draws people to a particular place – the place of their parents” (Pakanati 236). Bachelard calls this nostalgic space as “felicitous space” as it “evokes an intimate space that is lost forever” where home also becomes a “great image of lost intimacy” (Bachelard 100). It is the space we love, the space that concentrates being within limits that protect. Adding further to it, he points that it is a house of secret

rooms, “abodes for an unforgettable past,” with nooks and corners where one can curl up comfortably, “to curl up belongs to the phenomenology of the verb to inhabit and only those who have learned to do so can inhabit with intensity” (101). The “felicitous” space of the home consists of its domestic menagerie of tables, chairs, cupboards and stairs. The journey into intimacy is neatly evoked by drawers, cupboards, wardrobes and above all locks, although he warns against their use as gratuitous metaphors. In the context of the city, it is both the dwelling and the land, it is the dwelling upon or of the land, i.e., “Patna” which is at the center of Kumar’s literary writings. Thus, the “felicitous” space is primal to evoking nostalgia in the author’s mind where he convalesces the past while living in the present. For example, in *A Matter of Rats*, Kumar provides a political commentary on the economic, social and political trajectory of contemporary Patna while also remembering its glorious past, recalling anecdotes from his formative days while commenting on the ever-changing sociopolitical atmosphere that reflect the “lived” reality of the city:

The small stores where I once used to buy small packets of Parle-G biscuits were now selling mobile phones. The real changes were less visible. Nearly twenty women in the village earned government pay, working on child development schemes. Political and financial power was no longer limited to the upper caste. A few backward caste families had prospered. (Kumar in *A Matter of Rats* 24)

The small stores are an expression of the “felicitous space” that evoke memories of his childhood. In the transnational global space, the immigrants can travel back and forth by choice. This also allows them to compare and contrast the sociopolitical differences between the past and present city. Kumar’s periodic visits to the city of his birth allows him to contrast the visible physical changes and transformations. Patna isn’t just a city in Kumar’s writing. It portends to deep emotion in his literary writings that highlight his inner desire to have a place called “home.” For Bachelard, “felicitous space” brings calm and unity which he calls “intimate immensity” (197), and Kumar’s “Patna” does the same for him when he infuses it in his writings.

The Immigrant Gaze and the City

“Topoanalysis” pertains to the phenomenological impression of the author. Bachelard explains that one’s experience of how their life has been lived becomes the origin of their consciousness. The surroundings are capable of shaping a character’s consciousness and have an impact on their subjective being, arguing that as soon as one enters a new surrounding, it “grows in proportion to the growth of the body” (118), intimating further that the rural and rustic surrounding has more potential to produce imagery than the urban spaces because of the environment and surroundings. Kumar’s subsequent evocation is suggestive to the concept that the environment of the city had a great impact on the author’s subjective self. Patna is the capital of one of India’s most populated states. As a city, it is older than New York City where Kumar currently lives. It is interesting to take into account that barring a few cities such as Athens, Rome, Istanbul, Jerusalem and Damascus, not many cities of the modern world can boast of a 2,500-year-old history behind them. “Pataliputra” – or Patna as it is called now – is alongside these great cities, which had a glorious past, as has been found in the travelogues of Chinese scholars and Greek ethnographers alike, such as Fa-Hien and Megasthenese. But the city had a very precarious development in modern India. The postindependence government failed to capitalize on its rich heritage and manpower, which ultimately decimated the state’s economy. The Human Development Index of the state of Bihar to which Patna is the capital is the lowest in India. The relegated status of the city is what hurts Kumar and that has accrued his personal ignominy. So, when he chose to write about Patna, it is not just because of his memories and nostalgia, but also because of the “shame” that remains congealed in his consciousness and to which he attaches his own identity, as he writes in *Bombay-London-New York*:

I tell stories about Patna because they are a part of my shame at having come from nowhere... Both my shame and nostalgia are a part of the experience of having left Patna, where I didn’t want to belong, and then coming to America, where I’m not sure I can ever belong. (Kumar 67)

The city also becomes a marker of the author's immigrant identity. In *Passport Photos*, the author throws light on the rich history of the city that has gradually vanished from the public memory and is in danger of becoming lost. While narrating his own real-life experiences, the author expresses how immigrants are ill-treated at the airports via the lengthy process of frisking and frequent checks. Describing one such experience, he writes, "The officer reads the name of the new arrival's place of birth. He has never heard of it. He has spent 31 years of his life. But for some reason that he does not understand, the immigrant is filled with shame" (Kumar in *Passport Photos* 4). For a writer like him, this shame of arrival is a shared feeling among immigrants, irrespective of the background one comes from. Thus, Patna is not only a site of nostalgia for the author but also of "shame" that he carries in his consciousness as an immigrant. For him, the city is not just a place or a physical entity, but also something to which he shows a deep allegiance with his own identity. He writes, "Patna is not only my hometown. It is also a place in time. It made me who I am" (Kumar in *Bombay-London-New York*, 67). Kumar manifests this identity crisis whereby he is not able to forget his homeland with which he shares a close bond, "The reality, however, was that I was still living in Patna. I felt trapped in that city and in what I was convinced were only that shallow struggles of the large family" (65). What he suggests in these lines is a reflection of his deep attachment to Patna that has only grown over the years while living in America.

Edward Said views this conundrum of the migrant writer as an emotional feature, where he puts them "neither here nor there, but rather in-between things" (Said 99). This also creates an identity crisis in them. This in-betweenness of living at two places at once only furthers his dilemma of immigrant identity. As has been observed, the author seems to resist this transition. His literary narratives and the consciousness demonstrated through his writings tangibly showcase the writer's dilemma of "belonging." Immigrant authors often grapple with a "double consciousness" where they physically live at one place while sentimentally connected to the "other," showcasing an "assumed solidarity with the ancestral home on one hand, and a desire for a new home on the other" (Dayal 54). However, diasporic double consciousness isn't just about the conflict of situating self in either nation that the author considers "home," there are other dynamics that construct the diasporic double consciousness. As Dayal argues that "transcultural criticism" also has a bearing on their consciousness wherein reading one culture's space and time with the other "destabilizes discursive regularities" (57). It is the outcome of varied cultural negotiations while living in a diaspora that often ironizes the myth of "home." Thus, it destabilizes the border zones of cultures and challenges internal hybridity of a diasporic individual. Therefore, diasporic narratives continue to dig into these spaces of "home" that remain a subliminal part of their consciousness. Kumar explicates this crisis in the following lines, "both my shame and nostalgia are a part of the experience of having left Patna, where I didn't want to belong, and then coming to America, where I'm not sure I can ever belong" (Kumar in *Bombay-London-New York*, 67). Baidehi Mukherjee explains that the sense of in-betweenness and their alienation has been important in constricting their "cultural gaze" (Mukherjee 12). When immigrants suffer alienation, their consciousness gazes back at their homeland. Kumar's narrative reflects this cultural gaze which is an integral part of his diasporic consciousness, and thus, the constant negotiation of the spaces of Patna alludes to the "cultural gaze" wherein he more often contrasts both the cultures and that also leads him to a deep state of nostalgia:

I have an image for this time in my life. I could be travelling on a train in India and I would pass a house in the dark in which through an open window I could see burning a dim bulb. It would be a momentary glimpse, but it would be enough to evoke in my mind a memory of Patna and the lives of many of my relatives...I wanted to be the one in the train passing by that dark house barely illuminated by a single bulb.... I was not a writer; I was not in love. Nothing seemed to happen. I felt wretched about myself and felt, I think rightly, that this wretchedness also belonged to the place in which we lived. (*Bombay-London-New York*, 65)

"Home" for the immigrants and its subsequent longing have also undergone significant change in the transnational global space. Today, when the mobility is so common, there is this concept of "home" that is also transiting. Roy 142 writes that the Indian community practices have always revered the connection between soil and ancestors which is deeply embedded in cultural traditions showcasing an intimate connection with their motherland no matter where one lived. The process of imagining 'home' is made

visible through the complex relationship of *pitrabhumi*² (ancestral home) and *karmabhumi*³ (place of work). The intensity of his attachment is a reflection of his psycho-corporeal attachment with the city of Patna that only substantiates the already hyper attachment that the author has it with his past. This suggests that diasporic authors like Kumar might have left their place of birth in “physicality” but they are forever trapped in them where it is difficult to come out. The author, while living in the United States for the last two decades, has not lost touch with the news and events concerning the city – which he accesses through the media and other reports. He writes:

The stories that Patna offers me – there are only stories, and very few explanations – seem to belong to my past... The reports and stories I record or write are ambiguous gestures; it is as if I am waving at Patna, and it is difficult to tell whether I am saying hello or good bye. (*Bombay-London-New York* 67)

The author showcases a heightened sense of intimacy with the city where he was born and spent his childhood. The city, for him, also serves as the marker of his immigrant identity. However, Kumar’s literary narratives are not confined to the memory recollection of his days in Patna. Kumar has often engaged diasporic politics in his other literary writings, and to reduce the author’s diasporic consciousness to nostalgia and shame would be an inappropriate generalization. His writings also showcase the issues and challenges of diasporas mainly concerning “immigrants” arriving in the United States. *Passport Photos* showcases the other contours of immigrant’s life in a sense that the authors connect to them as Steven Grosby writes “collective self-consciousness” (Grosby 10) where the experiences of the past and the present form the basis of the author’s diaspora politics that also brings in the consciousness of “similarity” (us) and “difference” (them). In his review of *Passport Photos*, Peter Hitchcock calls out the novel as an innovative book on “cultural criticism” where Kumar has metaphorically engaged himself in the search of a “new poetics and politics of diasporic protest” (Hitchcock 133). His other works like *Husband of a Fanatic* and *A Foreigner Carrying in the Crook of His Arm a Tiny Bomb* articulate different nuances in Kumar’s writings which are marked by dissent and displeasure in the context of contemporary global issues like “terror” and its subsequent “victimization.” Yossi Shain in “Ethnic Diasporas and U.S. Foreign Policy” argues that diasporas in the United States have been highly dedicated to political causes in their country of origin and it is also important for their “political identity” in America (Shain 814). As a feature of journalist turned author, these narratives are written in reportage form and also showcase how the transnational moment has facilitated immigrant like him to appropriate and express these events through literary writings.

Conclusions

The varied connections correlating home, city and the immigrant life in the literary narratives of Amitava Kumar framed the focus of this article. The paper discussed how an immigrant author like him attaches importance to the city in literary writings. The article focused on how the city subsumes the spaces of home that is constructed on nostalgia and memories where the city becomes the location of both departure and settlement wherein it is also an important site of diasporic belonging and attachment. The article also explored the spatiality of the city spaces of Patna in the literary writings of Amitava Kumar, highlighting the relationship between diasporic memory and nostalgia and the idea of city spaces as “home” in articulating such attachments. The author’s writing about the city spaces is just not built on the imaginative consciousness, but his experiential negotiations of reality also construct and often complicate the narratives. In his literary writings, the constant evocation of Patna is borne out of his emotional subjectivity with whom he is

² *Pitrabhumi* – the word has been taken from Hindi lexicon which basically means “land of the father.” In the context of Indian culture, it mainly points to one’s native land.

³ *Karmabhumi*: the word implies to one’s “place of work”; Karma is a word taken from Sanskrit which basically suggests to “one’s work” and *bhumi* in Hindi means “land,” both in conjunction suggests one’s place of work.

sentimentally and emotionally remain deeply attached. The author's deep intimacy to his "home" is palpable in his writings and his periodic visit to India, and the spatial representation of city spaces is a manifestation of his own sense of awareness of the greater sociopolitical issues that construct and define modern-day Patna. The theoretical formulation of "topoanalysis" leads to a general proposition that his constant negotiation of these spaces alludes to the desire to return to his "past" via writing, wherein he wants to preserve and store the memories of "home" via writing. The constant negotiation of the spaces of Patna often exemplify his ambiguous state of mind. In his literary writings, the notional aspect of "home" is very complex as it combines an anxiety about not having a country to call his own with an emotional attachment to India. At the same time, the literary writings express the author's deep attachment to Patna. Therefore, "home" remains partly existent and partly mythical for a writer like him.

Conflict of interest: Authors state no conflict of interest.

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