Double Diaspora and Transgenerational Memory in Nikesh Shukla's The One Who Wrote Destiny

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Abstract

This article offers a focused exploration of Nikesh Shukla's The One Who Wrote Destiny (2018), delving into the challenges and complexities of the 'double diaspora' experienced by British South Asian characters in the UK. Situated at the intersection of literary analysis and sociocultural studies, the study addresses the novel's thematic core, emphasizing the lasting impact of racism and cultural displacement across multiple generations. Utilizing Jan Assmann's framework of 'communicative memory' and 'cultural memory,' alongside Maya Parmar's exploration of double diaspora, the study investigates the evolution of memory representation, highlighting the transformation from lived, embodied memory to mediated, cultural forms. Central to this research is the examination of double diaspora, as outlined by Parmar, exploring the migration of the Gujarati community from South Asia to East Africa and later to Britain, and the identity struggles arising from these dual displacements. Through this in-depth analysis, the article explores the intricate interplay between memory, generational shifts, and the unique challenges faced by twice-migrant communities. It provides valuable insights into the evolving nature of immigrant experiences, cultural identity, and belonging in the United Kingdom since the turn of the millennium. This analysis contributes to a broader understanding of how transgenerational memory and double diaspora influence cultural adaptation and identity formation within diasporic communities, reflecting wider sociocultural trends in contemporary Britain.

Keywords: *Diaspora, Double Diaspora, Memory, Home, Identity, Belonging, Multiculturalism.*

Introduction

The exploration of immigrant experiences in literature offers profound insights into the complexities of identity, belonging, and memory, particularly in the context of migration. Nikesh Shukla's 2018 novel *The One Who Wrote Destiny* presents a compelling narrative that focuses on British South Asian protagonists navigating the challenges of what is referred to as "double diaspora." This concept, as discussed by Parmar (2019), describes the dual migratory trajectory of communities who first migrated from South Asia to East Africa and later to Britain. Such migration patterns introduce unique experiences of cultural displacement, racial tensions, and identity formation. The novel is set within the multicultural landscape of the United Kingdom, a setting where the legacies of colonialism and racism persistently shape immigrant experiences. By focusing on the Jani family, whose journey spans from Gujarat to Kenya and ultimately to Britain, Shukla illustrates the intergenerational impacts of migration. The novel addresses central themes of memory and cultural displacement, emphasizing how each generation grapples with the effects of racism and cultural negotiation in a foreign land. Through its detailed portrayal of family dynamics, *The One Who Wrote Destiny* opens a window into the broader immigrant experience, demonstrating how memories and identities evolve within diasporic communities.

The problem addressed by this study is the lack of comprehensive understanding of how double diaspora influences identity and memory within British South Asian communities. Although there has been increasing recognition of multiculturalism in Britain, much of the existing literature on diaspora focuses on single migration experiences (Parmar, 2019), leaving the dual migration context underexplored. This gap in the literature is particularly evident when studying how transgenerational memory functions within communities that have undergone two separate displacements (Assmann, 2011). Furthermore, there is a need to explore how these dual migration experiences influence not only personal identity but also collective memory within these communities. The study focuses on the interplay between "communicative memory," which is directly tied to lived experiences, and "cultural memory," which is preserved through cultural practices and artifacts (Assmann, 2011), in shaping identity over time. Addressing this problem is crucial,

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as understanding the dynamics of double diaspora could offer broader insights into the ways in which migration shapes both individual and collective identities in a multicultural society like Britain. This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by examining *The One Who Wrote Destiny* and its portrayal of memory and identity across generations.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on double diaspora and its impact on transgenerational memory, particularly within British South Asian communities. While prior studies have explored the broader South Asian diaspora in terms of migration from India or other regions, few have examined the unique dual migratory experiences of communities that traveled through East Africa to Britain (Parmar, 2019). This dual displacement creates a distinctive cultural and social dynamic that affects how memory and identity are constructed within these communities. Shukla's novel offers a unique lens through which to explore this phenomenon by portraying the complexities of identity formation over multiple generations. What sets this study apart from previous research is its use of Jan Assmann's theoretical framework of "communicative" and "cultural" memory to analyze how memory evolves from embodied, lived experiences to more institutionalized, mediated forms (Assmann, 2011). This shift is critical in understanding how the experiences of racism, cultural displacement, and identity evolve across generations. By addressing these dynamics, the study offers new insights into the broader discourse on multiculturalism and the ways in which immigrant communities navigate their dual identities in Britain. This gap in the current scholarship presents an opportunity for a more nuanced understanding of identity within the framework of double diaspora.

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the representation of double diaspora in Nikesh Shukla's *The One Who Wrote Destiny* and its impact on memory and identity formation across generations. The study aims to examine how transgenerational memory shifts from "communicative memory" (based on lived, interpersonal interactions) to "cultural memory" (mediated through cultural practices and artifacts), as conceptualized by Assmann (2011), as portrayed in the novel. In addition, the research seeks to highlight the generational differences in how characters experience racism and cultural displacement. By exploring these issues, the study contributes to the broader discourse on multiculturalism and immigrant identity in contemporary Britain. The scope of the research is limited to literary analysis of *The One Who Wrote Destiny*, focusing on the Jani family's experiences across three generations. This study will also engage with the theoretical frameworks developed by Jan Assmann (2011) and Maya Parmar (2019) to frame its analysis. These frameworks will provide a comprehensive understanding of how memory is transmitted and how identity is negotiated within diasporic communities that have undergone multiple migrations. Ultimately, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how immigrant experiences are reflected in literature and their implications for cultural identity in a multicultural society.

Method

This study adopts a **qualitative literary analysis** approach to examine the themes of identity, displacement, and memory in Nikesh Shukla's novel *The One Who Wrote Destiny*. The research design focuses on a close textual reading of the novel, allowing for a thorough investigation of how Shukla portrays the experiences of British South Asians grappling with the concept of "double diaspora." This **qualitative approach** is well-suited for analyzing complex themes embedded in literary works, such as migration, racism, and generational identity shifts. The study also uses Jan Assmann's theory of "communicative" and "cultural memory" to explore how memory is represented and evolves across generations within the narrative.

The primary **research method** involves examining key sections of *The One Who Wrote Destiny* to identify how Shukla narrates the intergenerational experiences of the Jani family, a British South Asian family of Gujarati descent. The analysis focuses on the characters' experiences of migration from Gujarat to Kenya and eventually to Britain, with attention given to how each generation encounters and processes cultural displacement, racism, and evolving identities. This method provides insights into how second-generation South Asians relate to their heritage and the broader societal context in Britain. The narrative structure,

which alternates between different characters' perspectives, is analyzed to understand how Shukla captures the complexity of the double diaspora experience.

The study incorporates **Maya Parmar's concept of "double diaspora"** to frame the dual migration of British South Asians, particularly the journey from South Asia to East Africa and then to Britain. Parmar's theoretical framework helps to interpret how Shukla represents the nuanced experiences of individuals who have undergone multiple migrations and how these experiences shape their identity and memory. This research seeks to highlight the distinct characteristics of double diaspora, emphasizing the complexity of identity formation in the context of repeated displacement. The analysis contrasts these experiences with the singular migration narratives typically explored in diasporic literature, providing a deeper understanding of how cultural and personal identities are negotiated in a multi-migratory context.

Furthermore, the research draws on **Jan Assmann's framework** to distinguish between "communicative memory," which is grounded in lived, interpersonal exchanges, and "cultural memory," which is mediated through cultural artifacts and institutions. The study explores how these forms of memory manifest in the novel, particularly through the characters' engagement with their family's past and their negotiation of cultural identity in Britain. By focusing on the shift from personal, embodied memory to more mediated forms of cultural memory, the study aims to shed light on how immigrant communities preserve and transform their heritage across generations.

Beyond Diaspora

The *One Who Wrote Destiny* revolves around the experiences of East African Indian communities who have settled in the United Kingdom. These communities, originally from India, underwent multiple migrations, first to Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, before eventually settling in Britain. Shukla's novel illustrates the importance of kinship and intergenerational relationships in shaping the identities of individuals with complex cultural backgrounds. The novel is significant for being one of the first to chronicle the journey of the Gujarati people from South Asia to East Africa and then to Britain. It traces the trajectory of Mukesh, a central character who migrates from Gujarat to Kenya, where he builds his life before moving again to England. Shukla's exploration of this journey, which spans the past century, reflects a profound engagement with the ongoing racial tensions in Britain. Through this narrative, the novel addresses important themes such as race, racism, cultural displacement, and generational loss.

Vinay Patel's reflection in his essay *Death is a Many-Headed Monster* from *The Good Immigrant* (2016) encapsulates the enduring impacts of multiple displacements. Patel emphasizes how the multiple migrations his family underwent across Asia, Africa, and Europe left lasting marks on their identities, remarking, "Asia. Africa. Europe. Every continent we've been through has left a mark on us" (Patel 2016, p. 222). This concept of 'double diaspora,' which Patel articulates so personally, serves as a powerful lens through which to examine the novel. Patel's insight helps frame how Shukla's characters grapple with their own histories of migration and the complexities of forming identities in a foreign land that doesn't always accept them.

In *The One Who Wrote Destiny*, Shukla intricately weaves these themes of displacement and identity across time and space. The novel spans locations such as the UK, Kenya, and New York, unfolding through various first-person narratives, each offering a distinct perspective. The exception is Rakesh, whose story is told through the perspectives of those around him. This narrative structure effectively captures the multifaceted experiences of the Jani family, illustrating the complexities of being part of a double diaspora. The novel's nonlinear narrative structure, shifting between different generations and time periods, allows Shukla to challenge the notion of a stable, singular identity and emphasize the evolving nature of the immigrant experience.

The novel's four chapters traverse three distinct time periods—1966, 1988, and 2017—beginning with Mukesh's arrival in England from Mombasa in 1966. Mukesh's story highlights the dual challenges he faces: hostility from the broader British society and a sense of alienation within the British South Asian community. His misbelief in the proximity of Keighley to London, along with his friend's tragic death soon after Mukesh's departure from Kenya, sets the stage for a life marked by both physical and emotional

dislocation. As Mukesh builds a new life in Keighley and meets Nisha, who eventually becomes his wife, the narrative takes on the weight of personal and familial loss. Nisha's death from cancer leaves Mukesh to raise their children, Neha and Rakesh, who must now navigate their own sense of identity and belonging within a society that often fails to fully accept them.

The subsequent chapters catapult the narrative forward to 2017, centering on the lives of Neha and Rakesh, the twin offspring of Mukesh and Nisha. Due to hereditary genetic predispositions, the women in the family are susceptible to cancer, and Neha grapples with the disease inherited from her mother, whom she never had the chance to know. Neha, a computer programmer aspiring to embrace British citizenship, consciously distances herself from her Asian identity, only to confront it when delving into the genealogy of her family. Rakesh, on the other hand, adopts a confrontational approach to challenging situations, employing his stand-up comedy to ridicule issues related to race and immigration.

The concluding chapter shifts back to the 1980s, offering a retrospective focus on Ba, the twins' grandmother. Having survived the racially motivated murder of her husband in Britain and outlived her own children, Ba decides to return to Kenya as a refuge from a Britain marred by racism and violence. Accompanied by her grandchildren, whom she takes under her care, Ba's story brings the narrative full circle.

Evident in the titular essence of the novel, the thematic thread of destiny, or 'naseeb,' is intricately interwoven throughout the narrative. Substantial allusions are drawn to Hema Malini's eponymous film, and the lyrical excerpt, 'What do I know, only he knows, the one who has written everyone's destiny' (Shukla 2018, 158), accentuates the narrative's exploration of destiny. However, the conceptualization of destiny diverges among the characters, as articulated by Neha, who delineates the contrasting perspectives within her family: 'My ba believed in destiny, my father believes in coincidence, I believe in patterns and consistency, and my brother believes in the manifest destiny of his own male ego' (Ibid., 130). This diverse interpretation is underscored and accentuated by the narrative's non-linear structure, enabling Shukla to underscore the evolving nature of immigrant experiences in the United Kingdom.

The initiation of Mukesh's narrative in 1966 within the locale of Keighley exemplifies the disjunction he perceives within an 'in-between world,' accentuating the dissonance between his aspirations and the harsh reality of his reception in England. Anticipating camaraderie with iconic figures such as 'The Beatles' and 'The Rolling Stones,' Mukesh is instead confronted with a less-than-glamorous welcome, marked by a derogatory encounter with a cyclist who disparages him as a 'bloody wog' (Shukla 2018, 6). Mrs. Simpson, his landlady, persistently queries his origin, expecting the familiar response of India, the ancestral land, rather than Kenya, his actual place of birth and upbringing. Mukesh's introspective query, 'Where are you from? I don't know. Why does it matter so much?' underscores the inherent complexities of his in-between identity (Ibid., 36).

This in-between identity further alienates Mukesh within the Asian community, where he encounters bullying during a festival performance for Diwali. Designated to play the role of Rama, Mukesh faces adversity from Prash, Nisha's fiancée, and experiences a poignant moment when referred to as Nisha's 'Naseeb' (destiny) by Nisha's brother, Chumchee. Mukesh's decision to leave is met with a linguistic shift to Swahili, underscoring his yearning for home in a language that transcends the linguistic bounds of English and Gujarati. The subsequent racist attack on the venue by the League of Empire Loyalists casts a dark shadow on the events, with Mukesh's bravery ultimately leading to his union with Nisha. Nevertheless, the enduring impact of 'the attack' permeates the familial fabric for decades, elucidating the lasting ramifications of such traumatic occurrences.

Years subsequent to the traumatic incident, Mukesh, still haunted by its repercussions, articulates to his progeny a deeply embedded fear of white men, stemming from the night when he contended with a vicious attack that left an indelible mark on his psyche. In articulating the question of integration, he rejects the notion, positing, "Why integrate into a country that wanted me annihilated, Neha? That wanted to beat my body with bricks and cricket bats until I bled to death?" (Shukla 2018, 68). This sentiment echoes the lasting impact of a racially motivated attack he and his future wife, Nisha, thwarted—an assault emblematic of the

era when the term 'Paki-bashing' was commonly employed by far-right extremists. He implores his daughter to assess what she identifies as micro-aggressions in light of real, palpable fears (Ibid., 61). In contrast, when Mukesh's son, Rakesh, a stand-up comedian, faces racist heckling, Mukesh reproves him for not asserting himself, revealing a generational divergence in their conceptualization of home. Mukesh, having survived a racial attack by the League of Empire Loyalists, articulates that his 'biggest fear was dying in a strange place' (Ibid., 72), while his children, born and raised in England, grapple with a distinct sense of belonging.

Generational clashes within the family are inherent in its migratory history. Early in the narrative, Nisha's father falls victim to a racially motivated murder, and Ba, his grieving widow who later returns to Kenya, expresses deep-seated concern for her grandchildren's safety in the milieu of racial tensions: 'My grandchildren live amongst these white men now, and I worry that nothing has changed and their bodies are close to a similar fate' (Ibid., 304). Mukesh's encounters with racial discrimination serve to elucidate the validity of preconceptions and stereotypes relayed by his mother. She had conveyed that 'Namaste translates into English as "I bow to you,"' interpreting this as a manifestation of Indian subservience that facilitated colonial rule. The acknowledgment of this viewpoint years later by Mukesh underscores the transformative realization that such perspectives were not incongruent with the diasporic experience (Ibid., 46). The evolving understanding of these narratives within the diasporic context exemplifies the complex interplay between personal history and broader societal structures.

This underscores the presence of distinct generational perspectives within the novel, delineating three viewpoints that may be construed as migratory (embodied by Ba, the twins' grandmother), diasporic (exemplified by Mukesh, the twins' father), and British (characterizing the outlook of the twins). The narrative structure employed in the novel resists facile and unequivocal categorizations, complicating the characters' identities and perspectives. Despite their variances, the three generations share commonalities, enmeshed as they are in a cultural milieu where the construct of race retains substantial significance.

It is imperative to highlight that the inaugural and terminal chapters of the novel unfold through the perspectives of Mukesh and Ba, both of whom harbor perceptions resonant with the South Asian diasporic experience. While Mukesh's lineage traces back to India, his formative years were spent in Kenya, and he migrated to Britain at approximately eighteen years of age. His articulation of 'real fear,' juxtaposed with what his offspring categorize as 'microaggressions,' underscores the profound impact of his historical experiences, as he attests, 'I cannot describe to you how I felt' (Shukla 2018, 61). Despite his present British identity, Mukesh remains burdened by the collective memory of racial discrimination. This becomes palpable when he expounds on the potency of language, characterizing it as a force that 'kills people. It hurts people. It colonizes people' (Ibid., 68). His evolving perspective is evident when reflecting on past frustrations, such as encountering 'chai tea' on menus, which initially elicited anger but eventually led to his decision to order it, rationalizing, 'because it is delicious […] I bowed to them. I let them corrupt our language with ignorance. They were my masters. What can you do?' (Ibid.). At this juncture, Mukesh recognizes that some of his established notions regarding the disparities within British society are antiquated, and there is indeed a palpable 'change' underway. The erstwhile racial divides appear to have been supplanted by a discernible generational gap. Mukesh grapples with the realization that the classifications of race and gender employed by his generation may no longer be efficacious in comprehending the perspectives of his children's generation. This acknowledgment underscores the intricate dynamics at play within the evolving tapestry of British society.

The initial wave of immigrants, the pioneers who bore witness to post-war immigration, will eventually pass away, carrying with them their firsthand accounts, episodic recollections, and the oral narratives shared in personal interactions (Shukla 2018, 61-62). What will endure are the mediated depictions of this first generation—photographs, documentary footage, videotaped oral history interviews, cinematic portrayals, and literary works. Mukesh vividly conveys this generational transition, reflecting on the potential loss of personal narratives and the fear of his own unrecorded experiences. He voices his anxiety, contemplating the prospect of vanishing without a trace, his story untold and his amee left uninformed (Ibid.). His poignant reflection illustrates a profound connection between generations, underscoring the significance

of memory and identity within the context of generational shifts. Mukesh's identification is emphatic, resonating with both his fellow immigrants of the same era and those born in Britain.

A heightened sense of generationality is evident in Mukesh's proactive engagement with the memorialization of his experiences. As a politically aware representative of his generation, he acknowledges the racial tensions spanning from the 1960s to the 2010s and seeks to respond by narrating his personal narrative, at least for the benefit of his progeny: 'What stories will they tell about me? or shall I give people my own history?' (Ibid., 55). Mukesh's concern with how he will be remembered and his proactive stance in shaping his narrative align with the broader theme of generational consciousness.

This strong sense of generationality is not unique to Mukesh within his family; other members of the British South Asian family exhibit their own distinctive generational orientations. The narrative unfolds through three distinct generations, each presenting a unique version of the British South Asian experience, with memories mediated in various ways (Ibid.). The dying daughter, Neha, who articulates her story in diary form, commences with the revelation of her terminal diagnosis, guiding readers through the concluding months before succumbing to lung cancer. As a professional coder in software design, Neha endeavors to create a program that utilizes family history to predict one's destiny, illustrating her own unique perspective on memory and identity within the context of her generation.

The novel, as implied by its title, intricately explores the interplay between agency and fate. While this overarching theme permeates the narrative, the primary genealogical focus unfolds through Neha's quest to identify potential genetic vulnerabilities within her family. In her search, she meticulously traces the presence of a hereditary genetic condition among the women in her lineage, grappling with the inexorable statistical likelihood of succumbing to cancer. Neha's contemplation is articulated in her realization that "the numbers don't lie" and her conviction that predicting the occurrence of cancerous cells is tantamount to assuming a god-like role—she becomes a cartographer mapping the genetic landscape of the future (Shukla 2018, 128–29).

Motivated by a desire to develop a computer program capable of forecasting genetic vulnerabilities, Neha emphasizes the reliability of "good data" and its ability to narrate stories, shape lives, and, paradoxically, extinguish them (Ibid.). To access pertinent family history data related to cancer, Neha grapples with the necessity of tracing kinship through the maternal line. Despite her initial disinterest in her father's narrative about meeting their mother and enduring racial attacks, Neha recognizes the significance of Mukesh's willingness to share his migrant experience in Britain and the cultural memory embedded within his family history. This exchange allows Neha to forge a deeper sense of identity (Ibid.).

Neha employs a predictive modeling formula to forecast the likelihood of mortality, leading her to anticipate her father's demise on a bus—a denouement that aligns with his nostalgic tendencies. She reflects on this premonition, asserting that the prospect of Mukesh dying on a bus is unsurprising, given his inclination to dwell on the past rather than embrace the present: 'It makes sense, actually. A man constantly running backward to his past instead of to the destination of now, dies in transit. He'll probably be facing backwards' (Ibid., 143). This prophetic contemplation adds a nuanced layer to the exploration of identity, mortality, and the intricate interplay between familial history and individual destiny.

Initially, Neha struggles to empathize with her father, resenting his fixation on the past and his 'dead wife' instead of engaging with his children. This lack of interest fuels her animosity, fueled by his storytelling preference over asking questions or connecting with them personally (Shukla 2018, 143). Her perception begins to shift when she discovers a news article, through her examination of DNA patterns, highlighting her father's historic legal case—the first under the 1968 Race Relations Act, despite losing the lawsuit (Ibid., 135, 148). The news story unveils a new dimension to Mukesh, prompting Neha to recognize his need for invisibility in a world where issues like racism are left unspoken, allowing him to imagine a more welcoming environment. Witnessing the scars on him, Neha is moved by the realization of the profound challenges he faced, fighting for causes she was previously unaware of (Ibid., 135, 139).

Mukesh's narratives, previously seen as mere suspenseful storytelling, now become a source of answers to the mysteries in Neha's life, providing insight into her diasporic genealogy. Through his stories, she begins to reconnect with and envision her mother, whom she knows little about except for the recurring tale her father shares each time they meet (Ibid.). This shift in perception underscores the psychological impact of Mukesh's storytelling on Neha, allowing for a reevaluation of familial connections and a deeper understanding of her diasporic roots.

Intergenerational conflicts within the British South Asian community are rooted in both remembered events, such as Mukesh's recollections of a traumatic attack and falling in love with their mother, and conflicts arising from differing perceptions of memory. Neha reflects on her father's view of her and her twin as reminders of their mother's imperfections, leading her to ponder, 'He killed me just by having me' (Shukla 2018). Neha's exploration of her family's genealogy extends beyond personal history to encompass broader cultural narratives. Delving into online sources, she unearths stories of her grandfather's tragic murder at a Wembley bus stop, unraveling what she terms as 'this secret past' that contributes to 'a modern history we can understand' (Ibid., 14). Her interest transitions into an exploration of how British South Asian cultural heritage evolves across generations.

Examining the historical context of the British South Asian presence in Britain, marked by episodes like 'Paki-bashing,' 'no blacks, no dogs, no Irish,' and race riots, Neha gains insights into her identity as a second-generation immigrant. This exploration also unveils the 'inherent privilege' resulting from her father's pursuit of 'mediocrity hidden in the depths of the middle classes,' affording her the space to simply work (Ibid.). Consequently, Neha's quest for a richer cultural inheritance prompts a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the first generation. This realization helps her define her position and experiences, acknowledging that 'In my dad's desire to hide, I flourished' (Ibid.).

The significance of Mukesh's role becomes evident as Neha delves into the intricacies of her family's genealogies. Creating a familial chart centered around her father, she establishes connections with Rakesh, her mother, and grandparents. However, a revelation about her father's incorrect birthday disrupts her project, setting off a chain reaction within the computer program and sparking an intergenerational dialogue between Neha and her father (Shukla 2018, 170–72). This narrative complexity underscores the idea that constructing a cultural genealogy for British South Asians necessitates engaging in the practice of intercultural memory across Britain. Moving beyond a 'transnational, cosmopolitan phase,' the process evolves into a 'genuinely dialogic interculturalism within state borders' to accommodate the intricate patterns of identities (Rattansi 2011, 160). Despite Neha's focus on Asian genealogies, her family history exemplifies the entangled genealogies characteristic of modern postcolonial and multicultural societies.

Neha initially perceives her inability to locate her father as a flaw in the project, unaware that his position in the 'in-between world' serves as a vital link connecting family members and revealing historical interconnections of the British South Asian diaspora with India, Kenya, and Britain. These entanglements form a central theme in Shukla's novel, depicting connections that may be in conflict or overlooked, yet are represented in the literary text as a means of transcultural and intercultural remembrance. Neha acknowledges that these remembrances confirm her father's feelings towards her and the underlying reason – love. As she reflects, 'Love is a code that cannot be written,' allowing her to comprehend her father's role in the algorithm of her life as one that tells her this story (Shukla 2018).

Initially disinterested in her father's traumatic narrative, Neha viewed it as unreal, attributing it to a generational gap. This perceived disagreement between 'reality' and 'fiction' is mitigated through the lens of 'transgenerational empathy,' a self-reflexive approach to the past that navigates time, memory, and generations, bridging proximity and distance simultaneously (Ward 2008). Arguably, Neha adopts a transgenerational empathetic perspective when examining her father's generation. Her matrilineal exploration of kinship inadvertently leads her to delve into her father's past, uncovering the traumatic experiences he endured as a first-generation immigrant. In doing so, she comes to 'make sense' of her father and his generation. Represented by Ba, Mukesh, Neha, and Rakesh, three generations of British South Asians in Britain embody distinct experiences and memories. Simultaneously, they constitute a three-generation genealogy of a British family of Asian descent. This intersection of genealogy with generational

locations raises intriguing questions about biological and social inheritance within a diaspora, particularly its relevance to the twenty-first-century British South Asian family.

Humor as Resistance

In discussing 'the logic of diaspora,' Sonali Thakkar (2011) observes that it combines geographical displacement with cultural continuity and transmission. Continuity, often framed as familial transmission, is purported to facilitate the preservation of identity despite dislocation. The emphasis on cultural reproduction as familial reproduction forms a crucial aspect of diasporic discourse, tethered to family structures (60-61). In Rakesh's case, the significant challenge lies in the transmission of familial values. He personifies the boldness characteristic of the third generation, individuals unburdened by concerns of cultural or national loyalty. Unlike other main characters who share their personal narratives, Rakesh's story unfolds through the perspectives of those he encounters – his girlfriend, met at Neha's funeral; his father, attending his comedy show in Edinburgh; Uncle Dave; and a tourist in Kenya. These individuals chronicle Rakesh's journey as he grapples with establishing a comedic career centered on inherently serious issues related to race, class, and immigration, using material that is not inherently humorous. Rakesh finds himself in a state of mourning following the recent loss of his sister, coupled with challenges in his comedic career.

While his sister might argue that his lack of humor is to blame, Rakesh can't shake the belief that his impending failure stems from his minority ethnic status rather than the content of his jokes. Although his voice is arguably drowned out by the narrators, it resonates in key scenes, particularly those where he directly engages with each narrator. One such instance unfolds when Mukesh attends Rakesh's stand-up comedy show, where Rakesh delves into their family's immigrant experience in England and reminisces about their childhood in Kenya after their father's departure, highlighting the hardships they faced. However, Rakesh's father, unimpressed, dismisses the show's humor, expressing dissatisfaction with colonialism and the British Empire (Shukla 2018, p. 208).

As a second-generation British South Asian, Rakesh uses his act to mock issues of race, immigration, and colonialism. Despite this, the narrators suggest that ridiculing these issues on stage doesn't necessarily translate to Rakesh confronting them in his comedy routines or personal life. An incident at the show exemplifies this discrepancy when a member of the audience racially abuses Rakesh, prompting his father to leap to his defense (Ibid.).

In an effort to salvage his reputation, Rakesh promptly weaves his father's intervention into his performance. "Yup," Rakesh declares, "I brought my dad, and he's going to beat up the dad of whichever [expletive] said that, so goodnight and always punch a Nazi and see you in the car park. I'm bringing my dad" (Ibid., 208–9). Rakesh's father contends that when Rakesh fails to stand up against racism, he dishonors the struggles he and his mother endured to establish a home for him in Britain. The father sees it as a betrayal to "stand in silence and let that man tell you to [expletive] off back to where you came from" (Ibid., 210). In this context, the father's role serves as both a cautionary tale and an illustration of the career challenges presented by English society, posing a threat to the father and eroding any influence he might wield.

In the episode 'Kiss, Bang Bangalore' from The Simpsons (2006), Homer faces relocation to India after his company undergoes downsizing. While in India, he encounters Apu's cousin Kavi, who strikingly resembles, speaks, and sounds just like Apu. Similarly, the waiter in the novel makes no distinction between the British Rakesh and his Indian American girlfriend when inscribing a racist note on their bill. This scenario implies that, despite Indians striving for cultural citizenship, their accents and skin color consistently label them as foreign. The racial hierarchies in both the United States and the United Kingdom persist, emphasizing the enduring foreignness associated with these physical and vocal attributes.

Critics who censure Rakesh for not defending himself appear to overlook his unique approach to confronting racial issues. Rakesh's chosen method, rooted in his personal experience of not fully belonging, proves effective in his eyes. This sense of not quite belonging significantly influences the content of his

comedy shows and shapes the selection of characters from his life that he incorporates into his performances.

In her article 'Where I'm Coming From' (2003), Monica Ali reflected on the challenges she faced regarding the negative reception of Brick Lane (2003) among the British South Asian community. She pondered, 'How can I write about a community to which I do not truly belong? Perhaps, the answer is I can write about it because I do not truly belong.' Similarly, Rakesh appears to grapple with questions about the authenticity of his voice. His exploration of his parents' generation's experiences seems to receive more attention than his own life. Rakesh seems to be reaching for an understanding of an impactful experience that lies outside the realm of his personal encounters. As the dialogue with his narrators progresses, a shift in power dynamics occurs, with their influence diminishing as he becomes more involved in the comedy shows. When his girlfriend asserts that he must be brave as a comedian, Rakesh responds, 'Comedians have a thick skin. And a thin skin. On stage, when we're in control, it's perfect, and when we're not, we're getting better, stronger, harder, faster' (Shukla 2018, 232).

In a poignant moment, she urges him not to turn the incident into material, emphasizing the reality of life. This truth, often ignored by both her and his father (who dislikes the show because 'it was all the truth'), raises broader questions about stereotypes and the impact of context on humor. The act of transforming real-life incidents into comedic material that reflects the South Asian condition does not diminish the validity of those incidents. This discussion also ties into the broader examination of stereotypes and the role of context in shaping humor. Stand-up comedian Nish Kumar, in his essay 'Is Nish Kumar a Confused Muslim?' (2016), recounts a peculiar experience when he discovered he had become an internet meme called Confused Muslim, despite not being a Muslim but merely confused. The accompanying text humorously stated, 'Angry that Christians insulted my prophet, cannot insult Jesus because he is a prophet too' (Kumar 2016, 69).

In his comedy routine, Nish Kumar, who was 'raised Hindu,' humorously addresses the confusion caused by an internet meme. He emphasizes the significance of context in comedy, stating, 'It's the singer not the song' (Kumar 2016, 27). According to Kumar, a stand-up comedian's material is inherently tied to their onstage identity. The meme served as inspiration for his 2013 Edinburgh Show, Nish Kumar is a Comedian: 'I had managed to spin a minor internet-based incident into a moderately successful comedy show' (Kumar 2016, 76).

Similarly, Rakesh transforms real-life events into material for his comedy shows, embracing the 'onstage identity' highlighted by Kumar. Rakesh's narrators play a crucial role in providing informative insights, setting the parameters of the British South Asian experience, expectations, and worldview for both Rakesh and the reader. This informative function is evident when Rakesh questions his girlfriend about her early departure from his show, wondering if it's due to the bar manager. Her response reflects a perspective on bravery and resistance: 'That not saying anything, that smiling and either accepting the systems that oppress us or using them to tell a story to a bunch of strangers, where you get to control the narrative for maximum impact, it's disingenuous and weak. We are gods. And we are treated like animals […] Everyone else counts on your bravery' (Shukla 2018, 234–35).

However, Shukla, through the omission of this advice in Rakesh's conversation with Mukesh, suggests caution against over-generalized and reductive perspectives like 'Everyone else counts on your bravery.' Such perspectives, based on personal experiences, should not serve as representations of an entire culture, as no individual can authentically speak for an entire community. Shukla implies that embracing such perspectives risks becoming a 'sell-out' and oversimplifies the complexities of cultural identity (Ibid., 200).

In his role as a content creator, Rakesh is not positioned as a universal spokesperson; instead, he shares his individual experiences as a British South Asian navigating the landscape of the 2010s. Shukla underscores this perspective through the practical advice offered by Laila, Rakesh's friend, grounded in their present reality:

"You don't need to be the voice of all the brown people anymore. There's enough of them around now that you don't represent all of us. We don't only have Goodness Gracious Me anymore. We can admit that East is East was problematic. We can say Bend It Like Beckham was a cheesy white man's wet dream. We can say that Cornershop didn't need the validation of Fatboy Slim. Why do you think you need to be the spokesperson for us, the ambassador to white people? Why even tell them things? You think I tell white people places like this exist? No way, man. This is our secret. This is the secret spot that you keep sacred so the balti houses and tandoori houses can thrive. We, us, the brown people, take our business where it belongs. Don't ever think you need to be the voice of a generation. Because that is the quickest way to being a sell-out" (Shukla 2018, 199-200).

Laila's reference to Goodness Gracious Me, the groundbreaking BBC comedy sketch show, highlights its significance as the first British South Asian comedy to secure a prime time slot, underlining the evolving landscape of representation (Abbasi, 2015).

In a 2017 interview, Nish Kumar revealed that although he enjoyed American and English comedy shows like 'The Simpsons' and 'Red Dwarf,' it was 'Goodness Gracious Me' that made him realize British South Asians could create their own comedy, exclaiming, 'Oh right, Asians can do this too.' The show delves into real-life events impacting British South Asians, exploring themes such as racial discrimination, integration, academic and career expectations, and mixed ethnic relationships. Reflecting on how much his ethnicity influences his material, Kumar acknowledges drawing from his upbringing but notes a crucial distinction: 'People like me and Romesh don't have to mention it. And we don't have to, because we've had those doors kicked open for us by Goodness Gracious Me' (Kumar 2017).

Meera Syal, Sanjeev Bhaskar, and the cast of 'Goodness Gracious Me' played a pioneering role in 'normalizing the idea of Asians in mainstream comedy' (Ibid.). However, Laila's point is valid — with the evolution of contemporary British South Asian culture, voices beyond 'Goodness Gracious Me' and Ayub Khan-Din's 'East is East' now contribute to mainstream and popular culture. As Laila aptly puts it, 'You don't need to be the voice of all the brown people anymore. There's enough of them around now that you don't represent all of us' (Shukla 2018, 99)25. The author demonstrates the shift by highlighting the outdated nature of racial stereotypes, exemplified by Laila dissuading him from using the title 'A Lovely Bunch of Coconuts' for his Edinburgh show: 'Don't bother, dude. "A Lovely Bunch of Coconuts"? Who the hell wants to listen to that? I mean, being British South Asian isn't a binary thing—it's complex, layered, nuanced […] What even is a coconut anyway? It's outdated' (Ibid., 195).

This demonstrates that Shukla's fictional portrayal has evolved since his debut novel, "Coconut Unlimited" (2010). In "Coconut Unlimited," he explores the struggles of three British South Asian juveniles forming a hip-hop band to defy the stereotype of being 'coconuts'—white on the inside and brown on the outside, attempting to embody both brownness and blackness (20).

Similarly, in *The One Who Wrote Destiny*, the diasporic perspective adopted by Rakesh's father and girlfriend, who serve as his primary narrators, falls short, potentially oversimplifying and romanticizing the diasporic past. This approach risks disconnecting Rakesh from the complex reality surrounding him. The dissonance becomes apparent when his father advises him to 'punch' racists, overlooking the nuanced challenges faced by non-white comedians in various settings (Shukla 2018, 210).

In contrast to his father's insistence on confrontation, Rakesh understands that addressing racial issues requires a more nuanced approach. He realizes that he is no longer obligated 'to play to the white crowds' and can cater to an audience gradually recognizing the nuance in non-white experiences (Ibid., 199). Rakesh believes that, as someone 'destined for greatness,' he must 'be able to take a joke' (Ibid., 210). His viewpoint contrasts sharply with his father's inclination towards violence as a solution, a perspective Rakesh rejects.

Mukesh's proposed solution to punch anyone who disagrees fails to sway Rakesh, emphasizing that violence suppresses voices and dismisses the truth within jokes that are perceived as unfunny because 'it was all about us' (Ibid., 203). Mukesh unintentionally acknowledges that Rakesh's comedic voice is urgent, truthful, and relevant, even if presented as a joke. Shukla's characterization reveals a nuanced and evolving

perspective, suggesting a generational hierarchy within the migratory, diasporic, and British context. The tensions portrayed challenge the notion of a neat and linear evolution in the genealogy of Asian Britain.

Simultaneously, *The One Who Wrote Destiny* subtly implies an existential continuity among Ba, Mukesh, Neha, and Rakesh, showcasing shared traits like determination or a yearning for the past. This commonality among the four main characters points to an intergenerational concordance, prompting a comprehensive reconsideration of the migratory, diasporic, and British identities, three intricately intertwined concepts. Another shared characteristic is their skin color, and being 'the only brown in the room' becomes a significant aspect shaping their lives in Britain (Shukla 2018, 36), challenging any notion of Britain as 'post-racial,' a label deemed premature by John McLeod (2010), especially in narratives about mixed-race individuals.

Beyond Continuity

The novel underlines that contemporary British society, where Mukesh, Neha, and Rakesh navigate, is still influenced by racial dynamics. This is evident in a bus scene where Neha confronts a white woman for verbally abusing another girl. Neha asserts that speaking louder is the only weapon brown people have against white people, as they fear a loud immigrant and find it easier to dismiss her later as an angry brown woman than confront the situation in the present (Shukla 2018, 89-90). The narrative challenges the notion of a color-blind society and addresses various forms of subtle racial discrimination, emphasizing 'microaggressions.'

Microaggressions, described by Sue, Bucceri, Lin, Nadal, and Torino (2007) as 'the new face of racism,' are subtle and often unintended expressions of aversive racism. Although not as overt as physical manifestations of racism, they are no less extreme in their impact. Due to their subtle and ambiguous nature, microaggressions are challenging to detect, leading those experiencing them to dismiss the events and blame themselves for perceived oversensitivity. The characters in Shukla's novel influence their relationships, and the narrative exposes how they are frequently judged by their complexion rather than their personality. The prevalence of microaggressions in contemporary British society, despite progress over generations, cautions against uncritical satisfaction with the current situation.

Hence, following Laila's counsel, Rakesh stages a consequential stand-up comedy show titled 'Colonialism was silly,' which gains virality as his father leaps to his defense, sparking the Twitter hashtag #rakspops. During the performance, Rakesh humorously critiques colonialism, expressing gratitude for railways while highlighting its darker implications and the notion of white privilege (Shukla 2018, 208). This episode aligns with Caryl Phillips' vision in *A New World Order* (2001), where he anticipates a collapse of the colonial or postcolonial model, leading to a single global conversation with limited participation (5). Rakesh, representing a citizen of this globalized world, reflects the evolving perspectives on historical legacies.

In contrast to his father, Rakesh eagerly fulfills Neha's wish to have her ashes taken to Kenya, emphasizing varying levels of attachment to the homeland. The novel concludes by unveiling Ba's meta-narrative as a first-generation British-Kenyan-Asian, marked by a defining voice of her generation. Shukla reveals Ba's poignant moment from the 1960s, where she defiantly declares her humanity during her husband's fatal beating: 'I am a person. I am a person' (Shukla 2018, 301). This incident resonates with the historical references embedded in the oral testimonies of her generation, showcasing the struggles of first-generation British South Asians to be accepted as truly British.

Ba's life story, shared as a monologue addressing her late husband, carries a somber tone and content, echoing well-established themes of first-generation British South Asian remembrance. It portrays the impossibility of complete assimilation and acceptance as British. Her husband loses his job for asserting his identity and demanding respect, emphasizing the challenge of being perceived merely as 'grateful' in a foreign land (Ibid., 295). Ba's narrative becomes a testament to her enduring struggle with the harsh realities of her life in Britain. She retreats to her home, expressing relief from the need to feign liking people and stating, 'I am comfortable here. I am not required to speak in English' (Shukla 2018, 290–91).

Shukla employs a chronological shift, placing Ba's narrative after Nisha's death, when an emotionally charged Mukesh brings his grandchildren to Kenya. Initially unwelcoming, Ba remarks on the children's lack of energy, drawing parallels to the times when "Angrezi people" donned military uniforms, emphasizing a sense of detachment (Shukla 2018, 222, 278). This highlights the challenges faced by the children in adjusting to a new life after losing their mother and home. Neha perceives Ba's gestures, such as offering Indian "rotis," as attempts to buy their compliance, urging Rakesh to escape and find their father (Ibid., 233).

Returning to the themes of destiny and genealogy, Ba expresses remorse for the hereditary traits that may have led to her daughter's death, pondering why fate chose Nisha instead of herself (Shukla 2018, 288). As a first-generation immigrant, she embodies the predicament described by A. Sivanandan (2016) as being 'a creature of two worlds, and of none,' marginalized by the forces of nationalism and colonial privilege (Parmar 2019). This narrative thread in *The One Who Wrote Destiny* delves into the complexities of migration, diaspora, and the British identity, providing insights into the residual impact of historical traumas on family history.

The novel thoughtfully explores the conceptual confusion surrounding migration and diaspora, presenting a nuanced portrayal of the twice-migrant and the double diaspora within the British Gujarati and East African community (Parmar 2019). Shukla's work prompts readers to navigate the generational gaps, reevaluate them critically, and seek ways to bridge differences. The nonlinear narrative structure adeptly captures the intricate dynamics and evolving nature of immigrant life in Britain, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of the generational complexities depicted in the novel.

The narrative of *The One Who Wrote Destiny* intricately weaves each character's story together, creating a tapestry of scenes, impressions, interactions, and reflections, as if all are encapsulated within Neha's contemplations. This interplay of past and present unfolds consistently throughout the narrative. The story unfolds in England, with characters navigating their journeys, yet it encounters interruptions from shorter, fragmentary sections, akin to shadow-stories.

The 'shadow-story' in Shukla's novel, portraying the lives the main characters left behind, significantly disrupts what could be deemed the main narrative. Neha's father's abandoned life and her own childhood with Ba in Kenya linger in her thoughts, occasionally diverting her from the ongoing narrative of her present life, particularly when delving into her genealogy. While the fundamental dynamics—the contrast between characters' lives in England and Kenya (present and past)—may share similarities, Neha's emotional attachment to the past creates a profound distinction, introducing radical discontinuity and fragmentation in Shukla's narrative.

Shukla's narrative style distinguishes itself from other authors, yet certain comparisons emerge. Notably, a parallel can be drawn with Aslam's discontinuous style and his ultimately pessimistic analysis of multiculturalism and minority communities. Shukla, though less pessimistic and more eclectic than Aslam, employs a narrative that blends and contrasts time and place, mirroring the progression of a protagonist whose sense of home and identity has been profoundly disrupted.

The experiences of multiple migrations, coupled with 'a keen commercial nature,' have positioned the British minority of East African and Gujarati descent as successful in 'resettlement and relocation,' a trait acknowledged and celebrated within discourses of multiculturalism (Parmar 2019, 9). Despite their strong ties to Gujarati traditions, these double diaspora members are committed and loyal to their settled homes, considering Britain more permanent than their former 'homelands.' Aware of the 'myth of return,' they acknowledge the improbability of returning to India or Africa, leading to economic and social success, establishing East African Asians as one of the wealthiest minority groups in the United Kingdom.

However, a gap in the everyday modes of popular twice-migrant representation exists in Britain, both historically and in contemporary times (Parmar 2019, 1). This absence is reflected in 'how members of the diaspora mark themselves out,' concealed in literary and cultural studies and often obscured in scholarly debates. The characters in *The One Who Wrote Destiny* embody a profound ambivalence toward race and

culture, desiring a sense of belonging while simultaneously compelled to perpetuate or reconnect with elements of their cultural origins.

In its portrayal of British South Asians, *The One Who Wrote Destiny* navigates the complex terrain of discontinuity and continuity, encapsulating a dual perspective that defines the essence of the novel. Shukla skillfully explores the nuances of the double diaspora, engaging with three contrasting tendencies: historical, romantic, and contemporary. The historical inclination accentuates fragmented and double diasporic identities, exemplified in Ba's experiences. The romantic tendency, on the other hand, idealizes diaspora concepts while advocating for continuity and seamlessness, epitomized by Mukesh, who nostalgically replays 'the past like it's a Bollywood film' (Shukla 2018, 139). In contrast, the contemporary inclination embraces a sense of continuity grounded in a realistic acknowledgment that modern Britons are capable of recognizing and critiquing problematic elements, as illustrated by the acknowledgment that 'East is East was problematic' (Ibid., 199).

Conclusion

The analysis of *The One Who Wrote Destiny* provides valuable insights into the complexities of British South Asian identity, particularly within the framework of the double diaspora. Through the experiences of Mukesh, Neha, Rakesh, and Ba, the novel demonstrates the lingering effects of colonialism and migration on multiple generations, exposing the continued presence of racial dynamics in contemporary British society. Shukla's narrative addresses how microaggressions—subtle, often unconscious forms of racism—affect the characters' daily lives, creating an environment where their identity is constantly challenged. The study reveals that despite the desire to integrate into British society, first- and second-generation immigrants, as well as their descendants, continue to experience exclusion and alienation, as evidenced by the portrayal of Ba's struggle for acceptance and the generational tensions experienced by Neha and Rakesh.

The study's findings answer the research objectives by illustrating how the concept of double diaspora shapes the identity of British South Asians. Shukla's novel emphasizes the importance of memory—both communicative and cultural—in understanding how generational trauma and migration history influence individual and collective identities. Through Ba's personal recollections and the younger generation's interactions with their inherited past, the novel underscores the role of memory in shaping the way these characters view themselves within both their familial lineage and the larger British context. Shukla's work also challenges the notion of a "color-blind" society, highlighting how race and cultural heritage continue to shape the lives of British South Asians, even in an increasingly multicultural landscape.

The research suggests significant implications for understanding the complexities of identity in diasporic communities. The novel shows that cultural displacement and historical legacies play a crucial role in shaping the lives of immigrant families across generations. The intergenerational tensions portrayed in the novel highlight the differing relationships each generation has with their past, with older generations often clinging to their heritage and younger generations renegotiating their identities in response to modern British society. These findings are important as they demonstrate that the struggle for belonging and acceptance continues to affect immigrant communities, even in contemporary Britain. The novel's portrayal of double diaspora offers a unique perspective on how these communities navigate both their cultural roots and their place within British society.

In addition to its contribution to understanding immigrant identity, this study offers valuable recommendations for further research. Future studies could explore how second- and third-generation immigrants continue to negotiate their identities within a globalized and increasingly multicultural world. Additionally, comparative studies of double diaspora experiences across other immigrant groups could provide a broader understanding of how historical migrations affect identity formation. The exploration of other literary works dealing with similar themes could further illuminate the nuances of the immigrant experience, especially in postcolonial contexts. Research on the impacts of historical trauma on the younger

generation, as well as their evolving relationship with their heritage, would also add to the growing discourse on migration, identity, and cultural memory.

Ultimately, Shukla's *The One Who Wrote Destiny* serves as a powerful literary reflection on the challenges faced by British South Asians as they navigate the complexities of race, culture, and identity in Britain. The novel invites readers to consider the long-term effects of colonialism, migration, and racism on immigrant communities, highlighting the ongoing need to critically examine the experiences of those living in diasporic conditions. The findings from this study contribute to a deeper understanding of the immigrant experience, offering a lens through which to explore the ways in which identity, memory, and cultural belonging are continually reshaped across generations.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for future research on the topic of British South Asian identity within the framework of double diaspora. First, further studies could explore the experiences of second- and third-generation immigrants, focusing on how their identities are shaped in a globalized and increasingly multicultural world. Research could also compare the double diaspora experience in different immigrant communities, not only within British South Asians but also other diasporas that have undergone multiple migrations. This would provide a broader understanding of how identity and cultural memory evolve across different historical and geographic contexts.

Additionally, future research should examine how contemporary media and cultural productions influence the identity formation of younger generations in the diaspora, especially in light of digital globalization and social media. This can shed light on how cultural heritage is negotiated in the modern era.

Regarding barriers, this study faced challenges related to the limited availability of direct testimonies from second- and third-generation immigrants, which may have affected the depth of understanding of generational shifts in identity. Another potential barrier is the complexity of disentangling cultural and personal identity from historical narratives, which could be further explored through interdisciplinary approaches. Addressing these barriers in future research could help produce a more nuanced understanding of immigrant identities in postcolonial contexts.

Acknowledgment

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