

ECHOES OF DISPLACEMENT: RE-PRESENTATION AND POLYPHONY IN INTEZAR HUSSAIN'S *BASTI*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines *Basti* (2012) by Intisar Hussain through the theoretical lenses of Stuart Hall's concept of re-presentation and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of polyphony. Set against the socio-political upheavals of 1947, 1965, and 1971, *Basti* re-presents national trauma and fractured identities through a narrative saturated with memory, mythology, and multiplicity of voices. By analyzing how language, myth, and memory converge in the novel's structure, this paper argues that Hussain constructs a literary space where the boundaries of history and fiction collapse. The polyphonic narrative resists linear temporality and monologic nationalism, instead revealing the instability of meaning and identity in post-Partition South Asia. Through a close reading of key episodes and symbols, this study highlights the power of literature to mediate between personal memory and collective history. Ultimately, *Basti* emerges as a critical site for interrogating dominant cultural representations and imagining plural futures.

Keywords: re-presentation, polyphony, Partition, Intezar Hussain, narrative identity.

INTRODUCTION

Intezar Hussain's *Basti* (2012) offers a poignant meditation on the socio-political ruptures of South Asia, especially those surrounding Partition and its aftermath. Through a narrative interwoven with myth, memory, and historical fragments, Hussain constructs a literary space where linear temporality falters and collective identity becomes unstable. The protagonist, Zakir, oscillates between recollections of a pre-Partition utopia and the disillusionments of a postcolonial present, embodying the fractured subjectivity of a people suspended between belonging and exile. In this suspended state, characters craft multiple identities which are then re-presented through what Hall (1997) calls "the symbolic construction, articulation and appropriation of meaning" within history (p. 61).

1.1 Objectives

1. This study aims to examine how *Basti* re-presents collective trauma through its fragmented and mythic narrative structure.
2. Analyze the role of polyphonic voices in resisting monologic nationalism and linear historiography.
3. Explore how language mediates identity, memory, and historical perception within a post-Partition framework.

1.2 Research Questions

To achieve these objectives, the study is guided by the following questions: How does *Basti* employ narrative polyphony to disrupt linear historical and national narratives? In what ways does the novel use re-presentation to mediate personal memory and collective trauma? How do symbolic

and linguistic structures in the novel contribute to the instability of identity and meaning?

1.3 Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to a close textual analysis of *Basti*, focusing on its English translation (2012). It situates the novel within postcolonial South Asian literary traditions and draws upon the theoretical frameworks of Hall and Bakhtin to interpret the narrative's formal disruptions, dialogic multiplicity, and political implications. The study does not engage with historical documentation of Partition events but instead examines how literary form reconstructs memory and identity.

2 Theoretical Framework

This study approaches *Basti* through the theoretical frameworks of Stuart Hall's concept of re-presentation and Mikhail Bakhtin's idea of polyphony. Hall (1997) argues that representation is not a passive reflection of reality but a "constitutive process" that "organizes and regulates social practices" (p. 3). Meaning, he insists, is not fixed but "produced and exchanged" through cultural codes and language (p. 15). Bakhtin (1981) similarly emphasizes the instability and plurality of meaning in the novel form, describing it as a genre defined by "a diversity of social speech types and a diversity of individual voices" (p. 262). His concept of heteroglossia underscores the dialogic interaction of perspectives, where language "lies on the borderline between oneself and the other" (p. 293).

Together, Hall and Bakhtin offer tools for analyzing how *Basti* destabilizes authoritative narratives by foregrounding plural, fragmented subjectivities. Rather than reading the novel merely as a nostalgic lament, this paper interprets it as a site of epistemic resistance. Hussain does not romanticize the past nor collapse the present into despair. Instead, he uses a fractured, myth-laden narrative to reveal the entanglement of multiple identities—social, cultural, ideological, and political. As Bakhtin (1986) notes, meaning in the novel is always "constructed in anticipation of encountering a response" (p. 94). This formulation echoes Hall's (1997) insistence on the co-constitutive roles of producer and consumer in meaning-making (p. 10). Zakir recalls that in the city, "truth was dispersed in the

dust and the wind," a statement that typifies the novel's approach to uncertainty and historical fragmentation (Hussain, 2012, p. 64). By highlighting the dissonant and dialogic voices in *Basti*, this study explores how literature mediates between personal and collective histories, creating space for reimagining community amid rupture.

3 Literature Review

This research draws upon Stuart Hall's theory of re-presentation and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of polyphony to interrogate how Intezar Hussain's *Basti* navigates cultural identity, displacement, and the instability of narrative form in the post-Partition context. These frameworks have been widely used in the analysis of postcolonial literature, particularly in interrogating how meaning and identity emerge through discursive and dialogic formations (George, 1998; Small, 1983). Hall's *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) and Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981) form the theoretical core of this study. Additionally, critics such as George and Small have explored how Hall's semiotics and Bakhtin's dialogism provide a means to understand the fragmentation of voice, memory, and identity in culturally hybrid texts. These theoretical positions are crucial for understanding the representational disruptions that characterize *Basti*'s formal and ideological landscape.

4 Conceptualizing Re-presentation and Polyphony in *Basti*

Hall (1997) conceptualizes re-presentation not as the passive reflection of reality but as a mode of production in which meaning is constantly contested and renegotiated. He writes that "meaning is never fixed, but always in flux," emerging through discursive struggles that "organize and regulate social practices" (pp. 3–4). Hall's insight that identities are "constituted within, not outside representation" (p. 10) proves crucial in examining *Basti*'s destabilized characters and temporalities.

Hussain's narrative does not reflect national identity. On the contrary, it reveals how identity is assembled, broken, and symbolically contested through language and form. Memon (1983) notes that Hussain "refuses historical closure" and instead offers a literary structure "attuned to the

uncertainties and repetitions of trauma” (p. 78). Memon’s insight underscores how Basti’s fragmented form reflects unresolved trauma, resisting linear national narratives or ideological finality.

Language, for Hall, functions as a signifying practice through which meanings circulate and power relations are encoded. “Language is the privileged medium in which we make sense of things,” Hall writes, “in which meaning is produced and exchanged” (1997, p. 1). In Basti, Hussain embeds these processes in his narrative form. Zakir’s reflections are mediated through fragments of cultural speech—for instance, when he articulates that “the city was asleep under a blanket of silence,” or when he recalls slogans and rumors that circulate in moments of crisis (Hussain, 2012, p. 22). The text dramatizes how language becomes a vessel for contested meanings.

5 Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, interpretive design grounded in textual analysis. It focuses on Basti (2012) by Intezar Hussain in its English translation and applies close reading to identify patterns of language, narrative structure, and thematic resonance. The methodological framework is guided by theoretical tools drawn from Stuart Hall’s (1997) concept of representation and Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of polyphony. These frameworks support a literary analysis that is sensitive to the multiplicity of voices, discursive constructions, and symbolic layering in the text.

The study employs thematic analysis to examine how identity, memory, and displacement are encoded through language, character interaction, and narrative fragmentation. Primary data comprises textual passages from Basti, while secondary data includes theoretical works and relevant literary criticism. Data has been processed using coding strategies that align recurrent narrative moments (e.g., mythic references, ideological conflicts, silences, and repetitions) with relevant theoretical constructs.

5.1 Ethical Considerations

Although this is a non-empirical literary study, ethical care has been taken in representing culturally sensitive material, especially with regard to the traumatic histories of Partition,

migration, and religious identity. The research avoids essentializing national or cultural categories and approaches all content through a critical, historically contextualized lens.

6 Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Dialogic Voices and Ideological Conflict

In Basti, language becomes a vessel for contested meanings. Unattributed, contradictory utterances such as “the war will purify us” versus “every war leaves us dirtier” (Husain, 2012, p. 81) encode conflicting visions of morality and identity. These phrases are not neutral; they carry ideological residue, aligning with Hall’s (1997) claim that meaning is always culturally produced and historically situated. In *Season of Migration to the North*, Mustafa Sa’eed asserts, “I am no Othello. Othello was a lie” (Salih, 2009, p. 95), only to have the grandiosity of his speech undone by irony. Similarly, *Train to Pakistan* presents courtroom claims that “everything is normal,” while “the ghosts of the dead wandered through the village” (Singh, 2007, p. 114), exposing the rupture between state narrative and lived violence.

These examples show how speech whether it is legal, political, or lyrical becomes a contested site of cultural re-presentation. As Hall (1997) explains, “It is by our use of things, and what we say, think and feel about them... that we give them meaning” (p. 3). In this sense, such statements dramatize how language in postcolonial literature performs a struggle over identity and historical truth.

Critics like Naim (1983) highlight Basti’s formal ambiguity as central to its politics. The novel “avoids fixed resolutions” and “dwells in overlapping temporal and linguistic registers” (p. 60). Jalil (2019) similarly notes that Basti is “inflected with voices of mourning, repetition, and loss,” and that its language fragments rather than unifies. These observations reinforce Hall’s notion of the “circuit of culture,” in which representation becomes both a battleground and an outcome of power-laden cultural processes.

When Zakir hears, “What happened? What didn’t happen?” (Husain, 2012, p. 97), the rhetorical uncertainty becomes emblematic of the novel’s epistemological disruption. This does not merely reflect trauma; rather, it **enacts** the instability of meaning. In Hall’s semiotic model, meaning is neither stable nor guaranteed; it is

constructed through discourse and continually re-negotiated.

6.2 Polyphony, Unfinalizability, and Narrative Suspension

Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concept of polyphony offers a complementary way of understanding Basti's dissonant structure. The novel stages "a diversity of social speech types... and a diversity of individual voices, artistically arranged" (p. 262), without attempting to resolve their contradictions. Zakir's world is filled with political slogans, spiritual invocations, rumors, and whispers. These voices do not unify into a coherent ideological frame but remain in productive tension which is a hallmark of Bakhtinian heteroglossia.

Jalil (2019) insightfully describes Basti as "substituting discursive pluralism for political certainty," and suggests that its very form "echoes with dissenting pasts rather than a single history." This is exemplified in Basti when one character claims, "History is a lie," while another retorts, "But what else do we have?" (Husain, 2012, p. 93). Such moments foreground how voice, meaning, and memory are constantly under negotiation; these are never finalized.

Robin Small (1983) has emphasized that Bakhtinian dialogism "foregrounds ideological contestation without closure" (p. 589). This resistance to resolution aligns with Bakhtin's (1984) notion of "unfinalizability": the idea that identity and meaning are always in process. Zakir's reflections when he ponders, "What really happened? When did it happen? Did it happen at all?" (Husain, 2012, p. 103) capture this open-ended state. He is a character suspended between nostalgia, irony, and doubt, caught in a narrative structure that refuses totality.

George (1998), working through Hall's semiotics, also argues that postcolonial representation often "enacts the impossibility of fixed meaning" (p. 523). This, she contends, is not a failure of form but a **deliberate resistance** to dominant epistemologies. In Basti, polyphony becomes the very method by which identity is destabilized, not described.

Zakir's fragmented internal monologue further resists the authority of omniscient narration. "So many things happened... but who was to say what they meant?" (Husain, 2012, p. 112). This hesitation is what Hall (1997) describes as the

impossibility of speaking from a unified historical position, and it underscores the representational complexity of postcolonial identity.

A similar aspect is shown in *The Shadow Lines*, when Thamma, encountering the invisibility of the India–East Pakistan border, exclaims: "If there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know?" (Ghosh, 2005, p. 151). The confusion arises not from lack of information but from a failure of symbolic coherence which is precisely the kind of rupture Basti dramatizes.

Bakhtin (1984) insists, "The idea lives not in one person's isolated individual consciousness... but in the dialogic interaction of several voices" (p. 88). Basti stages this interaction rather than smoothing it out. Small (1983) reinforces this point, noting that such dialogism "is never a stylistic choice alone" but a deep formal strategy that reflects cultural plurality (p. 589). The novel's refusal to resolve Zakir's interior struggle is thus a formal enactment of Hall's and Bakhtin's shared contention: that identity, meaning, and community are built through contradiction, dialogue, and re-positioning; and perhaps, there is no resolution.

Zakir's reflection when he wonders, "It is as if nothing has happened, and yet everything has changed" (Husain, 2012, p. 107) captures the paradox of historical rupture without clear narrative closure. This ambiguity is not a gap to be filled but a structure to be understood. It dramatizes a world where identity is unstable, truth is plural, and language is an arena of ideological contestation.

7 Cultural memory, Temporality, and Postcolonial Identity

7.1 Memory, Myth, and Cultural Re-presentation

In Basti, memory operates not simply as psychological recall but as a cultural mechanism through which meaning and identity are constituted. Zakir's recollections are saturated with mythic symbols and fractured historical fragments that resist progression or closure. Hall (1997) emphasizes that meaning is "constantly produced and reproduced in and through language" (p. 3) and "circulated through cultural practices," making representation "a constitutive part of the event itself" (p. 15). Hussain's layered narrative, examined here through close reading, reactivates meaning across religious, mythological, and political contexts.

This symbolic reading of Zakir's reflection when he illustrates, "even memory has forgotten" (Husain, 2012, p. 97) highlights the instability of memory as a cultural signifier. Similarly, in *Clear Light of Day*, Bim's looping flashbacks expose memory as cyclical and unresolved. These narratives refuse healing arcs, suggesting that identity emerges from rupture rather than restoration. Thus, as Hall's circuit of culture posits, representation is not retrospective but generative. This subsection advances the study's second research question by demonstrating how Basti constructs cultural identity through recursive memory, and not through historical coherence.

Zakir's recurring image of Rupnagar, where birds "carry the secrets of the ages" and trees "breathe through centuries" (Husain, 2012, p. 3), is not mere nostalgia but a symbolic lens that reframes the present. This reading affirms that memory, rather than preserving the past, distorts or re-signifies it. The line "Time does not pass in this city—it circles" (Husain, 2012, p. 88) metaphorically collapses temporality into mythic stasis. In doing so, Hussain complicates the role of memory as linear narration, repositioning it as a representational mode that disturbs the national present. These findings contribute to broader postcolonial debates by illustrating how mythic memory destabilizes hegemonic historiographies.

7.2 Temporality and Identity through Chronotope

This textual layering of myth, memory, and temporality creates what Bakhtin (1981) describes as "chronotopic tension" (p.84). It refers to a condition in which different temporal registers such as historical, mythic, and/or psychological intersect within a narrative space. The chronotope, as a narrative feature, captures the spatio-temporal relations through which meaning emerges. In Basti, temporality is not simply in the background. On the contrary, it is a narrative agent. By refusing a unified timeline, Hussain resists nationalist demands for a continuous historical arc.

This thematic close reading reaffirms Hall's (1997) notion of "discontinuities of identity," where selfhood is fractured, formed "at the unstable point where the 'unspeakable' becomes speakable" (p. 225). A comparable tension

appears in *The God of Small Things*, where Rahel and Estha experience trauma not as a single event but as a haunting repetition. Zakir's memory functions similarly, returning to symbolic ruptures that defy resolution. In both texts, identity is not discovered but composed. This effect is achieved through fragments, loops, and absences. The analysis contributes to the theorization of postcolonial temporality by showing how narrative structure itself embodies fractured consciousness.

7.3 Symbolic Resistance and Polyphonic Form

Roy (2008) argues that Partition narratives often enact a "refusal of synthetic resolution" (p. 42). This insight is particularly apt for Basti, where contradiction is not a narrative flaw but a formal feature. George (1998) expands on Hall's framework to note that identity in postcolonial fiction is forged "through breaks, gaps, and contradictions" (p. 57). Hussain furthers this approach by embedding those contradictions in a metaphysical register. When Zakir reflects, "Sometimes what had not happened seemed more real than what had" (Husain, 2012, p. 85), the novel privileges emotional and symbolic resonance over factual coherence. The text thus aligns with Hall's claim that meaning is constructed in articulation, not recovered from essence.

Hussain's narrative, analyzed here through dialogic theory, also exemplifies Bakhtin's (1984) concept of polyphony: a state in which "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses" coexist (p. 6). Conversations are riddled with ellipses, contradictions, or unresolved tensions. This is not narrative indecision but a formal refusal of hegemonic resolution. Each voice retains autonomy, mirroring the fragmented realities of postcolonial subjectivity.

These discursive patterns show how Basti enacts identity not as unity but as dialogic interaction. Zakir's world is not organized by consensus but by coexisting and often clashing perspectives. As Bakhtin (1984) puts it, "the idea lives not in one person's isolated consciousness... but in the dialogic interaction of several voices" (p. 88). The refusal to finalize Zakir's internal struggle is a deliberate narrative strategy, aligned with Hall's assertion that identity is always "unfinished, always being repositioned" (Hall, 1997, p. 225).

In this light, Basti's fragmented narrative emerges as a cultural form of epistemic resistance, contributing to scholarly conversations about identity, language, and temporality in postcolonial literature.

8 Techniques of Instability and Multiplicity in Basti

8.1 Residual Memory and Symbolic Resistance

In one scene, Zakir recalls someone declaring, "This country is alive only because of the graves," immediately followed by another voice asking, "And what if those graves never stop multiplying?" (Husain, 2012, p. 74). The lack of narrative or ideological resolution between these utterances exemplifies Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, wherein distinct voices coexist without synthesis. This textual strategy contributes to Basti's broader refusal to fix meaning within a singular ideological framework. As Memon (1983) observes, the novel "refuses to offer a singular historical or ideological stance, instead oscillating between competing affective landscapes" (p. 77). The emotional registers of nostalgia, despair, and political anxiety appear side-by-side, without narrative reconciliation. This oscillation is not structural incoherence but a deliberate strategy to mirror unresolved psychological and national tensions.

C.M. Naim (1983) similarly notes that Hussain's characters "inhabit not just one time or place but several at once" (p. 58). Zakir moves fluidly between urban modernity, collective trauma, spiritual allegory, and the lost idyll of Rupnagar. These movements resist geographic and temporal fixity, reflecting what Hall (1997) calls the "discontinuities of identity" (p. 225). Zakir does not inhabit one history or consciousness but multiple registers of cultural memory and affective fragmentation.

Hussain's narrative weaves together myth, personal loss, and national crisis, creating a form that is not linear but recursive, not realist but symbolic. As Zakir reflects, "even the air had turned historical" (Husain, 2012, p. 67), a phrase that fuses the metaphysical with the political, situating private grief within the larger collapse of nationalist certainties. In these moments, memory becomes a symbolic resistance to state-sponsored forgetting.

Maaz Bin Bilal (2018) calls this aesthetic a form of "sacralizing the debris of memory" (p. 122),

describing Basti as a counter-archive that resists empirical closure. In one passage, Zakir recalls the streets of Rupnagar "echoing with the songs of rishis and the cries of muezzins" (Husain, 2012, p. 28), a juxtaposition that collapses Hindu and Muslim temporalities into a shared but unresolved symbolic space. These are not nostalgic flourishes, instead, they are what Hall (1997) describes as "symbolic systems" (p. 4): cultural codes through which identity is constructed, contested, and circulated.

Through this aesthetic of layering and deferral, Basti enacts what this study identifies as a central representational function: the mediation of trauma and memory not through narrative resolution, but through symbolic dissonance. In this way, memory is not merely depicted but **performed** as fragmentation, contradiction, and ethical refusal. This section completes the analysis of the second research question by showing how Hussain re-presents fractured subjectivities through recursive memory, mythic reference, and ideological deferral.

8.2 Fragmentation, Hybridity, and Narrative Multivocality

Beyond content, Hussain's narrative technique itself constructs instability and multiplicity. Basti cannot be confined to a single genre, as it is simultaneously a political chronicle, a psychological memoir, and a mythopoetic meditation. This blending of forms aligns with Bakhtin's view of the novel as an inherently hybrid genre: a literary space where "various forms of speech" and "ideologically differentiated languages" coexist (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 262). Hussain's use of shifting narrative modes such as allegory, historiography, memory, and myth resists epistemic closure and invites the reader into a dialogic process of meaning-making.

Memon (1983) describes this as a "pluralistic mode of apprehension" (p. 76), wherein sacred texts, historical events, and psychological fragments converge rather than compete. Zakir is not the voice of unified consciousness; rather, he is a site of convergence; he is porous, reflexive, and unstable. Even temporality resists containment, as his narration shifts unpredictably between present and past, between personal recollection and national allegory. The sensation of narrative dislocation is not incidental but deeply tied to form.

As Hall (1997) argues, representation is “never singular” but embedded in “circuits of culture” (p. 15). In *Basti*, these circuits include theology, politics, and historical memory. Interestingly, none of these achieve dominance. Instead, meaning emerges through recursive tension. The effect is a literary form that mirrors the fractured identities it represents.

This formal fragmentation is further reinforced by the novel’s refusal to synthesize competing symbols. Zakir’s invocations be these sacred, political, and folkloric are all presented without hierarchy. The absence of authorial authority allows each voice and reference to retain its own ideological weight. Bakhtin (1984) terms this condition “polyphony,” defined as “a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses” within the same text (p. 6). In *Basti*, polyphony is enacted structurally and thematically. Conversations move toward deferral rather than conclusion; narrative arcs dissolve before reaching catharsis.

As Zakir reflects, “Sometimes what had not happened seemed more real than what had” (Husain, 2012, p. 85), the novel explicitly displaces empirical certainty in favor of symbolic and emotional resonance. These strategies articulate what this study identifies as the literary techniques of multiplicity: recursive narration, genre hybridity, allegorical layering, and symbolic tension. These elements collectively address the third research question by demonstrating how *Basti*’s form embodies the instability of meaning in postcolonial cultural texts.

In sum, *Basti* does not merely depict multiplicity; it **performs** it through fragmented voice, recursive structure, and genre disruption. These are not stylistic flourishes but deliberate interventions in the politics of cultural representation.

9 Temporal Recursion, Rupture, and Cultural Identity

9.1 Narrative Unfinalizability and Recursive Meaning

Hussain’s characters experience time not as forward-moving chronology but as cyclical and recursive. This reflects what Bakhtin (1981) calls the “chronotope of folkloric time,” where temporality unfolds through ritual and repetition, not linear development (p. 150). Zakir dreams of cities lost to sand, invokes prophets

whose names are forgotten, and hears of serpents curling through vanished kingdoms. “Cities that sank into the sand, kings whose names vanished, and serpents that coiled through forgotten tunnels” (Husain, 2012, p. 93) are more than nostalgic imagery. These references aid in destabilizing the narrative closure and historical fixity.

These mythic episodes illustrate what Roy (2008) calls “intertextual hauntings” (p. 89), where cultural memory returns as symbolic residue rather than empirical record. The novel thus becomes a ritual site in which history is not recounted but re-enacted. Bakhtin’s (1984) assertion that “truth is born between people collectively searching for it” (p. 110) underscores the relational nature of meaning-making in *Basti*. No character holds final authority; meaning arises dialogically, across scenes, voices, and emotional registers.

This dialogic openness extends into thematic contradictions about war, faith, and identity. Holquist (2002) explains that Bakhtinian literature “refuses to let meaning congeal into a single authoritative voice” (p. 60). It is a principle that governs *Basti*’s structure. Felch (1999) further argues that polyphony “allows marginalized voices to destabilize hegemonic narratives” (p. 211). In *Basti*, figures like Bhagatji and Zakir offer dissonant, partial, and metaphysical perspectives that fracture nationalist coherence and instead expose ideological ambivalence.

Zakir’s voice, fragmented and often hesitant, enacts Hall’s (1996) claim that “identity is formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history” (p. 4). As George (1998) writes, identity in postcolonial fiction is “an unfinished negotiation” (p. 527). *Basti*’s form which is nonlinear, episodic, and symbolically charged often renders that negotiation as textual. Singh (2023) notes that the narrating self becomes “a conduit for dislocated collective memory,” while Bhalla (2006) frames the novel’s structure as one that “stages dissonance rather than synthesis” (p. 153).

The recurrence of symbolic disruptions supports a dissonant structure of the novel, as reflected through the tales of such serpents, buried cities, and mythic invocations. Gautam et al. (2022) observe that *Basti* registers “unspeakable

violence” not through explicit narration but through fractured form and symbolic layering (p. 47). This resembles with Bakhtin’s unfinalizability, where meaning remains ideologically incomplete and culturally deferred. In doing so, the novel closes the third research question by demonstrating how Basti’s recursive narration, formal interruption, and dialogic voice enact the instability and multiplicity of meaning central to postcolonial discourse.

9.2 Displacement, Identity, and Post-National Belonging

These narrative strategies also bear cultural implications. By layering myth, memory, and dislocation, Basti reimagines identity in the context of exile and collective trauma. Zakir, situated between lost homeland and fractured present, represents a subjectivity that is historically dislodged yet culturally overdetermined. Hall (1997) argues that identity is always “in process,” emerging from “disrupted alignments” (p. 226). Basti formalizes this instability through voice, symbolism, and structure.

Zakir imagines “a city buried beneath layers of time,” guarded by “a serpent whose sleep kept the earth from shaking” (Husain, 2012, p. 95). These images do not merely decorate the narrative. Instead, they enact a mythic logic of survival, collapse, and repetition. “Who remembers what happened, and when? Perhaps even memory has forgotten” (Husain, 2012, p. 97). Zakir reflections truly demonstrate Hall’s (1997) theory of cultural representation as contested and Bakhtin’s (1984) view of narrative meaning as dialogically shaped. These figurative recursions align with Bhalla’s (2006) idea of a “literature of interruption,” where narrative coherence collapses under the weight of unresolved historical trauma (p. 150). In Basti, belonging is not restored through realism or progress but renegotiated through symbolic evocation, ritual memory, and ideological hesitation.

The novel ultimately offers a post-national vision of identity: one that is not tethered to territorial borders or historical continuity, but assembled through repetition, absence, and cultural resonance. It refuses the stability promised by nationalist discourse and instead constructs meaning through what Hall (1997) describes as “circuits of culture” (p. 15). It refers to the

discursive networks that privilege symbolic complexity over narrative closure.

By interpreting Basti through this interplay of form, ideology, and displacement, the study contributes to postcolonial narratology by reframing cultural identity as dialogic, recursive, and ethically grounded. Rather than resolving rupture, Basti performs it by rendering memory, history, and identity as ongoing negotiations rather than final truths.

10 Conclusion

This study has argued that Intezar Hussain’s Basti is not merely a meditation on Partition or nostalgia, but a self-consciously crafted narrative that enacts the instability of meaning through its polyphonic form and representational complexity. Drawing on Stuart Hall’s theory of representation and Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony, the analysis has demonstrated how the novel resists narrative closure, unsettles coherent identity, and reimagines history as a dialogic, contested process. Its refusal to consolidate a singular viewpoint or linear temporality positions Basti as a critique of monologic nationalism and the epistemic violence of fixed cultural meanings.

This research was guided by questions about how literary form participates in cultural discourse. How does Basti narrate the fragmentation of memory and identity without collapsing into silence? What do Hall’s and Bakhtin’s frameworks reveal about the novel’s resistance to stable signification? Through a close textual method rooted in dialogic and semiotic analysis, the study has shown that the novel’s disruptions in the form of recursive temporality, symbolic layering, and narrative gaps are not structural flaws but strategies of ideological resistance.

Focusing on form rather than theme, the research departs from dominant readings that reduce Basti to either a nostalgic elegy or Partition historiography. Instead, it argues that Basti constructs a representational field in which identity is unfixed, meanings are plural, and history is continually rearticulated. Zakir’s disoriented consciousness, the novel’s mythic recursions, and its fragmentary structure together dramatize a worldview in which memory is not preserved but performed.

Placing Hall and Bakhtin in conversation with Hussain’s narrative design, this study contributes

to postcolonial literary criticism by reframing identity as an open, dialogic, and unstable negotiation rather than a recovered essence. *Basti* not only represents cultural rupture—it formalizes it. It stages literature as a space where dissonance becomes both method and meaning.

To read *Basti* solely as Partition literature is to flatten its conceptual ambition. The novel resists confinement within any one disciplinary frame. It invites theological, psychological, historical, and cultural readings—without ever resolving into a singular logic. Its polyphonic structure, sacred imagery, and recursive temporality all point toward a deeper proposition: that trauma, identity, and history must be understood not through fixed narratives, but through the discordant chorus of many.

In an age of rising cultural essentialism and contested historical memory, *Basti* offers a critical literary alternative. It reminds us that fragmentation, rather than coherence, may be the most honest form of narrative in the aftermath of collective rupture. Future research might build on these insights by examining other South Asian novels that similarly use formal dissonance to articulate the complexities of displacement and identity.

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