Memory Externalization and Interpersonal Relationships: An Analysis of *The Candy House by* Jennifer Egan and *The Immortal King Rao* by Vauhini Vara

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Abstract

In the light of the current technological developments and literary works, this paper explores the complex dynamics of memory externalization and how it affects interpersonal relations. To investigate these complex dynamics between externalized memory and human connections in the current scenario, the study focuses on the literary texts The Candy House by Jennifer Egan and The Immortal King Rao by Vauhini Vara with the assistance of theories on the Extended Mind by Andy Clark and David Chalmers, Prosthetic memory by Alison Landsberg and other posthuman concepts. The paper clarifies how memory externalization, manifested in the texts, develops and reshapes interpersonal connections, identities, and perceptions of reality.It examineshow the commercialization of memories alters human relations, how it is illustrated in the texts, how different discourses are maintained regarding the commodification of memory, and how it simultaneously connects and estranges human relations. It looks into the causes oftechnological developments that have changed human perceptions regarding extensions, retrieval, and memory maintenance. The study also inspects the effects of this change on individual and collective consciousness and the creation of personal and cultural narratives in the age of digitalization, where memories are more frequently recorded, shared, and curated with the assistance of technology.

Keywords: Commodification, Extended Mind, Identity, Individual and Collective Consciousness, Posthuman, Prosthetic Memory.

Memory is hard to define entirely since it is a notion with many facets. Guy de Maupassant remarked in his short story titled *Suicide*: "Our memory is a more perfect world than the universe; it gives life back to those who no longer exist," has been emphasized by Arkady Martin in his work *A Memory Called Empire* and highlighted that the "memory has a redemptive power, a way to reclaim a life lost"

(Johnson 2023). Memory is a significant area explored in various dimensions since the Greeks. However, it has become an emergent field of study involving multitudes of disciplines only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. French sociologist Maurice Hawlbwachs, British historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, French Philosopher Henri Bergson, Paul Ricoeur, French Historian Pierre Nora, and Jacques Le Goff are major pioneers of the discipline (Bosch 1; Sierp 2).

The terrain of memory is changing dramatically in the age of lightning-fast technological innovation. Digital technologies have unparalleled prospects for memory externalization, empowering people to record, preserve, and disseminate their experiences with incredible convenience but eroding our ability to contemplate profoundly and introspectively. It also raises concerns about the degradation of internal mnemonic processes. It becomes relevant in comprehending memory processing in a 'Posthuman condition' where technology increasingly mediates our memory. Fictional portrayals of dependence on technology are shown astechnology broadens our understanding of memory and forces us to face brittleness and fluidity. The paper analyses the selected texts' different manifestations and discourses regarding memory externalization. It attempts to comprehend how the commodification of memory in the era is pictured and how it affects human relationships simultaneously with the assistance of posthuman concepts, Extended Mind theory by Andy Clark and David Chalmers and the idea of Prosthetic Memory by Alison Landsberg.

The texts analyzed for the study depict societies where human memories are externalized with the assistance of technology, augmented, archived and shared among themselves and others. *The Candy House* (2022) by Jennifer Egan is set in the 21st century. It centres on Bix Bouton, a talented software entrepreneur who fixates on developing a game-changing concept. Bouton's new technology, "Own Your Unconscious", suggests that it allows people to access all of their life's memories and to trade their memories in exchange for access to those of others. The drifted relations among the textual characters understand each other better using the externalized memories, thereby determining the depth. The conflict arises when Mondrian, headed by Chris Salazar, and his followers resist "Mandala" consciousness uploading and invasion of privacy. It questions the relevance of trust and authenticity in human relationships in a futuristic society.

The Immortal King Rao (2022) by Vauhini Vara presents the titular character, King Rao, who was born to a Dalit coconut farmers' family in a village in the 1950s, Andhra Pradesh. He soon finds himself in the engineering department of a university in Seattle. There, he generates the idea of the 'Harmonica'. This memory externalizing solution makes him the ruling tech leader of a new globalized world and the CEO of the 'Shareholders', the governing body based on capitalist motives. Rao's daughter Athena, the narrator, is brought up aloof from the rest of the world in Puget Island by Rao. He decides to give his memory to her by externalizing it and considers it as a gift that he could give her even after his death. She is curious about what it means "to be a person among people —to be a social animal, with an obligation to kin and species" (Vara 107) as she explores the world only through her father's memories that have been implanted into her genetic code and have given her complete, unrestricted access to the Internet. Similar to the Mondrian, 'Exes,' who are against the Shareholders that drift human beings apart. They have created an alternate system where they decide their rules. They say, "We are making it known that we reject any system that places commercial value on our consciousness…we demand Rao's immediate removal from power" (157).

The prior studies on the texts are limited. A few studies have been done on the externalization of memory and its various aspects of human consciousness, identity, and relations along with the hyperreal nature of the text and brought out the postmodern elements and the seclusion of hyper-

connectivity in the modern world. A research gap is found in understanding the texts based on the aspect of memory externalization and its impact on human relations and the over-emphasis given to technical innovations. The solitude of human beings in the era of Artificial Intelligence and the hyperreality of media's influence on human identity are analyzed in the article "Hyperrealism of Advanced Technology and its Influence of Human Identity in Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House*". The elements of Artificial Intelligence and its symbiotic relation with human existence in the texts have been explored in the study "Exploring the Transformative Potential and the Challenges of Artificial Intelligence in *The Immortal King Rao*." This study attempts to scrutinize memory in the wake of posthumanism in terms of its social, cultural, ethical, and commercial facets of prosthetic memory as depicted in the texts. The impact of externalizing memory on human relations, identity, cognition, and consciousness needs more comprehension and extensive studies, which will be dealt with in the study.

As posthumanism suggests, the interdependence and co-evolution of humans with other species and technology, in such an era, the formation and alteration of human memory secures prime significance. Alexander Skulmowski, in *The Cognitive Architecture of Digital Externalization*, focuses on the effects of technology-enhanced forms of memory offloading. He argues that the tendency to offload is increasingly high among people. Humans have long preserved their memories in diaries, albums, and various other collections that give them nostalgic impressions when retrieved. Discussions on prosthetic memory by Landsberg remarked that the addiction to others' memory substantiates the tendency to publicize it. The expansion of technology has created new forms of memory preservation, such as memory externalizing, offloading, and retrieving in convenient times and forms. An article about the trends in Cognitive Science titled *Externalizing Autobiographical Memories in the Digital Age* remarked, "People sometimes rely on external devices instead of their cognitive processing" (Eliseev and Marsh 1073), which exemplifies human nature to depend on external artefacts for cognitive processes. In the process of externalization, instead of entirely focusing on the moment, people tend to get immersed in the efficacy of making memories, become addicted to experiences one has not gone through and may alter identities and human relations that create severe transformations in one's consciousness.

The Extended Mind theory by Clark and Chalmers advocates the idea of externalization of the mind based on the environment's active role in the cognition process. It is a "coupled system of biological organisms with the external resources" (18). The idea questions the notion of the static mind and elaborates on the boundaries of the human mind that are extended to the outside artefacts. The chapter 'See Below' in *The Candy House* is written in a way that different characters remember about their past through mail. Those emails become the evidence of their externalized memories. Human memory is not static; instead, it is subjected to various influences that continue to alter and modify. The chapter intends to associate the mail with externalized memory to present technology's indispensable part in one's consciousness. The extended mind or the process of externalization, as shown in the texts, can be associated with 'Prosthetic Memory' as defined by Landsberg: "Thanks to these new technologies of memory on the one hand and commodification on the other, the kinds of memories that one has intimate even experiential access to would no longer be limited to the memories of events through which one actually lived" (146). The assistance of new technology opens the possibility of extending and sharing the human mind.

Bouton, the character in *The Candy House*, comes up with the idea when a group of his researchers talk about animal memory externalization, which helps to apprehend animals' way of thinking. They explain, "We can upload an animal's perceptions using brain sensors. For example, I can capture a portion of a cat's consciousness and then view it with a headset as if I were the cat. This will help us learn how different animals perceive and what they remember- basically, how

they think" (Egan 15). Bouton imparted the same with human memories. Human perception can also be followed in this respect if their memories are externalized. The theory establishes that the human mind can no longer be an internal organ. This demonstrates that external occupations can alter, influence, and affect it, which means that the memories preserved internally can be impacted by external factors when extended using the technology as depicted in the texts.

Memories are externalized in exchange for others with the "Mandala" consciousness cube found by Bouton, which speculates the possibility of revolutionizing trauma therapy. Though *The Candy House* aims to portray the perils of externalizing memories, it has shown different instances of how human relations positively amend due to it. Landsberg discusses the utility of prosthetic memory, enabling one to participate in another person's happiness and sorrows without having first-hand experience. In the chapter 'What the Forest Remembers', Lou Kline and the famous recorder Miranda Kline get separated. Years later, Charlene, one of their daughters, uploads her memory to the cube in exchange for her father's memories that were externalized before his death. Charlene was desperate to have something to connect to her roots, and the cube helped her to get to know her father through his memories. The inner thoughts of the characters' dynamic collaborations of extended memories elevate the idea that externalizing gives a sense of togetherness among people and changes individual memory as a collective.

Max Scheller from *The Nature of Sympathy* (1913): "Fellow feeling, a sense of collective responsibility... a position of high moral value which he defines in opposition to 'emotional infection and 'emotional reproduction'... our fellow feeling must necessarily be confined to processes and incidents in another person's experiences such as 'we have already met with ourselves'" (qtd. in Landsberg 146). Max Gregory, Bouton's son who was against his father's idea of memory uploading, realizes that his experience of his father's memory has helped him in a crucial situation. Through his father's uploaded memories, he could remember the places and cities he had not visited before. This realisation caused him to understand and respect his father's notions and changed his perspective towards him. The rifts between people are resolved with the employed technology as it reduces the space between relations when clarity comes through their inner thoughts and perceptions.

Another instance shows that the process allows people to understand other's psychological problems and realise their mental state by knowing the root cause. Lulu, a character who worked as a citizen agent, had to spy for the agency. After her termination, it was difficult to comprehend the sudden indifference in her behaviour. Externalizing her memory and realising her trauma was the sole solution, as she seemed reluctant to talk about her condition. The chapter, 'Lulu the spy, 2032', is narrated as commands in a spy training manual, symbolising her memory of being a spy. Her perception of life becomes a series of commands. The chapter is narrated so that her entire life seems equated to the memory she experienced during the period. The process of externalizing her memory assisted in diagnosing her traumatic condition, which was unclear before. It came out to be a way to cure her mental instability.

In *The Candy House*, unlike the other text, the characters willingly externalize and retrieve memories since they yearn for their roots, as mentioned in Charlene's case, or it helps in various ways related to the intricacies of one's past. These depictions strengthen the discourses that explain access to other's memory can be righteous in such circumstances. The text also involves the readers and suggests being a part of the collective consciousness as the characters externalize their memory. This may help when employed for a good cause, as it helps comprehend the hardships of a particular community, develop empathy, and work for societal progress. Alternatively, it may cause tensions in relations as these memories, once externalized, become unauthentic or unnatural and mere representations of the human mind. When memories are externalized, they

are no longer an individual's property; it opens up a horizon of new experiences for the public. It becomes a "universal property" (Landsberg 151), accessible to anybody. These justifications for the commodification of memory are rooted in the idea, as Landsberg puts it, "another person's memory - is figured as a form of addiction" (144). The "Interchangeability and exchangeability" (149) memories underscore their commodified form. Private memories become public through mediation and may get appropriated. The idea transformed people's perception regarding memory as an internal, individual asset but rather a collective, shared when mediated through technology.

It can distort the realities of people, leading them to trauma from the revelations. In the case of Roxy Kline, in *The Candy House*, Lou's other daughter realized from her father's memory that he neither wanted to take up the responsibility of her nor stay with their family. It became a distressing event in her life that aggravated her usage of drugs. Access to human thoughts will make people vulnerable. It facilitates manipulation and control by fewer power structures over other sections, and this act of controlling drifts apart human relations. Memories act as anchors to our past, forming our sense of self and impacting our decisions and actions in the present. Manipulating memories threatens to upset this delicate balance, warping our perception of reality and undermining the foundations of personal agency and accountability. Such modifications can compromise the veracity and authenticity of personal narratives, which can cause misunderstanding, mistrust, and identity erosion.

Memory externalization can have significant psychological repercussions, including existential anxiety, confusion, and estrangement, that may also develop a shift in human relations. Our subjective experience is constructed from our memories, interweaving the past, present, and future into a seamless whole. As Landsberg suggests: "…like an artificial limb, these memories often mark a trauma" (149). Athena, in *The Immortal King Rao*, was connected to her father's memories from her childhood. As she starts witnessing his memories as episodes in her dreams, it becomes unbearable for her, as a child, to experience the heaviness of his struggles. His past events, from a poor background family, suffering and struggling to climb up to the stature he possessed in the new world. She thought: "It now seemed inevitable that his consciousness would not stop oozing through me until he dropped dead. By then, he would have overcome me altogether. I would be his host... This man created you in his image, and now he means to fill you up with himself until there is no space left for you" (Vara 104). In *The Candy House*, Lulu remembers her past as a fearful reminiscence of struggles in being a spy. Similarly, Athena discerns that her father's memory is traumatic in leading her life. She runs away from him when she realizes the fact of losing her consciousness and develops the fear of living a life that does not belong to her.

When launching the new technology, Rao remarked that the idea was "to bring people together in a way that no one ever had before" (Vara 310). Nevertheless, it has shown that it bifurcated the relations rather than giving a collective sense. Athena, realizing that her essence is being lost, runs away from her father to live to be 'herself'. In contrast to *The Candy House*, it becomes the catalyst for the drift between the father and the daughter as well as the perception of people towards Rao. The 'gift' he mentioned for her was through his memories, immortalized through her. She comprehends after his death that "...the disappearance of the one person by whom you have defined yourself, without whom you cannot be sure of your own existence..." (Vara 331). His influence has become an immortal repercussion in her consciousness.

Unlike Athena, the characters in *The Candy House* are depicted in such a manner that they fall victim to the obsession with innovation. Lincoln, one of the characters, rightly points out, "Who could resist the chance to revisit our memories, the majority of which we had forgotten...and having done that, who could resist gaining access to the Collective Consciousness for the small price of making our own anonymously searchable?" (Egan 86). This justifies the addiction to another

person's memory, as mentioned before. The obsession leads to admiration for the brain behind it, making it easier to capitalize on memory. The process of permanent access to one's Unconscious memory by externalizing seems unattainable to human capabilities hitherto, attributing a sense of divine status to its inventors. As in the title, people belonging to the Exes in *The Immortal King Rao* believed him to be so until news of his death spread.

As the narratives indicate, the central characters, Bouton and Rao, are believed to be tech demigods. For instance, In *The Candy House*, amidst the discussions regarding externalization, arguments arose: "If God is omnipotent, does that make us puppets? And if we are puppets, are we better off knowing that or not? (Egan 16). They were completely aware of the process that it would be an all-knowing, controlling, powerful entity and simultaneously with the authority of a God that Bouton would soon receive after the launching of "Mandala". Correspondingly, in a conversation with Rao, an admirer says that he sounds like 'God', which replies that he is just the CEO of the shareholders and continues, "Then as the CEO of the board of Shareholders, you are God..." this conversational video became circulated in which he says, "Then call me God" (Vara 312). The deification happens when people believe that the person attains something beyond human actions. The adulation helps them legitimately influence people to bring their ways and internalize their authority. This admiration becomes their vulnerability, and they accept the notion of externalizing memory to benefit the whole.

The circulation of memory brings reverberations to one's consciousness. The complex relationship between memory and perception is essential to consciousness because memories of the past influence our perceptions. As the foundation of consciousness, memory offers a temporal continuity that keeps our sense of self anchored in the flow of experience. Nonetheless, the externalisation of memory brings significant transformations in the terrain of consciousness. In *The Immortal King Rao*, though Athena is the narrator, Rao speaks as his memories are narrated through her. His past life is foreshadowed through her consciousness. Both these chapters point to how the publicization of individualized memory causes confusion between relations. Transferring Rao's memories tends to develop distress in Athena as she is thrown open to an experience to which she has no first-hand connection. Unlike the characters in The Candy House, who willingly agree to the externalization, Athena has no clue about what her father tries to impart to her. The dreams, a constant trance, bring disarray to her consciousness and identity—the fear of losing her sense of being drifts her apart from her father.

Cognitive augmentation could lead to the manipulation of memories, as described in the scenario of the selected texts. Memory manipulation is tantamount to tampering with the very nature of what it means to be human, undermining our capacity to live morally and authentically and to make sense of our lives and the complex world around us. When memories are uploaded, they become part of collective repositories. The case studies in the area observed that exposure to altered or fake images and videos can lead to false memories of never-occurring events. The realization of counterfeit and authentic seems distressful. Therefore, the higher probability of believing the manipulated memories generates a sense of ambivalence. This also determines what to remember and what not to; the unshared memories remain unretrieved and, therefore, unremembered, called "retrieval-induced forgetting" (Eliseev and Marsh 1078). The characters in the texts are subjected to the above strategy, where the concerned authorities determine their process of remembrance.

The perception of memories parallels what one externalizes and retrieves. Memory externalization changes what people attend to and remember about their experiences while recognising how memory is perceived. The authorities could determine this and change the perception of memory as a collective rather than a personal recollection. It may not be the exact memory that is being exposed but the framed narrative, and it is with these created memories that the person becomes

identified. There are even chances to get the memories being homogenised in due course. This can also lead to remembering as a mechanical rather than a natural process.An era in which the distinctions between mind and machine become increasingly hazy is heralded by the merger of human cognition with technological extensions, transforming our conceptions of selfhood, agency, and the limits of awareness. The externalization of memories obscures the precincts of human consciousness. It propels us to share our memories, experiences, and everyday moments, extending our knowledge of existence. One's perception regarding memory alters subtly but significantly in such circumstances. They no longer act as archives of one's life; they are crucial in defining one's identity and behaviour.

To encapsulate, memory externalization through fictional narratives simultaneously creates multiple discourses regarding its utility and dangers. Memory is a crucial component in the trajectory of human existence. In a situation where human interconnectedness with technology aggravates the necessity of understanding the changes in human memory. The search for purpose and meaning in life is a basic human urge beneath these digital displays' surface. The Posthuman comprehension of the texts substantiates that the alterations in memory caused by technological interventions eventually breach human boundaries and amend human relations. Whether they are enshrined in digital form or are indelible in the minds, memories act as links to the past that firmly establish our shared history and identity. As one traverses the digital realm through the texts, it is essential to be reminded that memories bear witness to the existence and influence of the narratives we create about our identities and places of belonging. Commodifying individual memory makes it accessible to a mass, leading it to a part of collective consciousness. It can have acute psychological ramifications, transform human perception regarding memory and may posit fluctuations in human relationships.

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