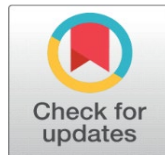
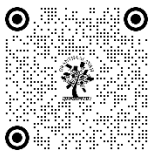


ROOTING ANEW: BELONGING AND IDENTITY IN KATHARINA KAKAR'S MOVING TO GOA

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ABSTRACT

The present paper titled “Rooting Anew: Belonging and Identity in Katharina Kakar’s Moving to Goa” investigates Goan’s attachment to their homeland using place attachment theory as its theoretical foundation. Katharina Kakar’s memoir, *Moving to Goa* tells her narrative of transitioning from displacement to finding roots, demonstrating the core elements of place attachment through her experiences in Goa. Place attachment refers to the emotional bonds people develop with particular locations through their personal experiences, memories and social relationships. It plays a vital role in shaping how People form their place-related values, sense of identity and interact with a place, which produces deep emotional connections. In *Moving to Goa*, Kakar investigates how various social, cultural and emotional elements create place attachment by studying traditional practices, community life and identity transformation that contribute to this bond. This paper argues that creating bonds between people and their places constitutes an essential factor in preserving cultural identity, reinforcement of community bonds and maintaining emotional wellness amidst the challenges of globalisation and urbanization.

Keywords: Goa, Place attachment, Home, Identity, Belonging

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1. INTRODUCTION

Place attachment is defined as the emotional, psychological and reverential bonds individuals and communities develop with particular locations. As Setha M. Low explains, “Place attachment is the symbolic relationship formed by people giving culturally shared emotional/affective meanings to a particular space or piece of land that provides the basis for the individual’s and group’s understanding of and relation to the environment” (165). Place attachment emerged from the academic fields of environmental psychology and cultural geography, which explains how people create meaning through experiences, memories and interactions. Yi-Fu Tuan in his work *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977) explains that space transforms into place through human encounters and knowledge acquisition. The idea of place attachment exists as a complex construct which depends on personal, social and cultural influences. On the individual level, each person establishes their attachment by interacting with places while using their senses and forming emotional connections to particular locations. On a social level, it manifests through relationships and practices that transform spaces into communal sites of identity. Culturally, it reflects the processes of belonging and

the sharing of culture and history across generations. This profound connection often stems from sustained engagement with homes, neighbourhoods, or natural environments, where people's sense of self and existential meanings are rooted in the emotional significance of particular place.

The recent scholarly focus on place attachment is developed in the context of globalising trends, environmental and migration dynamics. Xiaozhen Li asserts that, "Place attachment has been a topic of intensive study for several decades, and this heightened interest can be partly attributed to the challenges posed by globalization, increasing mobility, and worsening environmental problems, all of which threaten the bonds between people and their places" (Li 75). Higher mobility leads to diminished meaningful natural contact, yet emotional bonds between people and their places serve as critical stabilizers of their sense of continuity and identity. Through the attachment formed by place, one discovers human values, fellowship and empathy which connects people in an isolated world, while fostering cultural heritage and environmental preservation. Literature, art, and memory serve as important mediums through which place attachment is expressed and sustained, allowing individuals to engage deeply with spaces of significance. Ultimately, there is no bond more powerful than the fundamental relationship between human essence and the physical and symbolic places where identity and the selves are rooted.

Literature exposes and reveals the many signs and significations that places hold through its ability to uncover these meanings. Throughout literature the writers depict place as a historical and memory vessel which safeguards the fading heritage of both cultural heritage and emotional stories. Gaston Bachelard, in *The Poetics of Space*, observes, "Of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated" (8). Literature effectively illustrates the bond between humans and the environment, capturing the complexities of place attachment—its ability to offer stability, comfort and identity, as well as the emotional distress that occurs upon severing these bonds. Various literary movements such as regional, postcolonial and ecological literature use place as both a foundation for story development and a tool to examine human life. Through its engagement with place, literature demonstrates how place attachment becomes a vital element in understanding the human condition.

The multidisciplinary foundations of environmental psychology, geography, and sociology created the framework for the emergence of place attachment theory, which developed during the mid- to late 20th century. Various theorists have conducted research and made revisions to develop the theory throughout multiple years. Human geographer Yi-Fu Tuan established the basis for this concept through his introduction of a concept called, *topophilia*, which refers to the love of place. Place attachment theory received significant development through the work of Edward Relph, Harold M. Proshansky, Irwin Altman and Setha Low. Lynne C. Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright edited the book *In Place Attachment: Advances in Theory, Methods, and Applications* (2021), where they analyse place attachment through different perspectives and its relationship with various phenomena. As an environmental psychology expert Lynne C. Manzo leads research about how humans develop social and emotional connections with their surroundings. As a prominent figure in environmental psychology and human geography Patrick Devine-Wright establishes major contributions towards studying human-place interactions. The book provides an extensive evaluation of place attachment theory through methodological breakthroughs and interdisciplinary research approaches.

Katharina Kakar presents her story about moving from Delhi to a Goan village in her work *Moving to Goa* exploring how place creates personal identity and feelings of belonging. Her first experience of feeling like an outsider evolves into a profound connection with the land and its community members. The narrative uses specific illustrations of Goan local customs, natural cycle of events and day-to-day activities to show how place attachment develops steadily through personal interaction, emotional connection and familiarity. She demonstrates how place attachment develops through time, while describing both positive aspects and difficulties of integration. Goa morphs into a fundamental part of her personal development that contributes to her developing identity. Kakar demonstrates the development of attachment which occurs through genuine human interactions and real-life encounters. Her life experience demonstrates that people develop strong place bonds through psychological, cultural and emotional connections over time.

Goa, located on the southwestern coast of India is the smallest state in territory, yet holds a distinct personality among Indian regions. Tourists flock to Goa every year attracted by its sandy beaches with golden hues, palm tree-lined shores and dynamic nightlife. The cultural amalgamation of Indian and Portuguese cultures creates a distinct character in Goa as visible through its architectural heritage, dining traditions, spoken language and religious practises. The 451-year Portuguese colonial rule has established a permanent distinction between Goa and other Indian territories. Goa's society is marked by a relaxed, inclusive ethos often described as *susegad*, reflecting contentment and ease. Its villages

retain traditional forms of community life, even as urbanization and tourism drive rapid changes. Despite being connected to its traditions Goa remains accessible to global trends because the state has high literacy levels and a dynamic cultural arts movement. It continues to function as an ongoing meeting point where diverse elements of past customs and contemporary phenomena merge.

Place attachment stands as one of the basic requirements humans need. Edward Relph and Christian Norberg-Schulz define place attachment as “a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one’s own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular” (Relph 38). Place attachment goes beyond physical elements, to include emotional, cultural and symbolic meanings which create strong bonds between people and their environments. The human connection shapes how people interact with their environment, seeking stability, security and sense of meaning. Research into such attachment is essential for understanding the relationship between humans and places they inhabit, demonstrating how place affects human experiences throughout time.

Kakar demonstrates this concept through her life choice of moving to Goa with her husband despite the place lacking ancestral connections. Kakar and her husband decided to settle in Goa only because they fell in love with the place and discovered its tranquillity. As a result, even as an outsider, Kakar continues to regard Goa as her true home, as she expresses: “Goa is our home now. I believe that the most important decisions in one’s personal life are taken somewhere in the diffused and hidden landscape of one’s inner self” (Kakar 14). Her profound emotional bond with Goa is evident in her decision to choose the place as her permanent residence. The wilderness of Goa and natural surroundings creates a deep connection within Kakar that leads her to feel she belongs there genuinely. According to Kakar’s interpretation home goes beyond traditional geographical origins since it comes from a deep personal connection to a place through the soul. Thus, place attachment not only shapes personal identity but also influences the social and emotional fabric of communities, underscoring the critical role of place in grounding individuals, their sense of self, and their experiences.

Place exists beyond physical boundaries since it functions as a human experience that both creates and adjusts to the ways people exist and approach their environment. Space functions closely with cognition, emotions and human activities to determine how people perceive reality. As Relph contends, “‘Place is integral to the very structure and possibility of experience’ ... and not just a product of what is encountered in experience... [and is] certainly not susceptible to quantitative excavation” (Manzo and Devine-Wright 18). Thus, place represents more than the physical environment, since it integrates historical elements, cultural values and human memory. People who live in specific areas actively create meaning within the community by experiencing life day by day. Therefore, place takes an active part in developing individual experiences.

Kakar slowly adjusts to the environment which leads her to value structured routine, meaningful physical interaction and the practise of embracing each passing instant. She demonstrates that these elements create the authentic meaning of living. This suggests that, Goa as a physical environment provides its residents with deeper existential understanding which results in life transformation and personal enrichment. Kakar further reinforces this idea by quoting Raj Salgaocar, who remarks, “Our identity is based on our geography and history, on a myriad of influences over the years” (Kakar 213-214). This perspective emphasizes that forming a meaningful connection with the place is vital not only for survival but also for enhancing the quality of life.

Place attachment develops dynamically as people perform actions and tell stories that shape its continuous transformation. Place remains in constant creation because it exists beyond static boundaries so it requires active experience and performance to transform and re-shape itself. According to Lynne C. Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright, “Since place attachment is an embodied relationship to the world, places are constituted by people doing things in place and thus are constantly being performed and are never finished” (Manzo and Devine-Wright 22). A place achieves its meaning not merely by its physical existence but through the ways it is inhabited—through traditions, routines, challenges, and celebrations.

Katharina Kakar’s work *Moving to Goa* illustrates this concept with exceptional clarity. Kakar sees Goa as a beautiful yet unfamiliar destination upon her move from Delhi although she feels strong desire to embrace it as her permanent home. As she expresses, “We were now ready to plunge into a different life, grow new roots, redefine our priorities, and exchange the buzz of city life for the tranquillity of village life, lulled by the soothing sound of swaying coconut palms” (Kakar 5). Gradually, she becomes deeply connected to Goa through her involvement in traditional customs, interactions with neighbours, acceptance of village life patterns and her ability to overcome many obstacles. The activities she chooses to participate, include, restoring traditional home, celebrating Goan cultural events and learning local

community living methods directly shape her experience of the place. Through these lived interactions, Goa becomes for Kakar not a static or pre-defined entity, but an evolving and dynamic relationship continuously shaped by her everyday practices. Thus, *Moving to Goa* effectively illustrates Manzo and Devine-Wright's perspective that place attachment is an ongoing process, constantly performed and never fully complete.

Proximity seeking is a fundamental aspect of interpersonal attachment, and the same principle applies to place attachment. As Lynne C. Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright observe, "Proximity-seeking is a hallmark of interpersonal attachment processes that is also exhibited toward places, such as when individuals elect to live in a place or spend time there. Vacationers may revisit certain travel destinations" (Manzo and Devine-Wright 46). This is similar to the way human beings seek closeness to the loved ones for security and comfort. Tourists frequently visit their preferred travel spots as they develop emotional connections with these locations. People who invest time in specific locations usually create emotional connections that involve physical surroundings, atmosphere and associated experiences. Such attachments can stem from cherished memories or the desire to escape the pressures of everyday life. Tourists pursue emotional reassurance in the same way people visit close friends by seeking comfort in specific locations.

Kakar narrates about people like her, who never resided in Goa yet establish deep emotional ties to the region. The same inclination appears in her life choice to permanently live in Goa. The author mentions both hippies and tourists who decided to settle in Goa as they have developed strong affection for Goa. For example, she mentions that "Meet you in Goa for Christmas" (Kakar 89), became a familiar phrase among hippies gathering in Goa during the festive season. Kakar discusses about hippies like Eight-Finger-Eddie among other figures who decided to live in Goa permanently. According to Kakar many visitors choose to buy properties in Goa either to establish permanent residency or to visit often. As she notes, "With Goa's gentle and beautiful countryside, its alluring ocean and its warm tropical climate, it is not surprising that so many well-to-do Indians buy property and move to Goa" (Kakar 221). Furthermore, she highlights the number of artists, authors, and photographers who have made Goa their permanent residence, underscoring their proximity-seeking attachment to the place.

The way people respond to environmental risks and natural hazards depends heavily on their attachment to their place. People develop reluctance towards evacuation and strong desires to return home against ongoing risks because of their place attachment towards the place. As Lynne C. Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright observe, "A systematic review focusing on place attachment in relation to natural environmental risks and hazards revealed that individuals who are strongly attached are less willing to evacuate or relocate in the face of risks, and are more likely to return following disasters, even when risks remain" (Manzo and Devine-Wright 47). This signifies how emotional connections with a specific location typically become more important than safety-based concerns. The willingness to remain or return in spite of potential threats highlights the depth of one's connection to place and the essential role it plays in shaping identity, daily life, and emotional well-being.

Kakar presents a paradigmatic case where individuals refused to leave their homes despite facing threats from powerful figures, including a state minister. She recounts the story of how Cheryl D'Souza moved from East Africa to Goa with her husband after living there for many years. The couple bought a farm in South Goa and made it their permanent residence. But when mining activities expanded in the area, much of the land was acquired by the state minister at inflated prices. Cheryl refused all offers of millions of rupees when they attempted to buy her land. The mining mafia raised their pressure on Cheryl with disturbing phone calls during night, after her husband passed away. Despite all pressure Cheryl stayed determined and rejected any offer to leave her house. Kakar provides a vivid description of the fearful situation as he writes:

'Do you know what can happen to a woman alone at night?' / 'Your daughter is so pretty, aren't you afraid of what might happen to her?' / 'Your problem is, no man has taught you a lesson yet.'" However, the mafia underestimated this fearless woman, who boldly told journalist Aimee Ginsburg, "I am not going to walk out. They will only get the land over my dead body" (Kakar 148).

This scenario exemplifies how people tend to stay in their homeland because it serves as their fundamental source of identity, national pride and endurance. Many people resist leaving the land because it requires them to sever emotional ties as well as physical connections which they maintain despite the lethal danger.

Place attachment functions as a safe haven by giving people and groups psychological protection against everyday stress through provision of comfort and security. As Lynne C. Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright explain, "Places of attachment can provide a reference point and anchor for wider expeditions, or they can serve as the object of the exploration itself, such as when individuals form attachments to interesting travel destinations or utilize a place to escape

from daily routines" (Manzo and Devine-Wright 47). These locations function as fundamental pillars that provide stability and personal identity to people entering new wider experiences. Physical homes from one's childhood and familiar places within the community act as powerful psychological anchors that give people comfort during exploration of new spaces and life events.

The book *Moving to Goa* by Kakar examines the process through which people, both residents and migrants discover comfort and tranquilly from daily urban stress, social expectations and cultural detachment. She examines her choice to move to Goa which has brought satisfaction to her existence. She writes, "And are we happy here? Yes, we are. We feel at home, we have created our island of peace and we have been made to feel welcome in a community that is, on the whole, remarkably tolerant and accepting of those from other cultures and ways of life" (Kakar 54). This declaration of happiness demonstrates that Goa serves as a sanctuary which welcomes people beyond providing security. According to Kakar restaurant workers and labourers who moved to Goa share the same perspective of the place as a haven. Goa stands unique for offering security beyond physical protection because it gives emotional and cultural comfort to people with different backgrounds, who can thus rebuild their lives while feeling as part of the community. The supportive environment in Goa helps establish the location as a refuge where people can find peace and social acceptance.

Human place attachment stems from the early-stage attachment between mothers and children that develops during human development. According to attachment theory the positive early bonds between caregivers and children develop mutual supportive behaviour patterns which continue until the end of a person's life. Human beings establish psychological connections of safety and familiarity in the same manner they do with their caregivers through positive bonding. As explained by Lynne C. Manzo and Patrick Devine-Wright, "The theory of attachment assumes that early mother-child positive bonds will drive mutual positive behaviors across the entire lifespan... Likewise, we should assume that positive affective bonds with one's place should be associated with systematic behavioral tendencies to protect that place" (Manzo and Devine-Wright 194). Such attachments often translate into feelings of care, pride, and responsibility for a place, motivating individuals to engage in behaviors aimed at its preservation. Meaningful relationships built between people and their places of residence become essential to identity development since these locations become core components of internal identity.

As an outsider Katharina Kakar considers Goa to be her sanctuary—a place she genuinely accepts as her home. Her emotional connection to the region resembles the mother-child bond which naturally prompts the child to protect and take care of the mother. Through her writing Kakar demonstrates this protective behaviour by warning about Goa's rapid development which includes mining practises that destroy the environment and forests, pollution and loss of agricultural land. She stresses that the state requires combined protective actions to keep its natural glory and cultural values safe. Kakar quotes writer Damodar Mauzo, who asserts, "We are proud of our Goan culture. We had to struggle hard to protect it. So far, we have preserved our distinct identity, both political and cultural, and shall strive to retain that title "different" for posterity." (Kakar 220). Her advocacy reflects this same protective drive, consistently promoting the idea of responsible development that honours Goa's delicate balance. Through her awareness campaigns Kakar strengthens her connection to the land, while also motivating all residents and visitors to join the collective effort in safeguarding Goa's future. Through *Moving to Goa* Kakar establishes herself as an enthusiastic protector of both environmental landscapes and emotional cultural relationships that connect people to their place.

Scholars warn about diminishing community relationships and place bonds due to the concurrent powers of urban development and globalisation. Scholars express concern about "...the loss of communities as systems of informal connections between community members within a 'locality of relevance' (place) that was threatened by the homogenizing process of urbanization and the placeless influence of global capitalism" (Relph 18). The network of social bonds that maintained close connections between people and their immediate surroundings is fading away. The transformation process creates placelessness because people lose important connections with their surroundings. Community-specific identities and local characteristics are overshadowed by worldwide developments. These weakened social and cultural foundations threaten the emotional stability of people because they lose their sense of home.

Kakar points out different elements that destroy communal relationships and traditional practises in Goa. Kakar expresses worry about the disappearing unique charm of Goa while mourning the loss of its peaceful nature and easy way of life which are fading away with the influx of visitors. The deep-rooted sense of attachment that people previously felt toward the place is slowly fading. Many people have left their traditional occupations attracted by new job opportunities, which has resulted in essential community-centred activities diminishing in the village. As Kakar points out:

The economic interdependence of different professions within a community, all contributing their bit to enable a village to function and prosper, is now a thing of the past and a basket weaver or cobbler can no longer earn a sufficient income in this new world with its new professions and temptations. Their children grow up with Facebook and mobile phones and have different values and ambitions (Kakar 49-50).

The vanishing of traditional occupations has led to an unnatural disruption in the rhythm of village life and created disorder throughout the community that used to maintain a unified purpose. The escalating traffic and rising pollution levels have caused additional deterioration to the quality of life in Goa. The uncontrolled development has led to severe degradation of Goa's way of life which poses major challenges for preserving the region's identity and cultural heritage.

Viewed through the framework of place attachment theory, *Moving to Goa* demonstrates the enduring significance of emotional ties to place in shaping identity and fostering a sense of belonging. Katharina Kakar demonstrates through her personal experience regarding the importance of place attachment in grounding an individual's identity, in a rapidly changing world. *Moving to Goa* displays Goa as a living space which connects personal memories, cultural heritage and daily interactions. Throughout the narrative it is shown how preserving ecological connections and cultural elements maintains stability in contemporary life. In an age marked by mobility and displacement, place attachment offers a sense of continuity and security. Kakar's account demonstrates that places remain fundamental force which mould personal and collective identities. This paper argues that, today, cultivating place attachment is essential not just for personal fulfilment, but also for reinforcing social bonds, safeguarding cultural heritage, and encouraging environmental stewardship. The establishment of place attachment offers communities a significant means to construct enduring and peaceful communities under the stresses of worldwide transformations.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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