

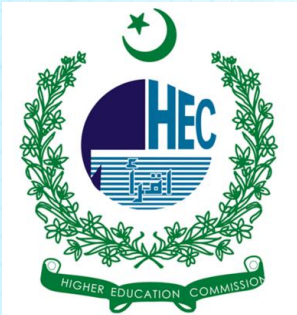
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**The Poetics of Composure: Self-Regulation and Nostalgia in
Taufiq Rafat's Poetry**



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Abstract

Nostalgia manifests as a poignant, bittersweet yearning for the past, where individuals fondly recall transient moments, places, and experiences that shape human identity amidst the inevitable currents of change and loss. Far from being a mere passive recollection, the self-Regulation theory of nostalgia, pioneered by Constantine Sedikides, reconceptualizes this phenomenon as a vital psychological mechanism. This framework posits that nostalgic reflection actively fortifies self-continuity, fosters existential stability, and elevates positive affect, thereby enabling individuals to navigate stress, loneliness, and disruptive life transitions. This emotional equilibrium is profoundly mirrored in the literary oeuvre of Taufiq Rafat, specifically within his seminal anthologies, *Arrival of the Monsoon: Collected Poems 1947-78 (1985)* and *Half Moon: Poems 1979-1983 (2008)*, which chronicle the mutating landscapes of Pakistani culture, nature, and rustic traditions. By evaluating Rafat's selected poems "Snapshot of My Father", "The Last Visit", "Once upon a Time", "A Positive Region", "Death of a Carpenter", "The Old City", and "Elegy for a Town", through this psychological paradigm, this study investigates how his verses operationalize memory as a tool for emotional self-Regulation. Ultimately, this research posits that nostalgia in Rafat's poetry transcends mere romanticized retrospection, it functions as a critical emotional conduit between the past and present, equipping the collective consciousness to resist the alienating pressures of modernity while remaining resolutely anchored to its cultural roots.

Keywords: Self-regulation, emotional nostalgia, familial nostalgia, personal nostalgia, eco-nostalgia, cultural nostalgia, urban nostalgia

1. Introduction

Coined in 1688 by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer, the word nostalgia combines the Greek words *nostos* meaning homecoming and *algos* meaning pain (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018). Originally, it describes a medical condition which is a kind of cerebral disease of extreme homesickness that afflicts soldiers. Hence, nostalgia becomes a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period

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or place with happy personal associations. However, literature utilizes nostalgia as a powerful narrative force and psychological lens rather than just simple sentimentality. Literary writers use sensory triggers to bridge the past and present to show how identity is built on remembered experience (Biru, 2024). It allows authors to explore the tension between memory and reality, often revealing how characters reconstruct the past to comfort themselves or escape the present (Lowenthal, 1985). In diasporic or historical literature, nostalgia serves to pass on inherited wisdom and maintain social connections within dislocated communities (Fortes, 2025). It provides a scaffolding for inquiries into loss, aging and the fragility of time, making personal stories resonate on a universal scale (Casey, 1987).

Taufiq Rafat (1927-1998) was a pioneering Pakistani poet, playwright, and translator widely celebrated as the *Father of Pakistani English Poetry*. Born in Sialkot, he was educated in Dehradun, Aligarh, and Lahore later graduated from Hailey College of Commerce before working as a company executive. He is credited with creating a unique identity for Pakistan English literature by adapting the English language to authentically express local South Asian cultures and realities (Rasheed et al., 2022). Using a modernist, free-verse (Aqeel et al., 2021), metapoetic (Aqeel et al., 2022), autoethnographical (Rasheed & Javaid, 2022), and intertextual (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022a) style, Rafat mentored young writers through Lahore poetry workshops until a stroke ended his career in 1984. Taufiq Rafat's poetry encompasses a variety of significant themes including nostalgia, rural life, culture, sufism (Rasheed et al., 2025), love (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022b), war (Zeeshan et al., 2026), and ecology (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022c). Through these themes, he presents an authentic portrayal of Pakistani society and its changing values. His poems portray Pakistan's local customs, and cultural values, offering an authentic picture of Pakistani society and its heritage (Rasheed & Aqeel, 2022a). Besides celebrating culture and tradition, Rafat's poetry also carries philosophical insights. He addresses themes such as old age, loneliness, death, and the fleeting nature of life, encouraging readers to contemplate human existence and the passage of time. (Tabassum et al., 2020)

2. Literature Review

In tourism, through nostalgic motivation, authenticity perception, and place

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attachment concepts, the historical reflection serves as a major driver for modern tourism, prompting travelers to abandon commercialized sites for real heritage and ancestral roots (Moreno et al., 2024). Likewise, in the mechanics of nostalgia, contemporary literature in psychological sciences has established a framework based on content, triggers and functions where the nostalgic content typically features the self as a protagonist interacting with close other during momentous life events. Although these experiences may initially involve negative scenes, they are ultimately redeemed by subsequent triumphs to generate positive affect. Furthermore, nostalgia is frequently triggered in response to negative moods and states of loneliness (Wildschut et al., 2006). Similarly, to critically examine the socio-cultural dimensions of memory, the application of Svetlana Boym's nostalgia to modern human behavior and 17th-century Swiss medical history, it is argued that nostalgia is not a longing for a place, but a psychological rebellion against time. Nostalgia functions as a double-edged sword, acting either as a creative survival tool or a poison to progress. Further, as modernization accelerates, temporal longing intensifies. Ultimately, by tracing how nostalgia evolved from a disease treated with leeches into a modern condition, Boym concludes that the only antidote to its mental dominance is nostalgic dissidence, i. e., the capacity to cherish memories while critically questioning them (Boym, 2007).

In the similar context, to examine psychological dimensions of consumer behavior, human psychological responses as the primary text through neuropsychiatric framework are investigated. Nostalgia operates as an idealized emotional state where brain utilizes a "screen memory" to filter out past pain, creating a perfect version of history that offers comfort against current frustrations. The key findings highlight olfactory-evoked recall as the most potent sensory trigger for these memories, with results showing that women are significantly more sensitive to these scents than men. Ultimately, the marketers strategically exploit this neuropsychiatric loop, using nostalgic cues and scents to bypass logic and drive consumer purchasing decisions (Hirsch, 1992). On the contrary, Raymond William's theoretical concept of the "Structure of Feeling" re-evaluates the cultural discourse surrounding nostalgia regarding social structures. While traditional critiques dismiss nostalgia as a hostile, conservative force driven by dominant societal structures, Tannock challenges this

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assumption. He argues that nostalgia serves as a valuable mechanism for all social groups to address diverse personal needs and political desires. However, the author critically concludes while it functions as an essential emotional response, the rhetorical structure of nostalgia ultimately places significant limitations on effective historical interpretation and contemporary action (Tannock, 1995).

While, in a study on digital culture, nostalgia is explored as a bittersweet longing for the past where technology is the only future. This resurgence is driven by digital media, visible in retro-themed social media groups and popular vintage TV shows. Furthermore, modern technology actively mimics the past through nostalgic photo editing and digital “skeuomorphs” interfaces that use old fashioned design for new functions. Ultimately, the internet has become a massive digital attic where individual and collective nostalgias continuously spread and converge (Niemeyer, 2014). On the other hand, the psychological functions of nostalgia are investigated, examining whether it serves as a positive resource for maintaining a stable sense of self while evaluating how sentimental reflections influence self-positivity and emotional resilience. The study demonstrates that nostalgia acts as a vital psychological buffer that reinforces self-worth and mitigates the ego-threatening impact of current failures. (Vess et al., 2012)

However, to contextualize the evolving relationship between text and memory, the survey of historical evolution of modern literature to analyze the mechanics of nostalgic literary aesthetics takes place where the deep correlation between the rise of nostalgia and the onset of modernity is paved down. The intensification of nostalgia in the modern era has fundamentally always been an integral part of literary history. To examine these literary nostalgias, the study applies diverse theoretical frameworks, explicitly incorporating ecocritical, postcolonial, and migrant analyses. The findings reveal that specific aesthetic strategies trigger nostalgic experiences within texts (Salmoose & Sandberg, 2021). Similarly, In the analysis of postcolonial literature, Rash explores the concept of “postcolonial nostalgia” by examining four memoirs written by white expatriate Zimbabwean authors, Alexandar Fuller and Peter Godwin. The study highlights that while these narratives successfully engage Western audiences, they ultimately fail to disrupt or challenge deep-seated colonial mindsets. According

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to the author, even though these memoirists actively attempt to distance themselves from the historical white supremacist regimes, their narratives continue to romanticize the past by depicting white settlers as benevolent and highly productive. Furthermore, by contrasting a nostalgic childhood of settler innocence with a chaotic, dystopian present during Zimbabwe's national crisis the texts effectively lament the dissolution of the old white order. This indicates that postcolonial memoirs can inadvertently reinforce colonial frameworks rather than deconstruct them (Rasch, 2018).

While the exploration of nostalgia in Pakistani English literature, particularly in the works of Taufiq Rafat, has received notable academic attention through various literary frameworks, its connection to psychological self-regulation remains unexplored. In existing literature, scholars have utilized "Cultural Memory Theory" to demonstrate how his nostalgia acts as a tool to preserve communal traditions and cultural symbols (Volski, 2007). From the perspective of "Postcolonial Hybridity", this nostalgia is recognized as a vital component of Rafat's poetry (Kuortti & Nyman, 2007). Furthermore, through the lens of British Romanticism, the concept of emotions recollected in tranquility highlights his yearning for the carefree days of childhood (Goodman, 2008). On the other hand, "New Historicism" frames his nostalgia as a socio-historical protest against industrialization (Hodge, 2011). Additionally, the perspective of Existentialism and Poetry Therapy interpret nostalgia as a psychological defense mechanism against grief and existential dread (Routledge et al., 2011).

However, a significant research gap exists, as these previous studies have predominantly focused on the cultural, historical and romantic dimensions of his nostalgia or viewed it merely as a passive defense mechanism. Consequently, they have overlooked its active self-regulatory function. To bridge this gap, this study applies Self-Regulation Theory (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018) to investigate nostalgia in Rafat's selected poems as a proactive mechanism utilized to maintain emotional equilibrium and psychological stability, thereby offering a novel contribution to the existing scholarship on his work.

3. Theoretical Framework

Dr. Constantine Sedikides presented his theory of self-regulation on nostalgia in the

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key article “Current Directions in Psychological Science” published in his book *THE Wiley Handbook of Positive Clinical Psychology* in 2008. It is defined as a disorganized self-Regulation in a total system (Miller, 1973). It says that self-regulation becomes unorganized or weak in a person’s whole system of thoughts, emotions and behavior. It shows that the person may find it difficult to control actions, feelings or responses properly. While, self-regulation means controlling your own emotions. Self-Regulation is a psychological process through which individuals monitor and control their thoughts, emotions and behaviors. When a person faces stress, loneliness or sadness the mind uses this system to restore balance. It is the brain that is on an auto-repair system. Applying an existential psychological framework to a comprehensive body of existing empirical literature, Sedikides synthesized prior research to examine the functional role of nostalgia. By analyzing various behavioral and psychological studies as the primary texts, nostalgia acts as a crucial defense mechanism against existential threats. Looking back at past memories significantly enhances social connectedness, reinforces self-continuity, and restores a sense of meaning in life, ultimately providing individual with psychological equanimity and vitality when facing loneliness or boredom (Sedikides & Wildschut, 2018).

4. Textual Analysis

This section analyzes Rafat’s seven poems – “Snapshot of My Father”, “The Last Visit”, “Once upon a Time”, “A Positive Region”, “Death of a Carpenter”, “The Old City”, and “Elegy for a Town” – dealing with different types of nostalgia including emotional, familial, personal, eco, cultural, and urban nostalgia to come up with the self-regulatory effect on the poet of all these memories.

4.1. Snapshot of My Father

Take from Rafat’s anthology *Half Moon: Poems 1979-1983*, “Snapshot of My Father” is written in Lahore on July 30, 1980. The poem has a deep cultural background and uses a single photograph to talk about heavy topics like old age, time, and death in very simple language. It shows an old father sitting on a house porch on a hot summer

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evening. The poem explores deeply emotional nostalgia ¹. It shows a peaceful evening on a porch in Lahore. Rafat looks back at his father “in the last year of his life” (Rafat, 2008, p. 134) This specific image conveys a deep sense of sadness and highlights the emotional fragility of the moment. His father wears simple clothes and looks very relaxed. A tiny bit of topaz sky shows that his time is running out. Yet, his soft smile resists the finality of death. This beautiful scene touches the audience’s heart directly. It bridges the gap between the past and the present. Through the image, the father reminds his son that “time, my son, is not measured in days” (Rafat, 2008, p. 134). This verse brings a powerful feeling of comfort amid the grief. It shows how deep bounds outlive physical death. Ultimately, the poem proves that “Between the falling of this shutter and that a million heart-beats remain” (Rafat, 2008, p. 134). This snapshot transforms a fleeting memory in to an enduring monument of my own emotional connection. This poetic preservation directly speaks to the profound role a father plays in an individual’s life, when a father is alive, he serves as an irreplaceable ontological shield a foundational source of unvoiced mentorship, silent guidance, and absolute security that protects the progeny from the raw, external anxieties of the world. However, when he departs from this world, his passing abruptly shatters this lifelong illusion of eternal protection, leaving a devastating, permanent vacuum where the child experiences an intense emotional uprooting, a premature psychological aging, and a deep, echoing silence in the spaces once filled by their greatest protector. To survive this profound s psychological fracture, the individuals must actively engage in emotional self-regulation, consciously striving to stabilize their shattered internal state. This self-regulation is achieved by anchoring legacy and his final philosophical wisdom that time is not measured in days, by actively transforming raw, debilitating grief into a structured appreciation of the immortalized snapshot, the individual internalizes the father’s memory not as a source of paralyzing sorrow, but as a continuous, regulating moral compass to regain emotional equilibrium and navigate life’s ongoing chaos. It happens because the father’s warmth is absolutely vital for a child’s social skills, emotional growth, and brain development. Ultimately,

¹ A bittersweet, cognitive sensation that reminds us of time's irreversibility and evokes a deep mixture of joy, comfort, and longing, which frequently feels like a mild sort of mourning.

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a father's love is just as powerful as a mother's love. In fact, a father's love alone is often the single most important factor in predicting a child's mental health, lifelong happiness, and positive behavior. (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001)

4.2. The Last Visit

The poem "The Last Visit", taken from *Half Moon: Poems 1979-1983*, explores memory, cultural loss, and passing time to find out familial nostalgia². Historically, it reflects mid-20th-century Pakistan moving from rural life to urbanization. Culturally, it mourns a vanishing heritage as an old family home is bulldozed for commercial farming. Writing in a distinct Pakistani English voice, Rafat mixes local imagery with universal grief. The speaker desperately searches for physical remnants to preserve the past. Overgrown nature and diffused light intensify the deep familial nostalgia. Ultimately, the work serves as an elegy for a bygone era now lost to progress.

In this poem, Rafat integrates local imagery with universal grief to mourn a vanishing heritage as an old family home is bulldozed for modern commercial farming. Textually, this intense nostalgia is first built through physical displacement when Rafat states, "I search for a nail to keep among / the remaining boards and stones" (Rafat, 2008, p. 34), a desperate act of collecting fragments that symbolizes the human longing to physically hold onto disappearing memories. This emotional longing peaks in the lines, "Through the shutter of memory filters / the last visit with aunt and uncle," (Rafat, 2008, p. 34), where Rafat critically employs camera-like imagery to show that nostalgia is an active, selective process used to frame and preserve the past against modern destruction. Here, the "shutter of memory" (Rafat, 2008, p. 34) acts as a nostalgic shield that freezes time to block out the harsh present, while the concluding image of the family "standing in the vine diffused light" (Rafat, 2008, p. 34) serves as a sensory symbol of fading glory, where the overgrown vines mark the unstoppable passage of time, yet the soft, filtered light bathes his ancestral relations in a warm, dreamlike, and timeless glow. Ultimately, this selective farming demonstrates a profound psychological process of emotional self-regulation. Facing the traumatic erasure of his heritage, Rafat actively manages his internal grief and

² A semisweet yearning for earlier moments, connections, and customs associated with family, which anchors individuals in a common sense of belonging and heritage and offers emotional solace.

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controls his emotional response by deliberately replacing the chaotic external destruction with structured, comforting imagery. This mental filtering serves as an essential coping mechanism that allows the speaker to maintain internal stability and balance, using the power of nostalgia to heal the trauma of modern displacement and safeguard his identity. It demonstrates that Rafat's final journey in "The Last Visit" is not just a personal goodbye, but a profound return. (Ozdemirs & Monani, 2015)

4.3. Once Upon a Time

"Once Upon a Time" is a reflective poem taken from Rafat's landmark collection, *Arrival of the Monsoon: Collected Poems (1947-78)* to bring out personal nostalgia³. Set in a post-colonial context, the poem rejects Western colonial traditions by grounding its themes in local cultural sensibilities and everyday Pakistani life. Written as the poet approached the age of 39, it captures a relatable mid-life crisis, offering a deeply personal and nostalgic commentary on physical decline, the passage of time, and the acceptance of leaving one's youth behind.

"Once Upon a Time" by Taufiq Rafat is a deeply reflective poem about aging and mid-life crisis, where everyday objects are used as powerful symbols of nostalgia to contrast a vibrant past with a decaying present. The opening line, "Once upon a time I had beautiful teeth," (Rafat, 1985, p. 8), introduces a nostalgic symbol representing the peak of health and youthful vanity, while the lines "I would laugh into the mirror / so I could admire them" (Rafat, 1985, p. 8), use the mirror as a psychological tool for self-evaluation. The analysis of these textual line reveals a sudden shift when the Rafat abruptly states "But that was long ago." (Rafat, 1985, p.8), which instantly triggers a deep emotional longing for his lost days, directly bringing the reader into a state of nostalgia. Ultimately, describing his physical deterioration as a "...roundabout way / of saying goodbye to my youth" (Rafat, 1985, p. 8), becomes a powerful metaphor for emotional coping, which beautifully demonstrates the psychological process of self-regulation. This conclusion shows Rafat's mature ability to monitor and manage his inner grief, using cognitive

³ An intense emotional state characterized by a yearning for cherished people, places, or moments in one's past. It provides comfort and stability during times of change or isolation by serving as a mental support system to anchor one's sense of self.

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restructuring to interrupt his longing, overcome the anxieties of a mid-life crisis, and successfully reconcile with the irreversible passage of time.

The journey of midlife stands as a pivotal crossroads, marked by biological, psychological, and social transitions that trigger an existential crisis. By navigating the intricate transition through ego mastery stages alongside stark awareness of mortality, this phase prompts an intense emotional upheaval and a deep reassessment of one's life. This structural crisis comes alive in the depiction of aging, where the literal decay of teeth serves as a visceral metaphor for fading youth, forcing a painful confrontation with physical decline. Yet, this vulnerability is not merely an end, but a transformative opportunity for profound self-discovery and psychological growth. Ultimately, by adopting essential coping mechanism like reframing challenges and seeking support, an individual can successfully reshape this tumultuous era in to a deeply enriching phase of life. (Balamurugan et al., 2024)

4.4. A Positive Region

“A Positive Region” from *Arrival of the Monsoon: Collected Poems (1947-1978)* stands as a classic piece of post-independence South Asian modernism to talk about eco-nostalgia ⁴. Historically and culturally, it explores postcolonial eco-poetics and topophilia by contrasting the vibrant, untamed beauty of Pakistan's mountainous region with the sterile, artificial constraints of modern urban life. Through detailed imagery of alpine pines, wild apricots, and waterfalls, Rafat introduces a narrative where the refreshing harmony of the rural countryside directly critiques the mechanical exhaustion brought by industrialization and urban progress. The citizens intellectually value environment protection, yet rarely practice eco-friendly lifestyle due to socio-economic pressures. The poem exposes that the modern economic and cultural realities alienate humanity from the environment (Pirani & Secondi, 2011).

The poem masterfully conveys a profound sense of nostalgia and yearning through both its environmental critique and its emotional climax. This sentiment first surfaces when Rafat contrasts the refreshing mountain air with urban pollution, stating

⁴ A sad and happy yearning for previous environmental states or vanished terrains. It includes both the sorrow for damaged ecosystems and the poignant remembrance of a more robust, pre-collapse Earth. It fuels both inventive ecological restoration and modern climate worries.

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that “The breeze / with a hint of rain makes one cavil / at the stink of upholstery and petrol” (Rafat, 1985, p. 20). It highlights a nostalgic longing for a pure, unpolluted past before industrialization took over. This building tension culminates in the poem’s poignant final lines, “Oh to be young again, to have the courage” (Rafat, 1985, p. 20), drawing a sharp contrast between the timeless youthfulness of nature and the inevitable decay of human life. Rafat does not merely long for chronological youth, but specifically craves the courage, the vitality, boldness, and freedom needed to break away from the artificial and exhausting constraints of modern city life represented by the vehicle. By weaving this melancholic and wistful tone throughout these specific lines, Rafat leaves the reader with a powerful postcolonial critique, suggesting that modern urban existence strips humanity of its natural vigor, leaving behind only a restless desire to return to a lost, spiritual connection with the earth. Ultimately, this longing serves as a psychological demand for self-regulation, where Rafat recognizes the need to restrain and govern his inner desires within a mechanical world, balancing the chaotic rush of societal progress with the disciplined preservation of his peace and true native identity.

4.5. Death of a Carpenter

Taken from Rafat’s anthology *Half Moon: Poems 1979-1983*, “Death of a Carpenter” is a poignant poem dedicated to a traditional craftsman, Mistri Noordin to emphasize cultural nostalgia ⁵. Culturally and historically rooted in post-colonial Pakistan, the poem laments the gradual decline of traditional craftsmanship and authentic, handmade artistry in the face of rising 20th century industrialization and mass production. His artisan’s career displacement permanently silences his tools, strips his identity and plunges his dependent family into deep socio-economic vulnerability (Chan & Huff Stevens, 2001). Rafat uses localized imagery such as perfectly grained wooden sideboards, strong joints, and brass ornaments to capture the essence of a traditional Pakistani household and celebrate the quiet, dedicated focus of old masters who worked for passion rather than modern commercial recognition. This poem

⁵ A shared desire for the beauty, principles, communication, and social patterns of a past time. It is a significant psychological and social force that molds group identity, affects consumer behavior, and provides reassurance during periods of swift societal transformation.

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remains a seminal text in Pakistani English Literature.

In “Death of a Carpenter”, nostalgia is deeply woven across different parts of the text to mourn the decline of traditional craftsmanship. The poem opens with a direct wave of personal nostalgia in the lines, “One by one they have gone / the skilled old men we used to know”, (Rafat, 2008, p. 128) where the poet looks back with sadness at bygone era and misses the generation of artisans who brought soul to everyday life. This longing shifts from people to physical spaces in the second stanza, where Rafat writes, “There are some lucky homes / here and there in the country” (Rafat, 2008, p. 128) implying that modern houses are soulless and that only a few fortunate, older homes still preserve the beautiful, handmade furniture of the past. Toward the end, the poem captures a painful nostalgia for a dying tradition through the lines, “And there are places still / if one will look for them / where such a maker can be found” (Rafat, 2008, p. 128), contrasting a time when these workers were celebrated with the present day, where the last remaining masters are hidden away in dark corners, ignored by a fast-paced commercial world. Finally, at the very conclusion, the carpenter beautifully practices emotional and professional self-regulation through his absolute focus and detachment from worldly praise. Rafat describes him as being “bent quietly over his work / in total concentration / careless of recognition,” (Rafat, 2008, p. 128), showing that despite knowing that the modern world no longer values his unique art, he regulates his internal emotions by refusing to become bitter or rush his work for money. His ability to stay calm, maintain an unbreakable dedication to his craft, and remain entirely indifferent to whether he gets fame or validation proves that he filters out external distractions to create purely for the love, dignity, and internal peace of his artistry.

4.6. The Old City

Discovering cultural nostalgia – a sad pleasurable desire for a lost culture –, “The Old City”, published in *Half Moon: Poems 1979-1983*, reflects the post-colonial identity of ancient Pakistani cities like Lahore. Historically, it shows that these traditional spaces survived centuries of invasions and colonial rule. Culturally, the title symbolizes Pakistani heritage by using vibrant images of crowded bazaars, community life, and decaying buildings to contrast raw, ancient roots with modern

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urban life. It captures the fading identity of traditional spaces facing modern transformation. Hence, the poem is a profound commentary on decay, where the poet uses nostalgia to preserve the memory of a traditional lifestyle that is rapidly being eclipsed by modern progress (Hodgetts, 2016).

“The Old City” explores deep cultural nostalgia, showing how a city’s historical identity stubbornly survives alongside modern chaos. Rafat uses powerful nostalgic symbols to portray the past as an active force coexisting with contemporary urban life. This generational preservation is symbolized by old architecture when Rafat notes, “The lives are all still there / high on the third-floor balconies” (Rafat, 2008, p. 36) transforming the ancient buildings into symbols of trapped ancestral memories. Rafat then uses the nostalgic symbols of ancient streets to connect the present with a grand royal era, stating that “the sounds of Moghul warriors/ reign on the cobblestones below,” (Rafat, 2008, p. 36) where the cobblestones symbolize a lasting historical footprint that modern noise cannot erase. Ultimately, this persistent nostalgia reaches its climax with the realization that “The past having nowhere to go / Endures...,” (Rafat, 2008, p. 36) turning the local street vendors into living symbol of cultural survival. At the end of the poem, these nostalgic symbols connect directly to the concept of self-regulation, which is the city’s natural ability to balance, control, and protect its own identity. The old city acts like a self-regulating living organism, it absorbs surface, but automatically, regulates its inner cultural ecosystem by keeping its ancestral memories alive deep within its bones to ensure its historical survival.

4.7. Elegy for a Town

“Elegy for a Town”, published in Rafat’s landmark collection *Half Moon: Poems 1979-1983*, reflects the historical and cultural background of the rapid 20th century urbanization and modernization in Pakistan to show urban nostalgia ⁶. Its central themes focus on deforestation, nostalgia, and the erosion of local identity, symbolized by modern high rises replacing vacant lots, trees cut down for power lines and the removal of colonial statues, highlighting the loss of nature and traditional heritage to

⁶ The longing for past cityscapes, their sights, and the cultural communities that once occupied them. It includes lost architecture, vanishing cultural hubs, and sensory erasure.

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commercial progress.

Taufiq Rafat's brilliant masterpiece, "Elegy for a Town" stands as a profoundly moving testament to the painful realities of modernization, beautifully capturing nostalgia through the woven threads of personal memory, vanishing nature, and a dissolving historical identity. His nostalgic journey begins when he helplessly struggles to reconstruct the altered landscape, admitting, "I try to remember" (Rafat, 2008, p. 118) which illustrates how aggressively mechanical urbanization erases childhood spaces. This sorrow deepens through vivid memories of a community hub symbolized by "the pipal" (Rafat, 2008, p. 118) tree, emphasizing that the local human life was once intertwined with nature, making it painful to witness everything becoming so diminishing. Finally, his personal grief expands into a grand historical mourning for a cultural heritage that is now slowly vanishing. Ultimately, analyzing this profound critique of modern progress that serves societal roots requires active self-regulation.

The place-making transforms the town into a living repository of shared memory (Farrar, 2011). The modern structural changes represent an invasive urban sprawl, which inflicts a cultural amnesia that servers the community from its roots. In response to this erasure, the narrative evokes a deeply yearning nostalgia to protect the town's historical heritage from total oblivion. By seamlessly blending the town's past memories with its modern realities, the poem ensures that the true, living vitality of the place ultimately survives.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the analyzed poems collectively demonstrate that nostalgia operates across multiple interconnected dimensions of human memory, reflecting a profound sense of loss in the wake of time and progress. In "Snapshot of My Father", the focus centers on Emotional Nostalgia, illustrating past family bonds and the memory of a parent from the irreplaceable foundation of an individual's inner identity, where self-regulation manifests as Rafat actively manages grief and grounds his identity by intentionally preserving these emotional anchors. Similarly, "The Last Visit" represents Family Nostalgia, showing that time inevitably shifts family structures and transforms once-lively gatherings into distant memories. The poem's characters

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employ self-regulation by emotionally processing the discomfort of structural decay and finding internal acceptance amid inevitable family transitions. On more individual level, “Once Upon a Time” reflects Personal Nostalgia, capturing a universal yearning for lost childhood innocence and carefree days when facing the harsh realities of adulthood, the protagonist uses self-regulation to consciously shield his inner innocence and govern his emotional responses when confronting hypocritical societal expectations. The scope broadens in “A Positive Region”, which is grounded in Eco-Nostalgia to convey how humanity deeply mourns the loss of serene, green, and unpolluted natural environments due to industrial advancement. This mourning triggers self-regulation as Rafat controls his environmental despair and re-evaluates his consumer choices to foster sustainable co-existence. This loss of the old world is further mirrored in “Death of the Carpenter”, where Cultural Nostalgia portrays the modern automation and machinery have tragically erased traditional craftsmanship and manual heritage. The craftsman’s resilience underscores self-regulation, highlighting an internal mastery to maintain personal dignity and purpose despite technical obsolescence. This transitions into “The Old City”, which utilizes Cultural Nostalgia to highlight the fact that modern progress alters traditional lifestyles and communal vibrancy, leaving behind a deep longing for historical roots. In this collective grief, self-regulation is demonstrated through the conscious community effort to maintain cultural identity and resist total assimilation into an overwhelming modern landscape. Finally, in “Elegy for a Town”, Urban Nostalgia, serves as a final lamentation that demonstrates how rapid and unplanned urban growth strips away the peace, simplicity, and unique charm of older towns. Facing this disruption, the community exercises self-regulation by adapting psychologically to their altered urban space while intentionally carving out micro-environments to preserve historical peace and sanity.

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