

# Memory, Forgetting, and Remembering in *Three of Us*: Exploring the Human Condition through Shailja's Dementia

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## Abstract

Avinash Arun's film *Three of Us* (2022) is analysed critically in this paper using the concepts of memory, forgetting, and remembering. The film explores the brittleness of memory and its deep link to identity and relationships by concentrating on Shailja, the protagonist who has dementia. The story offers a moving examination of human resiliency, grief, and reunion as it weaves together Shailja's slow cognitive deterioration with the emotional journeys of her husband and a long-lost friend. This research uses textual and thematic analysis to examine how the movie portrays memory's elusiveness and its significance to viewers, who use Shailja's narrative to confront their own weaknesses. By examining the wider ramifications of dementia in comprehending oneself and others, the study seeks to unravel the relationship between personal memory and the collective human experience.

**Keywords:** dementia, memory, forgetting, identity, human condition, *Three of Us*, Shailja, cognitive decline, relationships

## Introduction

Avinash Arun is the director of the Indian language drama film *Three of Us*, which will be released in 2022. Arun is a well-known Indian filmmaker and cinematographer who has worked on a number of well-known films that explore Indianness and everyday life, including *Hichki*, *Masaan*, and *Drishyam*. This paper discusses *Three of Us* (2022), a new Netflix film that tells the narrative of Shailaja Desai, who has been diagnosed with dementia. Before they deteriorate and are erased, she goes back to the spot where she grew up to remember all the lost and forgotten memories.

*Three of Us* by Avinash Arun is a powerfully moving movie that highlights the difficult reality of having dementia. Shailja, the main character, must manage her life while dealing with the crippling consequences of memory loss, which affect not just her but also her close connections. Conventional ideas of identity, time, and relationships are challenged by dementia, a neurological disease marked by cognitive deterioration. As a cinematic study on memory and its complex relationship with forgetting and remembering, *Three of Us* stands out. This paper seeks to explore how the movie depicts the fleeting and fractured nature of memory and how it employs Shailja's illness as a metaphor for all human frailties. Based on ideas from narrative theory, cognitive psychology, and trauma studies, the study clarifies how the movie reflects both individual and social reactions to memory-related difficulties.

**Aim** This study's main goal is to examine *Three of Us*'s thematic depiction of memory, forgetting, and remembering and examine the ways in which these concepts relate to the human condition. The study aims

to investigate the link between personal memory and its wider consequences for comprehending identity, relationships, and resilience by concentrating on Shailja's dementia.

**Methodology** Using a qualitative approach, this research closely examines the film's storyline, character arcs, and cinematography. Using multidisciplinary frameworks from memory studies, cinema studies, and cognitive psychology, the study interprets Shailja's journey's emotional and symbolic meaning. The study is supported by secondary sources, including expert evaluations of *Three of Us* and peer-reviewed research papers on dementia in literature and cinema.

### Memory as Identity: Shailja's Fragmented World

A major aspect of Shailja's character and the storyline of the movie is her progressive memory loss. Her sense of self is undermined by dementia, leading to an identity based on pieces rather than continuity. When Shailja is unable to identify familiar faces or remember important events, this fragmentation is emotionally conveyed, highlighting the vulnerability of memory as a fundamental component of personal identity. Dementia not only dismantles Shailja's memory but also disrupts her relationships, forcing her loved ones to confront the fragility of shared experiences. According to Seth A. et.al:

"Dementia is any disorder where significant decline from one's previous level of cognition causes interference in occupational, domestic, or social functioning. Generally, dementia should be an acquired *syndrome*, with multiple possible causes, rather than a specific *disease* itself" (1162).

Arun uses visual elements that metaphorically represent Shailja's inner world, such as faded photos and fuzzy landscapes. These elements not only illustrate her cognitive decline but also evoke empathy in viewers, drawing them into the lived reality of dementia. Additionally, the nonlinear plot of the movie immerses the viewer in Shailja's fractured view of reality, reflecting the disturbed temporal experience of dementia. As Brockmeier notes, the fragmented narrative structure "mirrors the disorientation experienced by individuals with cognitive decline, allowing audiences to inhabit their perspective" (Brockmeier 52). By employing these techniques, the film underscores the role of memory in shaping identity while poignantly illustrating its erosion.

### Forgetting as a Coping Mechanism

Despite Shailja's involuntary forgetfulness, her loved ones are unintentionally forced to reconsider their own connections to the past. In contrast to his ultimate acceptance of her situation, her spouse tries to cling to memories of her. The movie portrays forgetting—which is frequently seen negatively—as a possible means of recovery and rejuvenation. New kinds of understanding and connection can arise in the void left by memory loss.

Arun's directing delicately contrasts Shailja's mental deterioration with her husband and friend's emotional amnesia as they let go of old grudges and rediscover the core of their relationships. The intricacy of the story is enhanced by this dual viewpoint on forgetting as both loss and freedom.

### Remembering and the Quest for Meaning

Despite her illness, Shailja's journey is interspersed with poignant moments of remembrance that provide fleeting yet insightful windows into her inner world. These poignant moments serve as a reminder to viewers of the enduring power of memory despite its deterioration. Shailja recalls a song from her early years in one moving sequence, which creates a feeling of continuity despite the upheaval of her identity. Even when memory is brief or insufficient, the movie shows it as a process of creating meaning.

Remembering becomes a means for Shailja's spouse and friend to retain her spirit and their common past. The narrative process—through discussions and introspection—further highlights how crucial memory is to preserving interpersonal relationships.

### **Cinematic Techniques: Immersing the Viewer in Shailja's Reality**

Cinematic methods are used under Arun's direction to immerse the viewer in Shailja's subjective experience. Her cognitive deterioration is mirrored by the use of soft focus, dark lighting, and fragmented editing, which results in an immersive depiction of dementia. The use of muted language and recurrent melodies in the film's sound design contributes to the impression of confusion. Furthermore, by alternating memories with images from the present, Arun highlights the main concept of the movie by obfuscating the distinction between memory and reality. In addition to illuminating Shailja's situation, these strategies arouse viewers' empathy and prompt them to consider their own connection with memory and identity.

### **Universal Themes: Connecting the Personal with the Collective**

Three of Us tackles universal themes of grief, resiliency, and human connection by going beyond Shailja's particular narrative. By addressing viewers' anxieties about memory loss and its effects on identity, the movie strikes a chord with viewers. Shailja's trip serves as a reminder of the significance of remembering and honouring the past in a society that is changing quickly and where the demands of the present sometimes struggle with collective memory.

The film's emphasis on connections, both strained and restored, emphasises the concept that memory is a communal experience that forms and maintains human links rather than just an individual phenomenon. The movie emphasises the teamwork needed to deal with the difficulties of dementia by showing Shailja's husband and friend as active players in her story.

### **The Role of Caregiving: A Shared Burden and Blessing**

The role of carers in the life of a person with dementia is one of Three of Us's moving subtexts. As a carer and a spouse, Shailja's husband assumes a dual role that tests his physical and emotional fortitude. The story highlights the sacrifices and adaptations that carers must make, highlighting their sometimes-unseen challenges. The movie humanises the caregiving experience by highlighting the social and emotional costs associated with it via his quiet tenacity and times of annoyance. In addition to adding dimension to the caregiving dynamic, the reunion with Shailja's long-lost friend highlights the need of emotional support and shared responsibility in managing the difficulties associated with dementia. This group caregiving emphasises how crucial community is in overcoming vulnerability and loneliness that dementia often brings.

### **Memory and Temporality: The Fluidity of Time**

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emphasises how crucial community is in overcoming vulnerability and loneliness. This dynamic interplay between memory and time underscores the film's philosophical exploration of human existence.

### Symbolism and Visual Metaphors: Representing Memory and Forgetting

Three of Us's visual language is full with metaphors and symbols that allude to memory and forgetfulness. For example, the picture of water that keeps coming up is a metaphor for how fleeting and fluid memory is. Images of Shailja gazing at the sea or a river convey the impermanence and depth of memory, reflecting her mental state. In a similar vein, the theme of fading photos represents time passing and memory loss. Certain scenes have a dreamy feel due to the use of soft focus and dark lighting, which makes it difficult to distinguish between recollection and reality. The audience's emotional connection is strengthened by these visual components, which make Shailja's journey both universal and personal.

### Results and Discussion

According to the study, Three of Us presents a complex picture of how memory shapes relationships and identity. The film uses Shailja's dementia as a prism to examine more general existential issues regarding the nature of connection and selfhood. The story illustrates the intricacies of dementia life and its effects on both the affected person and their loved ones by combining themes of memory, forgetting, and remembering. The film's emotional impact stems from its capacity to reflect viewers' personal experiences with loss and remembrance. The human state, where remembering and forgetting coexist as necessary parts of existence, is metaphorically represented by Shailja's trip. The story's emphasis on relationships emphasises the teamwork needed to overcome dementia's obstacles, highlighting the adaptability and tenacity of the human spirit.

### Conclusion

Three of Us by Avinash Arun delves deeply into memory and its complex connections to identity, interpersonal relationships, and the human condition. The movie asks viewers to consider their own weaknesses and the fortitude needed to face life's uncertainties through the prism of Shailja's dementia. The story emphasises memory's importance in comprehending oneself and other people by presenting it as both brittle and resilient. The film's focus on community, caregiving, and time's fluidity enhances its examination of memory and makes it a very human and widely relatable piece of art.

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