

Partition and Trauma: A Critical Reading of Indian Fictions

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Abstract

In recent literary studies, the concept “Trauma” has attracted a great deal of interest among the academicians. It is a key term of reading and listening. The term in Greek literally refers to an injury on the body. But in recent usage especially in literary field and mainly in Sigmund Freud’s texts, it is implied as a wound not only on human body rather it presents human mind deeply. Actually Trauma Theory is conceptualized in the 1990’s by Cathy Caruth , Geoffrey Hartman and Shoshan Felman. In my research article,I am not going to details about what Freud presented it in a various psychological phenomenon. In other words, Trauma refers to an intense blow in mind or an experience that causes catastrophic events like war,treachery,betray and sexual abuses. Literature has influenced the life of human beings. Literature has an empowered language to display the inner world of human beings. There is a space for memories, introspection, retrospection, foreshadow, wound and trauma. My research article aims to showcase the consequences of the partition of India into separate states on various grounds and how it affects the mental psyche of the native people. I have selected some writers of Indian fictions which explore the traumatic outcomes of the characters.

Keywords: Trauma, Partition, Memory, Homeland, Nostalgia, Identity, Post colonial, Metafiction,

Introduction:

In recent literary studies, the concept “Trauma” has attracted a great deal of interest among the academicians. It is a key term of reading and listening. The term in Greek literally refers to an injury on the body. But in recent usage especially in literary field and mainly in Sigmund Freud’s texts, it is implied as a wound not only on human body rather it presents human mind deeply. Actually Trauma Theory is conceptualized in the 1990’s by Cathy Caruth , Geoffrey Hartman and Shoshan Felman. In my research article,I am not going to details about what Freud presented it in a various psychological phenomenon. In other words, Trauma refers to an intense blow in mind or an experience that causes catastrophic events like war, treachery, betray and sexual abuses. Literature has influenced the life of human beings. Literature has an empowered language to display the inner world of human beings. There is a space for memories, introspection, retrospection, foreshadow, wound and trauma. There are alternative aspects for analysis of trauma in literature, including trauma as intergenerational, transhistorical, unspeakable, unrepresentable.,These experiences are best represented in a specific kind of novel, known as “trauma novel”. The term refers to a work of fictions that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective group. In my present research study, I have selected Indian fiction especially those selected fictions which have been written on partition. I have delimited my study primarily on Amitav Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines*, Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan* and Saadat Hasan Manto’s select Short Stories.

Traumatic experience in *The Shadow Lines*:

Lines separate people and their identity. These demarcation lines shape one’s nationality. Once people commit themselves to a particular side of a line-willingly or forcefully-their fate is sealed forever. This creates an intense trauma in mind-it alienates a person from his/her normal life. It is evident in the text *The Shadow Lines* in which the narrator’s grandmother is gone through stern traumatic experiences which are actually the consequences caused by the partition. All the characters of the novel realize that they are encircled by several bright and permanent-albeit shadowy-lines, which they can erase neither from their memories nor from their lives. The aim of this article is to present the traumatic experiences of the characters caused by the partition of India. This partition is embedded by the long colonial oppression. The story of the novel presents a complex history of partition struggle. There was much chaos, political, social and cultural instability among the people due to the partition of India and Pakistan. There were rapes, murders, riots, and mass massacre on the people. Even the Govt. fails to control the situations. All the pathetic situations are recollected by Ghosh in his

novel. It is a historical novel in which it has been shown that how an event of history bears the seeds of trauma for the days to come. In this novel, we found that trauma from past memories of the characters that haunts them in the present. This article attempts towards a history associated with mental trauma. The story of the novel is intertwined in such a way of the past that creates an intense trauma of the memory of the narrator's grandmother. The narrator says everyone young is victimized to some secret agencies. There had been also a movement of terrorist among the nationalists in Bengal, while the narrator's grandmother recalls about a boy in his early nineteen-twenties. This young boy became a member of one of the secret terrorist societies since his tender age of fourteen. By recalling her memory she presents an account of his activities in order to serve for the cause.

He would exercise with them in their gymnasium, learn to use pistols and make bombs, smuggle their messages and run errands. He was finally rehabilitated a few months before his arrest. They gave him the first mission to kill the English Magistrate in Khulna district. All his preparation were ready; he was supposed to leave for Khulna at the end of that week. But the police learned that their network of informers was legendary. The boy was tried and exiled to the infamous Cellular Jail in the Andaman Islands.

This is a shocking memory that always haunts the memory of the narrator's grandmother. Thus the novel, *The Shadow Lines* deals with the colonial and national trauma in the name of partition. It influenced the people in dealing with memory, a terror experienced by the country, riots and plight of the people of the place are borderlines which make limited to their home as unsafe.

Another instance of trauma is after Thamma's husband died, she had no choice but to work. He was offered a teaching job in Calcutta because of his BA degree in History from Dhaka University. Thamma was busy for the first few years of his job, but this did not enable him to return to Dhaka. Then partition happened, and she saw no point of going back as Dhaka was now the capital of East Pakistan. In later years, she lived in a one-room tenement in a slum. There she would return to their old house in Dhaka and "think about all the things people do when they know that the best parts of their lives are already over" (Ghosh 154). Thamma feels now that "it's all over. They're all dead and I have nowhere else to run to invent stories" (Ghosh 155). Thamma thinks that everyone who lived on the other side of the house is dead, and later in the novel she learns that her cousin Jyathamoshai is still alive and living in their old house in Dhaka. Thamma and Abida of *Salt and Saffron* are both female Matriarchs representing their respective families and the first generation of immigrants from the partition. They share their partition trauma survival and their classes are very similar despite their differences. Abida and Thamma hold power over their family and try to influence their grandchildren, who are also the main characters and narrators of the novels. Both present a strong exterior behind which hides trauma. What binds them strongly is their sense of pride. Abida's pride lies in telling the story of the glory of *Dard-e-Dil* while Thamma's pride stems from sharing stories of her struggles that took her family from the slums to a middle-class

suburb of Kolkata. Their trauma thus surfaces differently in both novels, due to class privilege. Hence, the partition trauma of Abida is different in terms of suffering than that of Thamma.

Traumatic experience in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan:

Khushwant Singh was born on Feb. 2, 1915 in West Punjab. He got his schoolings in Delhi, Lahore and London. He was appointed information officer of the government of India at Toronto and Canada and Press attaché and public officer for the High Commission of India in the United Kingdom and the embassy in Ireland in 1948-50. As a novelist Khushwant Singh is famous for Train To Pakistan and I Shall Not Hear The Nightingale. Train To Pakistan made him internationally known. The novel, written in the perspective of historiography metafiction tries to distinguish between the "past event" and "present belief". In the text, as the characters undergo through the traumatic event of partition, the event which can also be considered as a "cultural trauma," (Kabir 178) the perspective of the characters towards life, religion, brotherhood and compassion undergoes radical change.

While discussing about trauma, Darren Gilmore feels that:

...Contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless rift that divides or destroys identity,. This serves as the basis for a large argument that suggests that identity is formed by the intergenerational transmission of Trauma (Gilmore, np).

As a text about partition, the novel Train to Pakistan makes one realize that even though the event took place long ago, the scars are still fresh in the collective consciousness of millions of people in both the countries till date. Khushwant Singh tries to explore the consequences of partition and how it impacts upon the psyche of the people and even the writer Khushwant Singh is also traumatized personally. The author relives his own sense of pain by describing the fictional village of Mano Majra where people of different religions would live amicably before the partition.

Train to Pakistan is the magnificent work in which Khushwant Singh narrates the tragic tale of the partition of India and Pakistan and the events are remembered as one of the blackest chapters of human history. This partition caused a great upheaval in the history of India. For this event, twelve million people had to flee leaving their home; nearly half a million were killed. In the recorded history it is found that over a hundred thousand women, young and old, were abducted brutally, raped, mutilated. The natives were uprooted and it was solely a deathly experience for them to give up their belongings and rush to an unknown place which was not theirs. This creates trauma in the psyche of the minds of the people. To Khushwant Singh, this was a period of great disillusionment and crisis of value also, a ponderous and breaking period of his normal life.

This brutality has been portrayed in a scathing irony in Train to Pakistan. It is entitled as Mano Majra, a novel of bold and unrelenting realism. It is the story of political conflict and hatred, violence during the terrible days that went forward and followed the partition of British India when the spirit of communal frenzy and passionate zeal for self expression were fuming and fumbling with the mass.

No one would remain aloof, the administration, the police even the armed forces was caught up in the spark of enmity. Mob ruled the streets, burning, looting, killing, shaming women and mutilating children; even animals sacred to the other community became the legitimate target of reprisals.

As Malgonker quotes;

The entire land was being spattered by the blood of its citizens, blistered and disfigured with the fires of religious hatred; its roads were gutted with enough dead bodies to satisfy the ghouls of a major war.

Literature on the traumatic memories of Partition, thus, evokes nostalgia where "meanings and memories are constructed and reconstructed" (Greenberg 90). It has witnessed countless deaths, riots, massacres that haunt people's mind, heart and their various dimensions. At the same time human animality that is juxtaposed by the righteousness of the heart that is represented by the man like Juggut Singh's character whose personal and social trauma haunt him. He sacrificed his life to save countless more lives. The sense of loss is all-consuming loss of nation, loss of home, loss of dignity, loss of honor, loss of family, loss of love and loss of life. Women, as subalterns in a the violent world, both social and communal, is treated as chattel that can be bought, sold, given, taken away and violated by men. In such a situation and in such tremendous turmoil, the characters either act or react. Sometimes when reactions are passive like Iqbal, in contrast, Juggut Singh follows his instincts and protects Muslim refugees in Pakistan, carrying them by train.

Traumatic experiences in the select short stories of Saadat Hasan Manto:

Notably, one of the most prominent short storytellers of the twentieth century and one of the most controversial as well, Saadat Hasan Manto, showcases the collective madness that exists during and after the partition of India in 1947. A well known Urdu short writer, Manto explores the human behaviour in connection with the burning issues like sex, violence, body politics etc. This study aims at presenting the trauma caused by partition in the psyche of the victims and exhibits deep insights into the tragic realities of life that are engendered by partition.

An unprecedented event took place throughout the subcontinent during the partition of India. Everywhere the air was charged with chaos and confusion. As new boundaries are defined that is the line of partition and it destroys the native houses-leaving no trace of the houses. The only consolation that is an imaginary homeland can be found for both Hindus and Muslims-a memory of pre-partition stage of India. Manto's short stories which are exclusively about his own personal life and the trauma of partition conveys this fact poignantly. It tells the readers about his own "inside and exile" status; his deep nostalgia for

the homeland of the past, where both Hindus and Muslims co-existed peacefully and fraternally without cultural or frowning upon each others's religious inclinations. The stories like "Khol Do"(1948), "Toba Tek Singh"(1955) and his many other short stories elaborate the same human tragedy and make readers aware of the huge loss that has caused millions in psychological trauma and loss of common brotherhood.

Being a short story writer, with the rare gift of a powerful imagination, Manto was able to capture photographically the traumatic displacement that occurred in South Asian society in 1947. He understood everyone's anger, bitterness, confusion and secret fears very well. Individuals are trapped in a web of turmoil and violence. In the stories discussed, madness is taken as a metaphor, representing not only the upheaval surrounding partition, but also torture and fractured identities. Most importantly, he possessed a great ability to blur the lines between reality and fantasy and thus illuminate in the reader's mind a continuous experience of the actual horrors as well as the underlying tragedies suffered by his characters.

Conclusion:

The Holocaust of Partition eventually endured beyond the capacity of narrative to replenish. It is difficult to negotiate with the temporal distance from the event. Today the division can be extended to literature and implement individualized modes of reminiscence, introspection, and lament. By establishing an account, the violence of partition, the author suggests, is an opportunity for future generations to learn a lesson about the aftermath of such gruesome violence.

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