

Refugee Trauma in *Island of Thousand mirrors***E. Subha Priya**

II M.A. English Literature

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Abstract

Immigration takes place for various reasons such as war, natural and climatic disaster and civil and political unrest. . Refugee and immigrant people experience acute and pervasive cumulative stress that shapes social disfunctioning .These stress and trauma experienced by two main characters in *Island of Thousand mirrors* clearly portrays Ethnic and Religious conflict they go through. Some people flew to other countries as refugees. Immigrants traumatize according to the circumstances they face. Assimilation to the foreign culture is additional cause of distress. Immigrants feel inferior with dominant foreign culture.. Psychologically immigrants memory gets affected. They keeps remembering unwanted Traumatic memory through nightmare. The trauma victim yasodhara, flew to another country which holds lot of trauma memoirs that haunt throughout her life.

Keywords : Aggression, Community violence, Immigration, refugee Trauma, war.

War is evident from the period of Ramayana Mahabharata periods. It not only ends with Indian mythology but also continues with Greek mythology with the Trojan war resulting in horrible outrages such as world wars, ethnic disputes, terrorist attacks, and genocide, all of which have a significant impact on the general population. The violence and bloodshed continues on both sides. Suffering in all forms prevalent during a conflict. A civil war is a battle between two groups of people or two countries that lasts for an longer period. They employed bows and arrows, spears, knives, and swords as weapons in the beginning, but as technology progressed, everyone began to use guns, bombs, and other destructible materials. Nuclear bombs, which have the ability to destroy everything and possibly turn the Earth to dust, that conceived at the pinnacle of technological civilization. Suicide bombers can also be found. The American War, World War I, World War II, and Sri Lankan Civil War are just a few of the noteworthy conflicts. The Cargil War, the Vietnam War, and the most recent confrontation between Russia and Ukraine all demonstrate how modern technologies gets exploited by both parties.

Island of a Thousand Mirrors blends true historical events in Sri Lanka with a fictional family history. She begins her family narrative in 1948 with the final British ship cruising far from Sri Lanka, following a post-coital prologue. The violent pourer equation and identity construction in Sri Lanka are depicted clearly. Before the violence tore apart Sri Lanka's tapestry and stained its beaches crimson, yasodhara family are engulfed in unresolved strife and endure devastating losses . Yashodhara , a Sinhala girl, is the protagonist of the narrative. The novel follows her father Nishan, a seven-year-old boy, and his twin sister Mala on their way to school. They both are the children of an ambitious school teacher from a distinguished Sinhala family,

and their father, a laid-back mixed-blooded doctor. One fine day one legged fisherman relates the naïve youngsters “we Sinhala are Aryans and Tamils are Dravidians. The island is ours, given to us from the Buddha’s own hand long, long before they came .”(Munaweera 26)

Yasodhara describes how her Grandmother’s dissatisfaction with her life prompted them to leave their fishing village and relocate to Colombo, sixty miles away, so that her children could attend university. Mala grows up as a victim of prejudice due to her dark skin, which makes her look Tamil, while Nishan, an engineer, is more acceptable because he looks Sinhala. Yasodhara now focuses her attention to her mother’s family. Sylvia Sunethra is yasodhara’s grandmother. Nishan gets approved to marry Viska, the daughter of a Sinhala judge with an Oxford education. Due to expenses incurred while restoring the house shortly after the judge’s death, their family strained financially. Sylvia is compelled to rent out the second floor of their home to the Shivalingams, a Tamil family. As days pass yasodhara’s mother visaka and shiva’s father ravanshivalinham both loved each other. Unfortunately they gets seperated by the Ethnic consciousness by the family and society results of which visaka marries Nishan and ravan marries a women from north . When yasodhara grows up she and Ravan’s son Shiva loved each other. The social and political discourse of the land didn’t permit the sharing and love existed between Tamil and Sinhalese. Visaka and Nishan decided it is too dangerous to stay in Sri Lanka, when mala’s husband is murdered by mob. The ethnic violence plays a major part in the destines. The violence they perceived with the eyes forced them to abondon their homeland and be refugee in some part of the world. Visaka says “I won’t bring up my children here, what sort of place have we become that grandmothers and children get burnt in the

streets.”(Munaweera90) Rajasinghe migrates to America .On the other hand Tamil family Shivalingams have no option but to flee for the sake of their lives. They migrates to London.

Kunz classified refugees into three distinct groups based on the refugee’s attitude towards their displacement. Those refugees whose opposition to political and social events at home is shared by their compatriots, both refugees and those who remain in home areas, are called majority identified refugees. Refugees who have left their home areas because of active or latent discrimination against the group, to which they belong, frequently retain little interest in what occurs in their former homes once they have left. These refugees, who feel irreconcilably, alienated from their fellow citizens, Kunz calls events related. A third type of refugee includes people who decided to leave their home country for a variety of individual reasons. These self-alienated refugees feel alienated from their society not by any active policy of that society, but rather by some personal philosophy. Shiva and family represented those who left their land because of active discrimination against the group to which they belonged. Yasodhara's family left their home land for individual reason and can be categorized under self -alienated refugees.

The condition of being stranger, loneliness, missing, guilt, humiliation, separation, value degradation, inferiority, sense of non-identity, bitterness, mistrust, prejudice, and scapegoat syndrome are among the seventeen ‘states of being’ that refugees experience, according to Andersson. Through the experiences of Yasodhara *Island of a Thousand Mirrors* examines refugee psychology. The novel depicts the loss of one’s identity due to migration. The issues at hand are ones of identity and adaptation.

Cathy Caruth is a literary theorist. She defines the term trauma as a wound of overwhelming violent experience that people suffer through unexpected and uncontrolled circumstances. She is a pioneer of a psychoanalytic approach that claims that trauma is the problem that could never be solved because it deals with the problem of the unconscious that lights up that impact in the contradictions of experience and language. “While the images of traumatic re-enactment remain absolutely accurate and precise, they are largely inaccessible to conscious recall and control.” (Caruth 151) It can be stated that “the most important feature of the traumatic recollection is that it is not a simple memory.” (Caruth 151) Instead of recalling the conscious memory, a traumatised person recalls from the flashbacks. The flashback could be placed in the past which were not fully experienced or it could be placed in the present that cannot be understood clearly. Consequently, “a flashback is not only an overwhelming experience or memory, but it is an event that is created by its lack of integration into unconsciousness.” (Caruth 152) An encounter with the traumatic experience takes place but it cannot be imbibed within the schemes of prior knowledge. “This particular event cannot be accepted as a narrative memory because it has not been fully integrated as it occurred.” (Caruth 176)

The traumatised person has to return to the memory several times in order to integrate it in existing mental schemes and to transform it into narrative language. If the integration and transformation have been successful, the person will not suffer anymore from trauma and he or she would be able to look back to the past and would be able to remember all these things. However, “it is also possible that traumatised persons experience long periods of time in two different worlds. They live in the world of their current life because they cannot separate these worlds.” (Caruth 176) Cathy writes “the impact of a traumatic event lies in its belatedness, in its

refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time.” (Caruth 9) She states Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucination and other intrusive phenomena. She explain that trauma is a deferred experience that returns to repeatedly haunt the survivor. After a latency period during which traumatic symptoms are not apparent, subject then engage in an involuntary cycle of repetition, a relieving of the traumatic experience. For Caruth this involuntary repetition occurs because the traumatic experience was not assimilated by the subject at inception. The trauma is so unexpected that the subject experiences a rupture in perception. This rupturing experience then belatedly repeats as nightmares or flashbacks.

Language is the main aspect of man’s identity and is vital in revealing the identity. The problem of language was raised immediately upon arrival. They experience a sense of rootlessness and alienation where they could not even understand the language. “We learn that although we have been speaking English from birth, people cannot understand the crispness of the Queen’s English mixed effortlessly with the roundness of Sinhala in our mouths.” (Munaweera 111) Xenophobia is another major problem faced by refugees . It is dislike or prejudice against people from other countries .It can be expressed verbally or by action from joke to open discrimination, hatred and abuse. Yashodhara faced discrimination when seated in bus or cafeteria. The trauma victim turned refugee flees from the country which holds lots of memory. Visaka and Yasodhara become the prisoners of memories which continue to haunt them through flashbacks. Immigrants may never be able to completely erase the past memories of native land. The Immigrant indecisiveness towards life in the new country and experience of homeland are

the cause for the state of displeasure in the psyche of the refugee .The sense of nostalgia and an urge to survive in the alien land depressed the entire family. The physical separation and watching the war from distance made them guilty. Phone call from Sri Lanka announcing news of bomb blast put them in touch with the wounded homeland. They became the mere spectators and they do not have privilege of anxiety. They realised that island is not just a distant memory but it is vivid and alive. They believe that they will find solace by donating money to the sufferers and it will keep kids from becoming orphans. They decided not to discuss about war and country but this intensifies their trauma. Yasodhara says “we never talk of this. But I dream of that head every night for a week.” (Munaweera 118)

Dream can also be the manifestation of trauma. Carl Gustav Jung has influenced modern dream studies. He was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who founded analytical psychology. According to Jung, dreams are direct, natural expression of the current condition of the dreamer's mental world. They imagine that watching the war from distance as spectators would spare them of indignation, anxiety and guilt. This current mental state of Yasodhara is manifested in dreams. He also states that dream is to provide prospective image of the future. Jung does not mean that dreams predicts the future, only that dream can suggest what might happen. Yasodhara's frightful nightmare of a young suicide bomber would turn out to be the suicide bomber and murderer of her sister Lanka. Her traumatic experience leads to nightmares about her past life in island. The haunting derives from the concern for the girl and her intensified traumatic experience leads to further nightmare about the young suicide bomber. After this tragic incident yashodhara married to shiva .They both buried the memories of island and flee away from the shattered country like “ tongue -tied , gaunt and broken ghost.”

(Munawshad 214) often they both had nightmares . She drives away from her past life and memories and hated even reference to those by someone. “These days I don’t even speak of that place .there is no thread of a life I want to follow there. The ocean does not call to me. I no longer long for those myraid shade of green.” (Munaweera 215) They have a six year old daughter and named her samudhra. Yashodhara never let samudhra know about their origin and her sister lanka who died in conflict.when samudhra keeps asking too many questions about their homeland yashodhara keeps avoiding it . Avoidance tactics is often used by trauma victims.

The novel’s protagonist, Yashodha, is clearly influenced by recollections of the past. Memories, flashbacks, and nightmares are all signs of the past’s power. Immigration is unable to reconcile with the past and, as a result, returns to their homeland. Yashodhara is saddened by their reversal of fortune. To stay alive in a distant nation, she relies heavily on recollections of their homeland. They must fight the power of forgetting in order to preserve their memories intact. As a result, immigrants are always caught between two worlds, neither of which belongs to them.

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