

Representation of Suffering in Daisy Hasan's *The To-Let House*: A Social Critique

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Abstract

This study focuses on the multifaceted and complex nature of human suffering, which can manifest in various ways and stem from different causes. The subjective experience of suffering has profound impacts on individuals and communities, and it can be used as a powerful social critique to highlight and address underlying societal issues. Suffering as a social critique is particularly potent in conflict zones where the pain and struggles of individuals and communities are often ignored or suppressed. Suffering is a recurrent theme in literature, particularly in the wake of tragic events, and it raises the question of why people suffer, especially in the case of vulnerable populations such as children, women, and victims of displacement and residents of violence-ridden societies. It can also be depicted as a senseless and cruel aspect of life that leaves characters feeling helpless and hopeless. Ultimately, human beings suffer due to their actions and the socio-political and cultural context in which they exist. The study aims to analyze the representation of suffering in Daisy Hasan's novel, *The To-Let House*, in which people's lives become a saga of suffering that aptly conveys the pain and tribulations they endured throughout their lives.

Keywords: Suffering, Subjective Experiences, Conflict-Zones, Vulnerability, Social Context.

The human experience of suffering is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon that can manifest differently. It may stem from various causes, including illness, loss, trauma, poverty, discrimination, or injustice, physical, emotional, psychological, or spiritual. Suffering is a deeply personal and subjective experience that profoundly impacts individuals and communities. Using suffering as a social critique is a potent tool to illuminate and address societal issues. It is also depicted as a senseless and cruel aspect of life that leaves characters feeling helpless and hopeless. By highlighting the struggles and pain experienced by individuals within a given society, it becomes possible to identify and work towards resolving underlying problems. The use of suffering as a social critique becomes even more potent in conflict zones. In such areas, it is common for the pain and struggles of individuals and communities to be ignored or even actively suppressed.

Suffering has been a recurrent theme in literature since time immemorial, especially in the wake of tragic events experienced or witnessed by people. The question of why people suffer has become more pertinent when dealing with the suffering of children, women or victims of displacement and residents of a violence-ridden society. In such situations, people's lives become a saga of sufferings that aptly convey the pain and tribulations they endured throughout their

lives. Thus, human beings suffer because of their own deeds and the socio-political and cultural context in which they exist. Suffering manifests in the form of violence, abuse, persecution, illness, death, etc., in its three forms, i.e., physical, mental and social.

Suffering is the state in which one experiences pain, distress, or hardship. According to Anderson, “the word ‘suffering’ originated from the Middle English term ‘suffrir’ and the Latin term ‘suffero’. Both terms meant ‘long-suffering’ or facing a burden of pain with patience” (13). An event in an individual’s life can also be called suffering. Suffering is described in myriad ways, such as “extreme anguish”, “soul pain”, and even “being less than whole”. Morris suggests that suffering is less a state of being than an event occurring within a larger, surrounding plot. (37) Historically, suffering has been related to divine justice or has roots in all religions that emphasize it as an unavoidable trait of being human. In philosophy, suffering was a central concept for many philosophers who believed that the meaning of human life is intimately connected with the meaning of suffering. Nietzsche believed that human existence is full of suffering and ends in death rather than happiness. According to him, to live is to suffer, and one must find a purpose in it. Man seeks meaning in suffering to ensure that it is not in vain. (162) Norridge (2013) argues that suffering is subjective and based on an individual’s experience of pain. Emotions such as love, jealousy, happiness, and remorse are also subjective. Essentially, Suffering is extreme distress caused by events that threaten a person’s well-being until the threat has passed or the person’s integrity is restored. (02). Furthermore, “if description is fundamental even to the definition of pain and representation has a pivotal role to play both in pain’s infliction and its cessation, then it is not hard to see why literature, particularly literature from places and periods of time associated with connotations of violence, environmental hardship or political oppression, resounds with depictions of suffering” (03).

In social science, Arthur Kleinman introduced the concept of “social suffering” to highlight how social, economic, and political forces can cause physical and mental distress. In this way, suffering is a social experience, but there is no single way to suffer; there is no timeless and spaceless universal shape to social suffering. (Kleinman and Kleinman 02) Suffering as a social suffering exists in collective and social interactions. The collective mode of experience shapes individual perception and expression. Relationships and interactions sometimes play a central role in the experiences of social suffering. (Kleinman and Kleinman 02). Similarly, Veena Das explains her work as an attempt to devise ‘languages of pain’ by which social sciences might be crafted as a textual body on which ‘pain is written’ (Das 67). Elaine Scarry argues that physical pain is difficult to communicate and thus often goes unseen and unacknowledged. She emphasizes the importance of “bearing witness” to pain and suffering and literature and art’s role in making these experiences visible. Further, Susan Sontag wrote extensively about the representation of suffering in art and media. She argues that images of suffering can be used to manipulate and exploit audiences but also have the potential to inspire empathy and action. Additionally, Elaine Scarry has written about the relationship between physical pain and language and how literary texts can help people understand and represent experiences of pain. It also helps to understand that pain is exceptional because of its capacity to make and unmake the subject continuously.

Smadar Bustan points out in her analysis of Scarry's book that Scarry's shifts between individual-isolated and social-political instances help the reader better understand the complex, contingent relationships between the experiences and the social, material, and embodied circumstances of those in pain. Bustan observes that Scarry describes pain and suffering as 'framing events' that may not necessarily have a language or a specific intended object. In doing so, she suggests that pain is beyond linguistic expression. Further, Bustan views subjectivity not as a fixed identity but as a way of living that emerges from dynamic shifts between individually and collectively oriented ways of being in the world. She argues that human agony is inherently intertwined with these continuous movements between the personal and public, individual and collective. Subjectivities marked by pain are formed in the oscillations between these two modes of being. (Van Ommen et.al. 06)

Caruth's work on trauma and narrative also explores how traumatic experiences can be "re-lived" through the telling and retelling of stories and how literature can provide a means of processing and healing from trauma. Literature speaks about and speaks through the profound story of traumatic experience. In their specific way, these literary texts engage a central problem of listening, knowing, and representing that emerges from the actual crisis experience. (4-5)

In the social sciences and humanities, theories of suffering often focus on how social, cultural, and historical factors contribute to individual and collective experiences of suffering. These theories explore the intersections of power, inequality, and oppression and investigate how these dynamics shape and perpetuate suffering across different social groups. Some theories also examine the role of language, discourse, and representation in shaping the understanding and experience of suffering. By illuminating the social and cultural dimensions of suffering, these theories challenge dominant narratives and power structures and promote greater empathy and solidarity in the face of human pain.

Portrayals of human suffering in literature depict the inevitable reality of life, which people must endure and ultimately overcome. This way, it adds a sense of realism to fictional works. Such literature can inspire hope and confidence, leading to spiritual victory and becoming a chronicle of survival in times of social and political oppression. Ramazani (2007) claims that "literary texts portraying historical traumas such as wars, revolutions, or forcible removal from family were part of everyday pains" (05). Writers often describe or recreate suffering to incite the will and desire needed to improve the world or change the perception of it. According to Levine (2009), many authors write books to come to terms with past events and understand and live with the memories of those events. They often write about the future, creating new possibilities for themselves. (16) Further, literature often depicts victims and traumatized characters as passive and helpless, unable to do anything about their suffering. Levine (2009) links this issue to pain and states that human suffering is often the result of trauma, tragedy, or painful past events. (65).

Social suffering refers to people who live in a world of pain and whose dignity is violated. As a social critique, the novel aims to portray a society characterized by oppressive and controlling governments, intimidation, and other features associated with the image of an imperfect society that is ruled by a power dichotomy in which one group enjoy the privileges and the other group is marginalized and devoid of any resources. This novel follows the pattern of oppression,

bloodshed and betrayal of humanity. She was no stranger to political and social oppression since she lived much of her life in Shillong. The portrayal of political oppression and associated issues primarily focuses on “the collective experience of suffering, and thus creates a culture of terror” (Kleinman et al. 17).

Writing becomes a powerful tool for writers facing oppression, loss, or trauma to express themselves and assert their independence. These writers use their work to convey the pain and trauma they have experienced, both physically and emotionally. Often, their writing is a result of their own experiences as victims of violent contexts or as witnesses to the suffering of others. It is important to recognize that the social context plays a critical role in shaping one’s experience of suffering. Suffering arises “when an impending destruction of the person is perceived; it continues until the threat of disintegration has passed or until the integrity of the person can be restored in some other manner” (Cassell 32). The theme of suffering in literature often represents the violence characters endure, whether within their families or society.

Daisy Hasan is a writer deeply concerned about the suffering of the people of Shillong, where she was born and raised. She has witnessed the tragedy of Shillong and its people, which was once a harmonious cosmopolitan context but has now been plagued by numerous insurgencies, riots, killings, bloodshed, and resentment among its community. The antagonism between insiders and outsiders has disfigured this town, leaving it a wounded, ugly, and loveless place. The people of Shillong have become permanent sufferers with no final solution to their problems. Daisy’s writing seeks to articulate the unheard voices of marginalized outsiders who often live as a persecuted minority. She desires to acknowledge the suffering of all residents, insiders and outsiders, to reorganize the social order and establish harmony and peace. Daisy is particularly concerned with the upbringing of children in conflicting societies and homes, as they often face severe identity crises. She grew up feeling othered in Shillong and understands living as an outsider. Living in a conflict-ridden society has a catastrophic and long-lasting impact on one’s life. The never-ending fear and uncertainty result in a wide range of physical and psychological problems. People experience trauma, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues due to the ongoing conflict. Maintaining relationships and social connections also becomes difficult, as people are often forced to flee their homes or live in isolation.

Daisy Hasan’s *The To-Let House* is a contemporary coming-of-age story set in the politically restive city of Shillong in North-East India. The narrative fictionalizes Shillong effectively by representing various locations that exist in reality. From the beginning, the city’s social and cultural relations had deep-seated divisions that affected its social geography and the lives of its people. Society becomes violence-prone to curb the alien growth in this land. It differentiates between citizens and denizens; its residents want this land only for pure blue-blooded Khasi. So, to achieve this dream, they are inflicting atrocities on outsiders, making their lives miserable. Outsiders fight for survival and remain fearful all day and night. The story follows the tormented adolescence of Di, Addy, Kulay, and Clemmie, providing a moving insight into Shillong’s dark and unsettling world. It also reflects on the childhood experiences of May, Governor, and Ma, highlighting that their own family and society tormented them. Daisy presents the harsh reality of growing up in a dysfunctional family and violence-prone society. The region’s violent search for identity serves as a backdrop to the protagonist’s journey, and the narrative artfully blurs the

line between the personal and the political, resulting in a vividly portrayed story. The characters depicted in the novel exhibit a notable inability to affiliate themselves with any particular cultural identity. Instead, they are persistently confronted with a struggle within themselves, even amidst the violence that envelops their external surroundings. However, this perceived vulnerability and incapacity to assign a definitive identity is revealed to be a potent narrative device, which effectively constructs a powerful discourse highlighting the nuanced complexities of belongingness. The novel explores the themes of antagonism and power between the outsider 'dhkars' and the insider 'locals.' Both Khasi and non-Khasi people suffer an identity crisis amidst ethnic conflicts and nationalistic political movements. The main idea is to shed light on the struggle to restore the privileges of the higher social status residents. The novel explores ethnic conflicts and the impact they have had on individuals. It also follows the characters' journeys of self-discovery and their quest for understanding their genuine identities.

The novel serves as a social critique and reflects upon Shillong's problematic socio-political and cultural context that causes suffering to its people. It is set against a backdrop of historical and cultural contexts marked by social, political, and environmental upheavals. The novel portrays suffering as pervasive, becoming a general misery that has also entered domestic walls. The novel delves into the intricate psychology of their characters and recounts their traumatic pasts. Their suffering is apparent in their conversations or remarks that reveal their wounds, which seem impossible to heal. These characters' experiences demonstrate the agony and psychological harm inflicted by their past. The novel also highlights childhood and family issues but from a different perspective. It emphasizes that personal traumas such as sexual abuse, incest, domestic violence, and abandonment experienced during childhood and within families have disastrous consequences on children's psychology.

Through her vivid and evocative descriptions, Daisy portrays the multifaceted nature of human suffering and offers a compelling vision of hope and resilience in the face of adversity. This research paper delves into the portrayal of human suffering and the constant struggle to overcome it, exploring Daisy's diverse forms of suffering and analyzing how her characters respond to these challenges. Furthermore, the paper investigates Daisy's narratives' ethical and political implications and demonstrates how her novel contributes to a broader understanding of the human experience and social justice. The narrative exposes the psychological and social effects of violence and trauma and offers a critique of the political and cultural structures that perpetuate these experiences. Daisy offers insightful critiques of historical, cultural, and political structures.

Daisy Hasan's novel *The To-Let House* delves into the struggles of adolescents in Shillong, Meghalaya, as they develop their identities amidst violence and trauma. The characters, including Di, Clemmie, Addy, and Kulay, feel like outsiders and grapple with their identities in a politically turbulent region. The story explores the complexities of identity formation and the impact of external factors on individuals. The novel depicts the complex relationship between individuals, their origins, and their inability to escape. The tussle between Khasi and non-Khasi adversely affects their life. They fail to affiliate themselves with any particular cultural, social, or ethnic identity amid the violence surrounding them outwardly. Shillong's youth are particularly susceptible to violence daily. Violence at home or in society casts a shadow over their coming of

age. They witness societal violence and its dread and stress in their parents' eyes and internalize it. In this turbulent atmosphere, adolescents are more vulnerable as they play multiple roles simultaneously. They are the victims, active members, and resilient whose identities are at constant loggerheads. The adolescents under study are both Khasi and non-Khasi. They belong to different ethnicities, but the commonality of their coming of age against the region's violent search for identity drastically changes their life and their mental condition. They are all victims of xenophobic society and are maladjusted children of abused marriages and live-in relationships. In this xenophobic context, their relations with parents, self-concept, ethnic group identification and attachments are affected.

The novel's opening sets the theme of the divide between society and home. Society is divided as a breach exists between Khasi and non-Khasi people. The mansion metaphorically is described as Shillong, which embraces people of different origins in its drab To-Let house. This embracing is symbolic of their temporary residence on the land. Non-Khasis are displaced people, so they feel alienated among Khasi people, yet they crave a social identity in Shillong. The Mansion family, consisting of May, Governor, Kulay, and Clemmie, lacks genuine relationships and kindness. Governor is treated poorly, like a servant, Kulay is treated as an enslaved individual, and Clemmie is often neglected.

On the other hand, the To-Let family consists of Ma, Di and Addy and is without a father figure, as their father has abandoned them. The mansion and its drab To-Let house are separated by a forget-me-not-hedge, representing a division between the two homes and metaphorically the divide between Khasis and non-Khasis. The forget-me-not hedge effectively conveys the completely contrasting world of the mansion and the To-Let house. Sadly, crossing this hedge is like entering a world of terror. The children in both homes experience similar situations and torchers. Whenever Di and Addy cross the hedge, they hear May screaming at Kulay while he is being heavily whipped. This experience is so traumatizing that Clemmie crouches like a frightened mouse whenever she witnesses it. Gradually, Clemmie dissociates herself from May because she mistreats her brother Kulay. She no longer identifies herself as May's daughter, leaves the mansion, and eventually departs from Shillong.

For Di and Kulay, life at the mansion is mostly a traumatic experience. Kulay feels physically and mentally insecure because he believes himself to be a blue-blooded Khasi and the son of May. He desires motherly affection and care from May, which she denies and treats him as enslaved. He is unable to acquire acceptance as a son. His search for a sense of belonging continues until he discovers that in the company of Terry, Martin, and Revise, all Union members. He gains a feeling of identity from this connection that he can rely on. When the narrative begins, he is pleased to have an identity distinct from the identities of others. "He is neither a Momodome nor a Mohammedan, but a blue-blooded, stone-eyed Khasi. He knows he is different - cleaner and clearer than them, the outsiders" (Hasan 9). There has been a prolonged battle for identity, and he strives hard to keep his Khasi identity. The sense of fulfilment is what Kulay craved and was always very far away from him. Kulay engages in a constant struggle to remain loyal to both worlds. He fails drastically in his attempt as May never embraces him as a mother, nor does the mansion accept him as a legitimate child because he was born out of an illegitimate relationship between Governor and Redcoat. On the other hand, his dream world,

which is white like crystal and only for blue-blooded Khasis, shatters badly when his half-Khasi identity is revealed.

Nonetheless, discovering that he is half-Khasi ends his life and protracted battle to find an identity that implies he is a blue-blooded Khasi. Kulay desired a sense of fulfilment that constantly eluded him. Kulay has a dual identity. He considers himself Khasi, but his half-Khasi identity assigns him to the liminal space or liminality, as Bhabha refers to in his book *Location of Culture*. This in-between space enhances the feelings of loss and identity crisis. He loses his hold on the past and struggles to reach his destination. Even his identity ends his life. “Kulay is beaten throughout the night...with heavy wooden boards, cut off his hair, burn his tongue with cigarette stubs and leaves him out on the street to keep company with stray dogs that have been unleashed by their furry at being deceived” (Hasan 200).

One day, Ma appears with her two daughters, Di and Addy, to seek refuge in the mansion as tenants. Their appearance aptly conveys that they are outsiders and journeying full of tribulations which they have endured and now they want to start their life with a new hope to live a meaningful life. Ma suffered in her childhood when she was called to the birthday party of her Khasi classmate. There, she was ridiculed and humiliated in front of all the guests because of her dress and not-so-good English. As an outsider, she suffered and was shown her place in society. At a later age, she was duped by her childhood friend in the false pretence of marriage. The man persuaded her to live together with only the promise of marriage one day. Di was born out of this lovemaking, but her man again promised to marry soon. After some time, Addy was born, but no marriage, so finally, she wildly protested again, living a sinful life for more than ten years, but her man did not bother, and finally, Ma left his home and turned up at the mansion’s gate.

Ma moves to this new place to escape her sufferings, but unfortunately, her troubles follow her there. The family’s move to the mansion was just another illusion of their hopes as they continued to suffer in their new home. In To-Let House, Ma frequently complains about her daughter’s father for deceiving her. Even though he left her and she lives without him, she still feels tied to him and cannot accept that he has moved on. He left her because he was already married and could not marry her. Ma feels like he has abandoned her, and the frustration of separation has a significant impact on her mental health. She starts hitting her daughters frequently as a result. This separation makes Addy act maturely and cast philosophical quotes at age 10; her views and expressions turn into adults. She says, “See, see those people. Their mouths are full of blood” (Hasan 19). Although Addy knows the people are eating kwai and their mouths are red because of its juice, she still likes to think another way. Ma’s identity is tied to being a single mother, and her daughters, Di and Addy, do not have a father because Ma and her one-time husband were never married. The trauma of being abandoned by their caregiver is overwhelming, and their suffering of abandonment reaches its zenith when these girls start searching for their father in various household things.

Di even imagines her father might be in an old wooden cupboard, but when she opens it, she finds it empty and feels like a coffin. Addy also misses her father and always chants a rhyme, remembering her father. She sings, “Addy- Addy. The girl without her daddy” (Hasan 18). Addy and Di have no choice but to grow up as orphans. Being non-Khasi, girls, illegitimate children

and fatherless caused them to experience suffering and a severe identity crisis. The mother figure is also missing, as Ma is always lost in memories of her daughter's father. The separation stress negatively impacts Ma's mental health, and she begins beating her daughters more frequently. When displaced teenagers or traumatized children experience sorrow and sadness without a father figure, their identity crisis is compounded.

Di and Addy's sufferings are not limited to their home; they suffer immensely when they cross the hedge and enter the mansion to play with Clemmie. They were treated as servants in May's labour camp, i.e., her kitchen. Further, May appointed her husband, Governor, as a guard to have an eye on everyone. Di and Addy have to endure torture while playing with Kulay and Kay. They whipped the girls, mocked them and called them *dkhars* (outsiders). The whipping game becomes torcher for the girls as they are frightened with pain and often piss in their pants. The whipping game symbolizes the divide between insiders and outsiders that have entered the domestic walls, as after whipping the girls, Kulay asks the girls, "You want to fly kites, or you want to fight?" (Hasan 21).

As a child, Di suffers the trauma of being fatherless and the affectionate support of her mother; besides, her struggle never stops. Governor, the husband of May, molests Di at a very young age. "Shillong is the Rome of the East," Governor tells Di. "And I am its Romeo..." He offers his forefingers to the girl and leads the trailing question mark towards the garage" (Hasan 49). He sexually abuses her many times. These several fits of abuse left Di with a weak sense of self. She fails to articulate that this wrong happened to her. "Di, like her mother, is wordless with her own secrets" (Hasan 65). She suffered all night after being molested by Governor, often in the darkness of night, she thinks about that incident when "she had felt the cold air prick her skin as her dress had been taken off. Like a wrapper from a sweet" (Hasan 66). She shivered immensely and pulled her quilt over her head, and the world turned dark, symbolizing her dark future or her being lost in the world of darkness. Thus, Ma and Di are victims of a patriarchal society. Ma falls victim to a man she loves but is ditched by him after exploiting her fully. Despite being mistreated by her man, Ma caught herself in a gender role that is fixed and rigid in the traditional societal setup. She silently and meekly suffers this loss until one day, she attacks one man, imagining he is her man. Di suffers as an illegitimate child and as a non-Khasi tenant. Di suffers and bears physical distress in her early life and mental anguish in the latter part of her life.

In the Mansion family, May the tyrannical figure, suffered since childhood when she failed to receive love and care. Her parents did not look after her affectionately as they both were busy in their respective works. She felt abandoned, alienated and lonely all the time, but she endured much suffering and pain when she was diagnosed with tonsillitis at the age of sixteen. She was admitted to the hospital, but no well-wisher had come. Neither her parents nor relatives bothered to look after her in the hospital. "She had suffered the indignities of blood and urine tests alone and decided that she loathed the world and those who carelessly brought her into it. That day, she had two things out of her system. One was her tonsils. The other was her heart" (Hasan 42). After the death of her parents, May suffered because of the guilt of murdering her sister and brother-in-law as she did not want to share any portion of the property which she had inherited from her parents, being the youngest daughter of the family. It is hinted in the novel that May and Governor commit this crime, which appears to others as a simple accident. After this

incident, May parked her car in the garage, which remained hidden for many years. May's guilt is also reflected in her rearing up her sister's children, Pheobe and Kay. She gets Kay admitted to the best school in Shillong and provides good luxuries and freedom to Pheobe to overcome her guilt of depriving these children of growing up without parents.

Like May, Governor also had a gruelling childhood, full of responsibility and poverty. His mother was deserted by his father so he disliked him very much. Her mother changed to Christianity to seek solace and left Governor unattended. In his adolescence, he migrated to the urban area of Shillong in search of occupation and settled in a tailoring shop to survive and feed his siblings who remained back in town. All these incidents negatively affected Governor as he grew up feeling abandoned and loveless. Eventually, he falls in love with May and marries her against the wishes of May's parents. May, on the other side also took this marriage as an act of revenge upon her parents. She marries a "half-bred, underfed piece of inadvertent shit" (Hasan 35). After their marriage, May regrets marrying Governor, and the bond of love starts to fade in upcoming times. Governor falls victim to matriarchy as May becomes the authoritative and tyrannical figure after inheriting most of the property from her parents, the youngest daughter. Governor starts cursing his life and third-class position in his home, destined to follow May's order, serve her or do all odd jobs. He feels frustrated under May's domination and seeks love outside this marriage bond. He falls in love with Redcoat and performs extra-marital affairs.

Similarly, May also involves herself in adultery now and then, seeking true love. The bond of marriage broke completely when Kulay was born out of love and incest between Redcoat and Governor. Angry and frustrated, May snatched Kulay as a way to punish his parents, who cheated May under her own roof. May made Redcoat an offer and demanded her pound of flesh. Redcoat, having nowhere to go, fatalistically accepted the offer. "Never your son, said May's calculating stare, for she hoped to punish the woman for her sin by demanding that her child be enslaved in the mansion forever" (Hasan 189). In one dark night, Kulay was delivered as a bundle through the kitchen door of the mansion, and May laughed a witch's laugh. "No one had ever wanted him. How could May?" (Hasan 190).

Thus, the situation in the mansion reflects the uneasy coexistence of people from various ethnicities. Life in the Mansion appears complex and shows alarming signs of torture, molestation, emotional deprivation, slavery, and psychological trauma, drastically affecting the quality of life of every being living in this or its drab To-Let house. The consequences of these problems can be seen in criminality, which in different majors affect everyone and make them lunatic in their own way. As a victim, they suffered a lot, like his own members of the Union brutally killed Kulay as they considered him a traitor. Those who remain resilient overcome this challenging situation and accept their place in home and society as Addy. She resolves to live as a spinster in Shillong itself. She says, "Unless I'm hounded out of Shillong, I won't leave it. I am a loner. I thrive in solitude" (Hasan 225).

Clemmie's happiness and future advancement are hindered by her growing up witnessing multiple beatings to Kulay, quarrelling parents, a drunken father, and May's illicit relationship with Benji (her tuition teacher). She despises her mother for torturing Kulay. She refuses to live with her. When Kulay dies, she and Di leave Shillong, never to return. Clemmie expresses her

grief to Di, “But what does my pain matter? What does anything matter” Why live at all? Why? (Hasan 213). For Clemmie, “who has burnt her bridges, there is no going back and no more mourning” (Hasan 218). Some who cannot cope with this situation tend to escape as Di and Clemmie leave the Shillong. Their tormented childhood is reflected when the mad-drunken Governor attacks Di and Clemmie, “we feel the chill in our bones as only bewildered, broken children can, children who are led into dark, drunken corners and provided for, and beaten and cruelly loved” (Hasan 192). When Kulay dies, Clemmie blames May for his unfortunate death; she says, “It was all May’s fault” (Hasan 201). May is left behind in the mansion all alone, and this mansion will miss the children, “who would dance and sing loudly to deflect attention while stealing something to eat. Criminal to the core. Where were the children?” (211-12). They cannot be found out as they were lost to the violence.

Additionally, May suffered the agony of knowing the fact that her husband cheated her very badly. May suffers eternally under the knowledge that she is responsible for the loss of Kulay’s childhood and his death. She commits suicide to give a punishment for her crimes. “She has flung herself from the highest gorges crying out like the mythical Likai, who has drowned herself in the waters for having unknowingly eaten her child’s flesh” (Hasan 227). Governor although portrayed as a sexual advancer as he is involved sexually with many women at the outset, he is a tragic figure and victim of patriarchy who suffered in his childhood, adolescence, youth and old age. He died crippled, blind and unacknowledged death. His demise puts him in the category of sufferers who suffered because of his own deeds and sometimes circumstances beyond his control and his social and familial context.

Di’s appearance and personality seem ordinary and not very charming, as she is presented as a skinny devil with a freckled face. She always maintained low self-esteem and got lost in her dark secrets. Governor molests her at the very beginning of the novel. She becomes a substitute for May and endures the atrocities inflicted by Governor. Governor vents his frustration by molesting Di as he could not vent it out on May concerning her being a powerful figure. Gradually, Di learns how to conceal, manipulate, cheat, and lie. Di becomes the victim of the patriarchal mindset of men who want to tame women. However, in the context of Shillong, the society follows matrilineal lineage, so all men there are powerless and submissive to the women they marry. So, their purposeless and unmeaningful life makes them sufferers as they always crave an identity and respect to which they are near only if they occupy prestigious salaried jobs. In this way, Governor being treated as a servant for May and destined to do all odd jobs on May’s command makes him frustrated to the core. He becomes a drunkard, cruel being and sexual predator who takes his revenge on May by molesting Di and having an extra-marital affair with Redcoat. In describing the importance of paternal presence in daughter’s lives, Kruk (2012) relates that fatherless children often feel abandoned, struggle with their emotions, and, more importantly, are at risk of suffering emotional or sexual abuse. Di is a victim of sexual abuse. Her suffering and unhappiness are highlighted in the novel. Di endures this horror alone throughout the novel, but when the novel approaches its end, May confesses to Di that she knows Governor did wrong to you but could not help her at that time. Governor damaged Di through sexual abuse, maltreatment and repeated molestations.

Moreover, he makes her frightened to the core that she could not relate her suffering to anyone. In this way, he deprived her of a normal childhood, which undoubtedly affected her present and future mental health. “Di does not dance when she learns of Governor’s death. She is unable to escape the pall of gloom that has descended over the mansion and fanned out over the tenant quarters” (Hasan 193). Di further suffered concerning her femininity. When Kulay and Di fall in love, she wants to affirm it from Kulay. This represents her weak sense of self. Their bond did not last long because of the intersection of personal and political. In his struggle to prove his Khasi Identity, Kulay detaches himself from Di as she is an outsider. Kulay is part of the Union who strongly detests any relationship with outsiders neither friendship nor love. So, Kulay denounces Di on the pretext of being a true member of the Union and this decision leaves Di again shattered and lonely. She again suffered as being deprived of love, which she craved throughout her life and feels cheated. The love bond between Di and Kulay is presented as doomed and forbidden love in the context of the society of Shillong where the divide between the two communities is large enough to overshadow the genuine love between the two communities.

Thus, in terms of pain and suffering as a theme, this analysis confirms that suffering is evidently portrayed through the destruction of every character’s childhood, adolescence and old age. The concept of suffering is also seen via May’s feelings of guilt and remorse over robbing Kulay of his childhood. Di suffered from abuse and isolation during her childhood years of living in the To-Let House with Ma and her sister Addy, and she suffered further when Kulay died. Her final suffering comes when Di turns into a woman and leaves Shillong many years ago, and Addy’s letter informs her that Ma has died. For Di, the memory of Ma is like the memory of a woman who binds Di and Addy together from a previous birth. “For Addy, who has never left Shillong, Ma will remain an abandoned goddess, perfumed and adorned, but contained infinitely in a halo of sadness like ‘the white contains the black of the eye’” (Hasan 218). On her journey back to Shillong, she eventually put her life together. Di meets May, finds her lost in the past, completely disjointed from the present, and notices “Dreams of the dead shadow May’s eyes. May confesses, “I am an older timer, but they still won’t leave me” (Hasan 224). Gradually, May becomes a victim of loneliness, guilt from past deeds and loss of near ones, especially Kulay.

Kulay, an unwanted, abandoned, and mistreated child, has the experience of growing up motherless, without affection and care, in an environment that failed to provide even the most basic sense of security and familial or social acceptance and support. On the other hand, the experience turns out to be so traumatic as to cause him to lose his own life in the end. He can be recognized as a victim and preparator of violence that tends to make him feel suffering throughout his life. Di is a child victimized by many sexual abuses and faces rejection in the family and society as an outsider. The novel emphasizes the powerful and persistent impact of childhood trauma and the pressing need of trauma victims to make sense of and come to terms with their harrowing past. All characters have traumatic childhood experiences in the familial context and the social context. These experiences make them sufferers, and the novel also explores their quest for identity and meaning in life and the resolution for their sufferings.

Daisy’s critique covers intercommunity relations in society and intra-family relations at home, highlighting their flawed and incomplete nature. In the context of the novel, suffering can be

defined as the conscious endurance of pain or distress, as all characters seem trapped in their past. She mainly discusses the struggles of minorities in making a living and the inevitability of suffering among the people of North-East India. Her novel offers a panoramic view of crucial issues that cause suffering and presents a realistic portrayal of her society, reminding people of their limitations.

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