

Gendered Memory Trauma : Cultural Truma Narratives of Indian Partition

Dr. Richa Dewani

Associate Professor, Department of English Literature
Government Arts College, Sikar, Rajasthan
Email - manoj.psychology@gmail.com

Abstract: *The presence of the past is now more potent than ever before, leading to a multi-prolonged discussion of the Partition and its aftermath. An act of remembrance is always subjective, partial and fragmentary. Yet it contains moments of truth that illuminate significant facets of life and historical reality. Though societies discover their own ways of dealing with the past and its unbearable memories, their manner of retrieval and commemoration of them shows convergence as well as divergences. What is common in all societies, however, is a longing to transform the memories of the past culturally, through a multitude of artifacts.*

Key Words: *nature of its survival, gendered narration & trauma and cultural differences.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

“ The human predicament is to remember. It is remembrance or this ability to remember that helps one make sense of one's life, and reconstruct the past in a coherent way. The survivors of holocaust, genocide or political oppression be it the Jewish Holocaust, or the Partition of India, have tried to reconstruct past events through memory, both voluntary and involuntary , and these attempts at reconstruction have given birth to some of the most enduring works of literature. History cannot tell us the whole truth. It conceals more than it reveals. Every generation negotiates this tension between closure and disclosure in its own way. As regards India, the wave of books that have appeared on the theme of Partition in recent years demonstrates that the culture of remembrance is at its peak, and that story-telling has come to be validated as one of the ways in which individuals try to grapple with the past in an age when the canons of historiography and political thought fail to put the past in order.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW :

Alok Bhalla the editor of a useful collection of stories “*Orphans of the Storm*” relating to the Partition, feels that there is not just a lack of great literature, there is, more seriously, a lack of great history Concluding that we Indians have been unable to come to terms with what is the most catastrophic moment in our recent history.

Jason Francisco “*In the Heat of Fratricide*”, states Partition fiction and some non-fiction is almost the only social history we have of this time. We do not intend to engage in a debate on how fictional Partition fiction is, but the point does need to be made that it is in fiction, rather than any other genre, that we find an attempt to assimilate the full importance of what Partition meant.

Writing on holocaust memories and testimonies, **James Young** poses the question: How can we know the holocaust except through the many ways in which it is handed down to us? He answers it by suggesting, As much as through its history we know the holocaust through its literary, fictional, historical, political representations, and through its personal, testimonial representations for it is not only the facts of any event that are important but equally, how people remember these facts and how they represent them,

Sudhir Kakar in his exploration of how communities fantasize violence, says that sexual mutilation figures prominently: the castration of males and the amputation of breasts incorporate the (more or less conscious) wish to wipe the enemy off the face of the earth by eliminating the means of reproduction and nurturing.

Urvashi Butalia in “*The Other Side of Silence*” concludes, These aspects of partition- how families were divided, how friendships endured across borders, how people coped with the trauma, how they rebuilt their lives, what resources, both physical and mental, they drew upon, how their experience of dislocation and trauma shaped their lives, and indeed the cities and towns and villages they settled in-find little reflection in written history/

3. THE STORY OF THE UNBEARABLE NATURE OF ITS SURVIVAL:

In this study I have tried to demonstrate how trauma fiction serves several valuable functions. It is an important way of witnessing or testifying for the history and experience of historically marginalized people. Further, it chronicles lives under pressure that need the powers of literary imagination and character development. These imaginative literary approaches provide a necessary supplement to coping up with psychological situation. The texts considered in this study explore traumatic events like World War and Partition and their lingering consequences, both were events of incredible scope and complexity, impossible to define satisfactorily why these happened and involve differing circumstances, populations, ideologies, intentions and effects. But the similarities and differences we discern by comparing these fictional renderings can offer us valuable insights into understanding the cultures and effects of violence. Examining the traumatic aspects of violence these fiction writers engage the imagination and fictional techniques in order to fill in gaps left by official histories pointing to unhealed wounds that remain on the body, in sexuality, intrusive memory and emotional relations. The fictions guide through an experimental approach to memory and history both elucidating and confronting with the interconnections between traumatic historical events, memory and the body as well as how one can ascribe meaning to the past.

Having consulted many texts on the nature of trauma, the one thing that remains constant is the significance of telling, or narrating the trauma as a way of surviving it. At the core of these stories is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.

4. TRAUMA NARRATIVES MAY BE A NECESSARY :

The inscription of trauma narratives may be a necessary, sufficient and compelling means of establishing recognition. At the same time, such identity politics can subjugate and immobilize victims in the very act of recognizing their suffering. Moreover, an act of remembering trauma or self-flagellating confessions if done by the majority community in a nation can result in politics of a vicious kind, leading to malevolent political choices. Needless to say, there have been no such earlier attempts. Right-wing groups all over the world thrive on the interplay of memory, history and identity. A multilevel political analysis of violence is necessary; however, in the Indian or rather the South Asian context, there are rarely absolute villains or absolute victims. The moral complexity of the situation would have ended if there was a clearly identifiable enemy such as a state that sponsored genocide. The complication deepens when the victims are often also the perpetrators at some point or the other. Even the ideological function of 'Partition' historiography has been very different from, say, that of Holocaust literature. The investigation has not been primarily concerned with assigning guilt to the opposing sides. The chief object has not even been to consolidate different ethnic, national identities in South Asia. Rather, it has been aimed at justifying, or eliding, what is seen as being an illegitimate outbreak of violence, and at making a case about how this goes against the fundamentals of Indian and Pakistani tradition and history. This framework makes for a somewhat unusual *account* of violence and of the relationship between violence and community, an account that is not readily available in the literature on similar events.

The recent debate about trauma in psychoanalysis serves to throw light on the problematic issues of truth, history and representation that circle endlessly around the subject of memory. Memory is, in a sense, a locus of struggle over epistemological issues. It may be seen as a problematic and perhaps exemplary site for dealing with the complex inter-linkage of reality and fantasy in representation and interpretation. Memory acts in the present to represent the past. Memories do not merely describe the speaker's relationship to the past but place the person quite specifically in reference to it. It is by no means a simple retelling, but rather a work of interpretation. Memories are acts of commemoration, of testimony, of confession, of accusation. It is not only important to acknowledge the fact that what has already happened cannot be changed, but it is also essential to recognize that the will is crucial in seeking to alter in any way what has already taken place.

5. GENDERED NARRATION OF THE WORLD WARS :

The central action of the story is left unnarrated and is only remotely implied. Given Scharlach's reputation, Jean is understandably concerned about his family when he learns that the German general has taken his town. As it turns out, the Germans have spared both his family and their ancestral home, thanks to the quick thinking of Jean's fiancée, Yvonne Malo. The story suggests - but only through Yvonne's unwillingness to spend time alone with Jean, and the absence of other likely explanations - that Scharlach spared the family, house, and village because Yvonne Malo allowed him to have sexual relations with her. But this scene, assuming it occurs, is never recounted. Similarly, it is strongly implied that Jean de Rechamp is responsible for the death of the wounded Scharlach, who has by chance been left alone in his care.

These stories expose the damage done to individuals and collectivities in terms of trauma by revealing the extent to which living at the edge of life and witnessing horrific acts of massive death and destruction shape and impact not only victims but the societies to which they return. Attempting to work through these strikingly traumatic experiences further highlights attitudes commonly found in narratives of survival.

6. TRAUMA AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES :

Two different women, two different memories of work during the war: but their experience may not have been so different. During the war, the same woman might feel all of these things: pride in accomplishment, fatigue and resentment, longing for pre-war routines. Their experience was often an ambiguous one, and official policy and contemporary discourse underlined and exaggerated its ambiguities. What the public, including women themselves, wanted from women's work changed abruptly and frequently during the war. Sympathy and praise were shadowed by suspicion and blame. Women workers were victims, they were heroines, cheerfully shouldering patriotic tasks; they were profiteers, making money from male sacrifice; they were victims again, forced by the war and enticed by their own weaknesses to neglect their true duties to their children upon whom rode the future.

It is not surprising that both at the time and in their memories decades later, the women who replaced men in the workforce during the war had difficulty interpreting their own experience. For women, the liberatory potential of the disruption caused by Partition has generally and understandably been obscured by the trauma of violence and dislocation. That survival, and strategies for survival, can also be instrumental in women finding their feet is amply demonstrated by the experiences of Bibi Inder Kaur, who took advantage of facilities and training provided by the government for widows, acquired economic self-reliance but also great self-respect, dignity and the immeasurable satisfaction of "asking no one for charity", bequeathed a legacy of confidence and self-worth to her daughters and spontaneously preferred what she had made of her life to what her life may have made of her, had Partition not intervened and agreed that it had given her the chance to forge her own destiny, to spread her wings. Survival is traumatic, too, because it leaves the victims alive to ask questions that do not have easy answers and to try to understand the horrific experience in pre-constructed ideas about the world.

Thus, figuring out the implications of survival after a near-death experience and comprehending the meaning of the trauma are two struggles that victims grapple with as they begin their lives anew. Women always become victims in the game of war. The social meanings attached to each woman's gender might be so different as to render the project of describing one woman in terms of the other meaningless. As every woman differs from every other woman in more or less significant ways, it is impossible to determine the (racial, class, cultural, etc.) identity of the authentic woman and thus to unify different women under the signifier woman.

At best, she might be able to speak accurately of her own unique experience of being a woman but then she would be speaking as an individual, not as a woman. To speak of women in a substantive way is to risk projecting onto all women one socially dominant construction of woman, thereby distorting the meanings of the lives of more marginalized women.

7. RELEVANCE OF PROPOSED STUDY FOR SOCIETY :

Trauma work is also memory work, and the testimony of the survivor does not, in its articulation, determine meaning, and thus close a familial, cultural, or historical chapter. Rather, the speaking of the trauma opens meaning, is productive of meaning, and necessitates a willingness on the part of the listener to bear witness to the catastrophic event, to untangle the narrative knots, and to listen through the gaps and ruptures, which takes precedence over any desire for finality. We are never free of the past, whether it is named history, memory, or experience. It is also the understanding that the past is, what has already taken place, and the memories of which it is composed, is constituted by suffering. We remember trauma; we are made as ourselves out of trauma. If there is a lesson in trauma stories, it is not about facing up to the past so we can move forward, not in learning how to get over trauma, but in how to continue living with it and even to continue loving oneself and the world through it.

8. COCLUSION:

When the victims of trauma are already peripheral, disempowered members of community, the traumatic experiences they suffer comprise an additional assault on their integrity and safety. . That trauma is so painful and hard to cope with has to do with the fact it shatters the amicably coordinated illusions that support our self-centered view of the world and avoid the gaps and fissures of our social fabric. The catastrophic position of trauma is a position of the unacknowledged or unfathomable loss and pain of the marginal self, and their loss and pain need to be placed in the context of communal support and attentive, compassionate listening.

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