



Intergenerational Trauma And Cultural Memory In Bhisham Sahni's Novel *Tamas* (1972, 2016)

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Abstract: This research article examines the intergenerational trauma and cultural memory through deep exploration of Daisy Rockwell's English translation of Bhisham Sahni's exponential novel *Tamas* (1972, 2016). *Tamas* is set in the historical background of the Partition of India (1947), therefore this paper focuses on how the cultural postmemory and lived experiences of such a cataclysmic event had an impact on the psychological and sociological landscape collectively and how it continues to shape the experiences of the second generation through an intertextual descriptive and qualitative analysis. It provides critical insights into the social and mental complexities while examining how trauma narratives are interwoven with memories of the past events that have a deep impact on the people and society as a whole till date. It is brought to light by examining the politics of forgetting and willful remembrance of the past and the intergenerational transmission of trauma through cultural memory and historical narratives.

This article explores the concerns raised against the backdrop of Partition of India with the help of secondary texts like Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988). It scrutinizes the shattered lives and communities which grapple with the enduring scars of memory as both a burden and a means of survival, and with trauma becoming a way of life for those living in the aftermath of such a catastrophic event by highlighting the pervasive fear, violence, and loss they endure. The study offers rich exploration of how postmemory offers as a vehicle for expressing cultural past amid the traumatic complexities of Partition by exploring its impact on the collective psyche of the society.

Through an understanding of theoretical frameworks and earlier researches on Trauma Studies, Postmemory, Cultural Memory, ambivalence, concept of 'self' and 'other', through the critical works of Cathy Caruth, Astrid Erll, Marianne Hirsch, Homi K. Bhabha, and Edward Said respectively the article substantiates the arguments raised in the paper. It further answers the question, Whether the trauma endured and its post-memories continue to haunt the present of the second generation? It also raises the question, How is the present shaped by past cataclysmic events like that of Partition?

Index Terms - Intergenerational Trauma, Post-Memory, Forgetting, Partition, Existentialism

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper explores intergenerational trauma, where the trauma experienced by one generation affects the lives of their next generations. It investigates the long-term impacts of trauma, including emotional dysregulation and societal challenges, focusing on the Partition of India and how literature serves as a medium for transmitting these experiences.

Trauma Studies

The grounding of Trauma Theory in psychoanalysis and the focus on Holocaust, made it a subject of criticism for 'eurocentrism'. Presently, 'trauma theory' has broadened beyond its origins in psychoanalysis and literary theory to become an interdisciplinary approach better described as 'trauma studies'. Anthropologists Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman in their work *The Empire of Trauma* (2009), explored how the concept of trauma has changed the way we understand violent events. Based on the ideas of Michel Foucault, they developed a framework for analyzing how trauma discourse shapes people's identities. This approach combined with studies of collective memory offers new ways of interpreting trauma in literature. Guy Beiner in his book *Forgetful Remembrance* (2018) Offers a pioneering in-depth study of a history of forgetting. It challenges the very parameters of the troubled intersection between history, memory, legacy, commemoration and heritage. It examines the paradoxes of what actually happens when communities persistently endeavour to forget inconvenient events.

Cathy Caruth, a leading figure in psychoanalytically informed literary theory and humanistic approaches to trauma studies, in her phenomenal work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narratives and History* (1996), defines trauma as "In its most general definition, 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 appearance of hallucinations and other uncontrolled phenomenon" (Caruth, p.11). Sigmund Freud in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams and Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) explains trauma as something that is not just a physical wound, a healable event; instead it is an injury to a person's psyche. It is an event that can not be located directly to a specific moment or experience in a person's past. It stays unresolved because it was never completely comprehended or processed at the time, and it later returns to haunt the survivor (Freud, 1920). It ruptures the person's sense of self and causes psychological disorientation leaving a deep imprint on the person's mind. According to Caruth, Sigmund Freud uses literature to study traumatic experiences because both his psychoanalysis theory and literature focus on the complexities between what we know and what we don't know. She believes that people who have experienced trauma carry the weight of a difficult, overwhelming history within them; which they cannot fully understand or control, and because of this, it continues to affect and shape their present and future. Therefore, the trauma becomes a part of who they are, but they can't fully 'own' or understand it. Instead, the trauma itself seems to possess them.

Cultural Memory and Postmemory

Cultural Memory Studies is a dynamic multidisciplinary field that has introduced methods for studying the cultural forms and media through which memory is produced, constructed and shared. The theory of Cultural Memory was introduced by the German scholars Jan Assmann and Aleida Assmann in his book *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis or Cultural Memory* (1992), drawing heavily on Maurice Halbwachs's concept of collective memory. They examined how the images of the past are constructed and communicated through acts of remembrance such as literature, and introduced the core concepts and distinctions in "communicative memory" and "cultural memory" (J. Assmann 2008). Astrid Erll in her article "Traumatic pasts, literary afterlives, and transcultural memory: new directions of literary and media memory studies" (2011) focuses on how memory is kept alive through ongoing engagement and investment. Erll and Rigney in their work "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction" (2006) identify three roles that literature plays in the production and communication of cultural memory, first; as a medium of remembrance, second; as an object of remembrance, and third; as a medium for observing the production of cultural memory. Marianne Hirsch in her book titled *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), discussed the concept of 'postmemory' and 'second generation memory'. She explores the experiences of children of Holocaust survivors and how they inherit and struggle with traumatic memories they did not directly experience.

Ambivalence, 'self' and 'other'

The Indian-British literary theorist and scholar Homi K. Bhabha, in his critical book *The Location of Culture* (1994) gave important concepts of hybridity, mimicry, third space and ambivalence which has its roots in Frantz Fanon's work *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), where he posits that the colonizer fabricated the colonial subject, who in turn assimilated the colonizer's culture. Bhabha describes the place or the position that a hybridised colonial subject occupies as the liminal space or a state of ambivalence. It is a space of being almost 'them' but not completely 'them', a space of ambivalence between the coloniser and the colonised, causing troubles in colonial power relations. Edward Said discusses the concept of 'self' and 'other' in *Orientalism* (1978). He points out in his second definition of 'Orientalism', making a distinction between the

Occident, i.e. self and the Orient, i.e. the Other. By the process of Othering, the colonizers dehumanize the natives by treating them as 'not fully human', and codify and fix the 'self' as the 'true human'. They considered themselves as the embodiment of 'proper self' while labeling the colonized as 'savages'. However the postcolonial perspective of this concept may not be directly applicable to this research objective but it is important to understand as it also has a traumatic impact on the psyche of the once colonized nation.

The Partition of India 1947

The most destructive and distressing event of India's history is the Partition of India (1947). When one talks about Partition, the tragic images of violence, bloodshed, sufferings, separation, and polarization automatically appear in their minds. It caused a great loss of life during the unprecedented migration and displacement of millions of people between India and Pakistan. People became strangers in their own ancestral lands and with one single decision they were forced to spend their lives in a new and unfamiliar land. In the midst of this tumultuous brutality and insanity, people were compelled to watch their lives take a turn they never expected while enduring whatever challenges came their way in order to survive. Therefore, this paper explores the intergenerational trauma and cultural memory of the Partition in Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* with the help of theoretical studies of Caruth, Astrid Erll, Marianne Hirsch, Homi K. Bhabha, and Edward Said on Trauma, Postmemory, Cultural Identity, etc.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research aims to investigate and analyze the intergenerational trauma and cultural memory through a qualitative analysis of Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* (2016). With the help of understanding from various other research done previously on catastrophic historical events like the partition of India 1947 based on trauma and cultural studies, this paper highlights its broader impact on the psychological and sociological landscape of the people who lived through it and its transmission in the generations which came after them. It allows the readers to evaluate the overall validity and reliability of this study by giving important insight through the descriptive analysis process. It examines the psychological depth through the behaviors and experiences of the individuals reflecting on the collective trauma and memory of the society, with the help of textual analysis and reviewing of already existing written materials on trauma and memory. Therefore it is an inductive method where the hypothesis is developed by considering social context, such as the environment under which the actions, behaviors, and experiences of individuals in a society as a whole is formed under the impact of cataclysmic events.

III. Intergenerational Trauma and Cultural Memory in Sahni's *Tamas* (1972, 2016)

Traumatic events often receive two literary responses; one is the immediate response during or after the event, this type of response is incomprehensible, mostly personal, emotionally intense, and often melodramatic, and the second response is after a span of time, when the event has stabilized in the collective memory of those who lived through it, this is more objective and emotionally detached, giving a clearer understanding of the forces which led to such an event. Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* (1972, 2016) is one such reflective response to the Partition of India which was published twenty three years after this cataclysmic crisis. Sahni was a writer, teacher, translator, and polyglot. He was a prominent Indian writer and a member of Progressive Writers' Movement, his works presents the experiences of Partition and its aftermath, human sufferings and social injustices by examining the psychological depth, hyphenated identity and sense of alienation. *Tamas* (1972, 2016) explores intergenerational trauma through the impact of partition on individuals and communities. He shows how the violence and displacement of 1947 haunt the future generations of those who experienced it through postmemory. Through his varied characters, Sahni examines the enduring psychological scars of the partition, emphasizing on the pain, anxieties, cultural trauma, and political upheavals. His novel is a realistic portrayal of the understanding of the complexities and subtleties of the Partition, it is an emotional and evocative depiction of the aftermath of the 1947 Partition.

Through gore description of the destruction, murder, rape, mutilation and the ruthless inhumanity of Hindu-Muslim violence during Partition, Sahni presents a sense of despair, anger, and its horrors in the light of trauma of the refugees who were victimized by the delineation of arbitrary borders. "In the light of the day, the city lay still as though half dead of a snake bite. The grain market still burned,...At night, the sky had blazed red...A dead horse had been discovered in the Naya Mohalla chowk. The body of a middle-aged man had been found on the road." (Sahni, p.161). The fear and terror experienced is highlighted in the novel, "The

doors of houses were shut, and everything was silent...Men walking in the streets always had a sense of eyes peering at them" (Sahni, p.162). Extreme fanaticism and humiliation experienced by the victims of Partition is shown through the inhumane acts of slaughtering with bodies lying in the lanes unidentified. These heartwrenching experiences are recollected by Sahni through his postmemory of Partition and also from his observations as an adult. He was deeply affected by the chaos, where many sacrificed their lives for the country's freedom and others died in the violence. The violence of Partition took a psychological toll on people, as Sahni presents through the memory of his lived experiences haunted by the horrors he witnessed.

Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* (1988), also presents the violence of the Partition through graphic depictions of murders, abductions, and the forced migration of people by focusing on the experience of both Hindus and Muslims. Such violence has a deep impact on personal and collective memory of people leading to the transmission of these traumatic experiences across generations, leaving the individuals to struggle reconciling their past and present. These novels address the blurred boundaries between nations, identities, past and the present through an exploration of cultural memories of violence and displacement. They present the lingering trauma of partition on the characters reflecting on how collective trauma is passed down, influencing future generations, and highlights the role of cultural memory in shaping historical consciousness. The Partition caused a cultural and psychological rupture along with physical rupture in the geographic borders. With the ruptured cultural memory individuals struggled to reconstruct their identities in the new land Post-Partition. Sahni's narrative suggests that the events of Partition continue to haunt the collective consciousness of those who survived it. The painful act of remembering and forgetting the traumatic history in *Train to Pakistan*, reflects on the altered sense of belonging, where cultural memory acts as a coping mechanism to overcome the traumatic loss of their home and lives. This reflects on how memory is kept alive through ongoing engagement and investment (Erll, 2011), and how literature preserves cultural memory as a medium of remembrance, and as an object of remembrance (Erll, 2006). Through this, trauma is engraved in the collective memory of the individuals and continues to have a psychological impact on those who grew up in such a fractured world. Therefore rupturing the sense of self by causing psychological disorientation and leaving a deep imprint on the person's mind. (Freud, 1920)

Sahni himself has written this phenomenal account of Partition through his active postmemory of the Partition as a child, therefore it suggests that intergenerational trauma feeds on the postmemory of one's past. Here Sahni's memory of his overwhelming experience is the 'delayed' and the 'uncontrollable phenomena' that according to Cathy Caruth is the sign of Trauma (Caruth, 1996, p.11). It reflects on how children who did not directly witness the Partition were affected by the violent and gore scenes of brutality and insanity; of murder, rapes, trains full of corpses, and much more, and how they this trauma for their entire life by carrying it in the form of postmemory. This highlights Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'second generation memory' where she explores the experiences of children of Holocaust survivors and how they inherit and struggle with traumatic memories. Moreover, these haunting memories of the violence, also impacted the sociological landscape, where the experiences of the communities collectively constructed their present. Therefore the Partition left a psychological scar on generations affecting their worldview and social interactions. Those who survived the Partition, especially children, struggle to reconnect with their cultural past and use trauma as a means to it. (Beiner, 2018). The generational pain is seen in the confusion and emotional damage presented through recollection of Sahni's childhood memory where he seems to be caught in the legacy of past trauma. This reflects on the broader cultural tendency to repress painful memories in order to survive even when trauma continues to haunt for generations.

Partition Trauma is like a wound which leaves its mark forever, it is a psychological injury that has an intergenerational impact. According to Freud, trauma leads to an unconscious transmission, where repressed memories have the tendency to surface unexpectedly constructing the present. The trauma of the cataclysmic event like Partition in Sahni's novel can be seen in their actions, fears, and inability to confront the past. The violence through mass murders, forced migrations, and communal hatred left deep psychological and emotional scars.

Partition placed the society in a state of 'ambivalence' (Bhabha, 1994), where they were neither fully in their past nor in their future, all they were left with was a torn, fractured and fragmented new land marked by a sense of alienation, displacement, and uncertainty. The 'ambivalence' is experienced by Sahni's characters toward the state, religion, and national identity, as it is shaped by the chaotic divisions of Partition. In the newly created borders, they were forced to reevaluate their roles as 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. Sahni himself

as a product of this traumatic event can be seen as being stuck with the memory of partition even after years as he writes about it after twenty-three years. He symbolizes the ambivalence in the psychology of the individuals caught between the Partition world and the harsh post-Partition reality where the scar of the trauma remains as a reminder of the cataclysmic event.

The relationship between the Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh communities in the novel can be seen in the light of Edward Said's concept of the 'self' and the 'other'. The communal violence that erupted during Partition reinforced identities based on religious and national grounds—marked by deep animosity, mistrust, and fear—creating a sharp division between 'Self' and 'Other'. The Muslims were the 'other' for Hindus and vice versa. The Muslims referred to the Hindus as "kaffirs" whereas the Hindus like Lala ji in the novel wished the British would keep the Muslims or the "Turks" suppressed. However, this division is marked by deep animosity, mistrust, and fear.

This article is substantial for understanding the historical trauma endured by societies and holds significant societal relevance. The Partition of India 1947 left a deep psychological scar on those who lived through it and generations after them through its horrific memories. As portrayed by Sahni in *Tamas*, the violence and fear of 1947 continue to haunt the second generations through postmemory, those who did not directly experience it. This research article helps in understanding the effects of trauma on communities affected by conflict, forced migration, and communal violence in contemporary society. It guides how to address cultural memory and trauma as a way of coping mechanism, as a healing process, as repressing these painful histories only adds to the further societal disintegration and psychological suffering.

Moreover, it offers a vast future scope for further research by offering insights into how social, cultural, and political landscapes are influenced by intergenerational trauma. This can help in studying the contemporary issues of mental health, social cohesion, and intercommunity relationships, especially in societies stuck with the legacy of Wars, the Holocaust, Rwandan Genocide, Western Colonization, other events like Partition. Through comparative analyses with these historical traumas or contemporary Syrian refugee crisis, this research expands the understanding of how societies deal with the universal patterns of trauma transmission. It also offers rich avenues for future inquiry on how literature shapes national consciousness through trauma narratives and past cultural memories, especially in the ways in which different authors present the same historical events from multiple perspectives. Hence, this research article can be used in contemporary discussions on migration, identity, and reconciliation in the field of education, research, medicine as well as politics to provide a valuable framework for addressing intergenerational trauma, its transmission to next generations with the aim of fostering empathy and healing.

IV. Conclusion

Since the beginning of time, the world has been subjected to the barbarities of war, communal violence, terrorism, sexual abuse, and natural disasters. These barbarities have left an everlasting impact on the physical as well as psychological sphere of the people, and it remains imprinted on their minds leading them to suffer the trauma throughout their lives. 'Trauma', was initially attributed to physical injuries only, however through various studies and research as mentioned and discussed within the literary discourses in this article, shows that trauma is also an expression of internal wound that impacts a person's psyche, it is like a scar, an imprint which is passed on from one generation to another in the form of traumatic memories of the past. This article, through an exploration of intergenerational trauma, gives an elaborate insight into the psychological state of the individuals who experience it through their cultural memories of the past. It reflects on the comprehension of a traumatic experience of cataclysmic events like Partition of India 1947, which is retained in the memory of next generations through the act of forgetting and willful remembrance of the past. The intergenerational trauma is examined through the adaptive behaviors and nature of transmission, with the politics of remembrance and cultural memory. It highlights the complex relationship between personal experiences of trauma and the broader cultural memory. The lingering presence of trauma of the Partition in *Tamas* is seen through the fractured cultural identities which moulded the psyche of the once peacefully united communities. In the act of suppressing painful cultural memories of catastrophic events, one revisits them, this makes the past wound to resurface and become new, making it an immortal imprint with no possible escape from it but

to live with it forever, making it difficult for one to reconcile their past with the present. Therefore, the efforts made for silencing of traumatic memories is seen as an obstacle to healing and true reconciliation, resulting in intergenerational trauma. It highlights the fluidity of unfortunate cultural memory, where the society is seen to be caught between the past and the future. Moreover, the paper also highlights how the marginalized, and alienated refugees of Partition in Tamas struggle with the legacy of exclusion and the search for belonging and autonomy. Therefore, this article examines how intergenerational trauma and cultural memory of Partition shape both individual and collective psyches of a nation. It highlights the lasting impact of Partition's violence, silence, and complex issues of identity.

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