

## **Diagnosing the Unassimilated Wounds of Partition's Trauma; A Probative Study of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Saadat Hassan Manto's "Khol Do"**

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### **Abstract**

*The research paper aims to probe Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory in Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan and Saadat Hassan Manto's "Khol Do". The objective of the research is to unveil the gruesome archives of traumatic happenings of partition through a comparative analysis of Sundari in Train to Pakistan and Sakina in "Khol Do". Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory is the secondary source for the research paper. The study heightens the significance of trauma as an event which fragments human consciousness but is ripe with the potential to be shaped by language.*

Keywords: Trauma, South-Asian Literature, Partition, Psycho-analysis, Post-colonial, Catharsis.

### **Introduction**

The research aims to explicate psychoanalytic repercussions of trauma related to Indo-Pak partition in Khushwant Singh's novel, *Train to Pakistan* and Manto's short story "Khol Do", with the lens of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. The objective of the paper is to locate the trauma imprinted on bodies of Sundari and Sakina, as well as on their subliminal, via a comparative study of both female characters. By and large, the critical study unravels how the molestation of women during partition functions as a tool of exploitation in order to abuse the entire nation on both sides of the border.

Saadat Hassan Manto, a post-colonial South Asian Urdu writer of 20th century migrated to Pakistan in 1948, despite opposing the independence of Pakistan from India. He was compelled to go in order to join his family. Otherwise, he was fain to have remained in India. Moreover, he left India after hearing one of his Hindu friends comment regarding killing Manto had he not been their friend, merely based on his religious identity. His personal life experiences evidently influenced his work. His cruel father figure made him attribute the least important and violent traits to the male characters. On the contrary, the female characters in his writings enjoyed central and prioritized roles, whether it was a prostitute or a homemaker. He indeed was a revolutionary for the literary world.

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Khushwant Singh was an Indian writer and English language journalist. His writings are rooted in his social observations and mainly contain wit, perspicacity, satire, humor and secularism. As per his desire, some of his ashes are buried in Pakistan which is felt to reflect nonconformity to the partition of subcontinent in 1947.

*Train to Pakistan* published in 1956, originally, under the title of 'Mano Majra'. It was Khushwant Singh's first novel. Singh was awarded Grove Press Award for this novel. Washington Independent Books review it as "A powerful and moving novel that is both disturbing and exhilarating" (Grove Atlantic). The novel is set in a village whose inhabitants belong to diverse religious, social and cultural backgrounds yet they all live in harmony with each other. This novel explores the partition of 1947 along with the riots that followed. It is a tale of violence, bloodshed, mass hysteria and brutality where one million people were killed in a week. John Gabree reviews: "A powerful and affecting novel capturing both the sweep of the cataclysmic events of 1947 and the intimate details of village existence" (Grove Atlanticn.d.).

"Khol Do" is a short story based on Indo-Pak partition of 1947 by Saadat Hassan Manto. It has been translated in English under the title 'Open It/Loosen Up'. It is a controversial story as Manto had to face a trial of obscenity for writing this story. HindLaknavi reviews, "Disgustingly haunting all, thinking, humans like me should feel like vomiting" (Khol Do-Saadat 2014). A major element that constitutes this story is the anonymity of the characters i.e. the perpetrators are kept anonymous. It is considered a deliberate attempt by the author in order to emphasize human animosity in general, without emphasizing upon any particular religion, culture, region or political group. It also shows the greater extent of barbarity witnessed at the time of partition of not a single community rather every community be it Muslims, Sikhs or Hindus. "Khol Do" narrates the tale of a girl estranged from her family in the chaos of political turmoil. She gets raped. Thus, her body responds to the heinous words "khol do" with the lowering of her trousers to depict the trauma she bore.

The term Trauma dates its origin back to Greek language which employed trauma for describing wounds. Trauma is a massively shocking and disturbing experience which juxtaposes the victim's outlook and stance about the inside and outside world. Trauma studies deal with the role of memory in determining one's individual and cultural identities, and its illustration in language. Major concerns related to trauma arose after the World War leading to the germination of trauma studies. However, in 1970s, the attention shifted to sexual violence faced by women which resulted in psychological complications. Trauma studies are inter-disciplinary studies that were developed in 1980s in the light of Freud's theory which considers trauma as a suffering of an individual's memory and psyche. A traumatic experience changes one's identity and affects the capability of language as well. It limits the victims from speaking about the trauma that they have endured. Later, Freud's theory was modified and the unresponsive attitude of trauma victims was considered a response actually.

Cathy Caruth explored trauma studies in 1996 when she presented an approach to Freud's work on psychoanalysis in her composition 'Unclaimed

Diagnosing the Unassimilated Wounds of Partition's Trauma: JRSP, Vol. 59, No 1 (Jan-March 2022) Experience; Trauma, Narrative and History'. She introduced trauma theory in literature by attributing trauma as an unsolvable issue of conscious in relation to the language. It can be identified in texts as the survivor is inclined towards repeating the traumatic event he experienced or witnessed recurrently. Caruth identifies trauma as a tumor in consciousness that wounds the psyche and, therefore, the fright caused by it prevents the survivor to linguistically present it. If one does so, it is hard to locate it. Trauma is paradoxical in nature as it insists on being told and fully known yet the inability to comprehend it exists too. Trauma's potential and influence is timeless and universal i.e. it evokes an almost similar response to those who have not experienced it but have witnessed it or heard of it from those who survived. Thus, the attempts of scripting the traumatic history by historians can be justified under Caruth's model of trauma studies. Trauma allows history to arise when understanding fails as history is not merely recording of incidents or past experiences, it is rather a strategy for reliving those traumatic moments to locate the unknown chunks of shattered memory. Caruth puts forward a connection between the texts of psychoanalysis and literature, and between the individual and collective trauma. It is so because neither every historian has been a trauma survivor nor every trauma survivor could re-write history.

The critical study explores the following research questions:

1. What is the significance of titles *Train to Pakistan* and "Khol Do" in association with trauma induced in the characters?
2. What role do unassimilated wounds of memory play in rewriting partition history in accordance with Caruth's trauma theory?

## **Literature Review**

In the guise of partition literature, Singh raised his voice on the political issues of his country through the techniques of realism and satire; primarily in *Train to Pakistan*. Raizada remarks, "The indignation felt at the ghastly human tragedy was poured by him with scathing irony and stark realism in this memorable work of fiction" (Chatterji n.d., 8). Referring to Singh's attempts at providing an insight into the Sub-continent's political and national affairs, Warren French remarks, "Singh's terse fable suggests a profound disillusionment with the power of law, reason and intellect in the face of elemental human passions" (qtd. in Meenakshi 1). In 1964 in Guest of Honor Talk, Singh broached his discontentment with the partition and the proceeding events by saying; "The division of India had been accompanied by the most savage massacres known in the history of the country. After 1947, I wanted to shout my disenchantment with the world" (Pandey 2015, 404).

Saadat Hassan Manto is celebrated as a forthright and most expressive writer whose writing strategy is "to drive home awkward truths" (Abidin.d., 55). His stories, short in length with anonymity of characters end up giving goosebumps to the readers as Nazneen Sheikh endorses Manto with an "ability to transport the reader into a realm of possibilities, however, automatically adding another measure of success to his merit as a writer" (Sheikh). Partition literature

Diagnosing the Unassimilated Wounds of Partition's Trauma: JRSP, Vol. 59, No 1 (Jan-March 2022) covers a prime share of Manto's work because "if you don't read him, you will never truly understand the madness of partition" (Lakhe 2018).

Cathy Caruth took the roots of trauma theory from Freud's ideologies of psychoanalysis and she brought to light the notion that trauma is "not locatable in the first instance but returns to haunt the survivor" (Khadem 2014). Caruth considers traumatized psychology as a product of fragmentation of conscious memory that shatters the identity of an individual and an entire nation. "Trauma is the afflictive sentiment brought about by both the realization and the remembrance of the cruel, unjust and horrific events of one's past. This in turn results in the direct influence on one's future. In the words of Kilby, trauma is, in actual, a wound which is "not experienced at the time of its occurrence but later as haunting presence" (Mahanty 2021, 237). Therefore, it stays in the unconscious mind and grows up into a tumor which continues to afflict one's emotions and behavioral patterns

As a result, traumatized experience disrupts the emotional pattern by cultivating one's unconscious and subconscious mind. "Every act, incident, thought and emotion has an influence on a person's unconscious mind, which he may realize to a limited extent" (Cherry 2020). As a trauma theorist and a lecturer, Cathy Caruth correlates language and traumatic memories that are "never fully known but nonetheless insist on being told" (Caruth 1996). It is literature which provides a way out for those memories as "literary language has always been distinguished by its capacity to transmit what cannot be communicated in more straight forward ways" (Caruth 1996). Hence, trauma and language are inextricably coupled with each other in order to get rid of the haunting presence of traumatic memories.

### **Research Methodology**

The research incorporates a textual analysis of *Train to Pakistan* and "Khol Do" as the primary texts. The applied theoretical framework is Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory. The reviews concerning the aforementioned author, novel, short story and theory form the secondary sources of the thesis. The secondary sources also employ both print and electronic media. Cathy Caruth's book 'Unclaimed Experience' has also been consulted as a part of secondary sources for the research.

The critical study embodies a qualitative and deductive research which is conducted on a grounded theory by Cathy Caruth. The thesis opens new dimensions for the novel and the short story as cathartic and therapeutic literature. The texts of *Train to Pakistan* and "Khol Do" were constricted to literary fiction and partition literature only but the research has attempted to widen the ambits affiliated with Singh's and Manto's writings respectively. The significance of the research lies in the use of literature and linguistic expression as a source to evade the psychological trauma induced by Indo-Pak partition.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

"The summer of 1947 was not like other Indian summers. It was hotter than usual, and drier and dustier. And the summer was longer. For weeks, the

Diagnosing the Unassimilated Wounds of Partition's Trauma: JRSP, Vol. 59, No 1 (Jan-March 2022) sparse clouds cast only shadows. There was no rain" (8). The beginning of *Train to Pakistan* foreshadows the forthcoming religious agitations, inter-communal hatred, grisly accounts of numerous deaths and slaughter, peaks of insanity and barbarism, trains full of dead bodies and sexual molestation of either gender. The imagery of a "hotter, drier, dustier and longer" summer with no anticipation of rain bears witness to the harsh upcoming circumstances for peaceful inhabitants of the Sub-continent. Singh elaborates the historical records of trauma in the novel: "There was a man holding his intestines. There were women and children huddled in a corner, their eyes dilated with horror, their mouths still open as if their shrieks had just then become voiceless. There were bodies crammed against the far end of the compartment, looking in terror at the empty windows through which must have come shots, spears and spikes" (58). The trauma induced in those lifeless bodies when they had life in them is evident from the "terror" which caused their eyes to "dilate with horror". The "voiceless shrieks" denote the voices of thousands of migrants which were silenced by those in power. The sight of the first ghost train loaded with dead bodies evoked trepidation in the spectators such as Hukum Chand who could not stand the traumatic recollections after returning home. The narrator affirms Hukum Chand's state in the novel as "bewildered and frightened him by its violence and its magnitude" (59). In the light of modifications made to Freud's model, silence and a lack of response is actually a response to the traumatic event. Thence, the "violence" and "magnitude" of traumatic event witnessed by Hukum Chand rendered him numb and petrified because of its unsettling nature.

The study focuses on the infliction caused to the female body as a canvas of war. "Some were without limbs, some had their bellies torn open, and many women's breasts were slashed. They floated down the sunlit river, bobbing up and down. Overhead hung the kites and vultures" (95). It is felt that the female body is used as a symbol to have been "torn apart" and unleashed nefarious war crimes upon to denote victory. The female body is made a denotative image. Consequently, the brutality inflicted on females knew no boundaries while demarcating the countries. "Breasts were slashed" to portray the animosity which rendered Muslims to "slash(ed)" Hindus from their claimed land and vice versa. Furthermore, "kites and vultures" signify the enemy, the male gender of another religion and different nationality. It is noteworthy that the position "overhead" is connoted for all women who were victims of rapists, murderers and all sorts of assaults from "overhead". Their position as the one beneath is consequential in the gender dynamics. The war of patriarchally sturdy enemies made the vulnerable feminine victims cower in a low position. Thus, the trauma of body emerged in the psyche of characters in compliance to Caruth's notion of trauma. The female characters were weighed down by the harrowing trauma.

True to form, the character of Sundari in *Train to Pakistan* evinces the excruciating elucidation of trauma inflicted upon the migrants during partition. Sundari exhibits the traumatic wounds imprinted on the bodies of thousands of women who were the innocent victims of sexual abduction and gang rape. On her way to Gujranwala with her husband Mansa Ram, Sundari, a bride of four days becomes a part of the abhorrent and horrendous expedition of partition. "She who had not really had a good look at Mansa Ram was shown her husband completely

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naked. They held him by the arms and legs and one man cut off his penis and gave it to her. The mob made love to her. She did not have to take off any bangles. They were all smashed as she lay in the road, being taken by one man and another and another" (114). The "smashed" bangles lying all over the road become a representative of the "smashed" psyche and identities of numerous female victims.

The appalling episodes of Sikh and Hindu mass migration to Mano Majra as corpses and sundering from their Muslim brothers collectively turnout to be the cumbersome melancholy of the partition's false dawn. The disturbing sights and harrowing tales do not let the inhabitants of Mano Majra sleep peacefully. "The day's events were not likely to be forgotten in sleep" (96). Their inability to sleep, "fitful" sleep, waking up "startled cries", "dreaming and reliving" the harrowing scenes and "sobbing" spoke for the shock that they tolerated as an outcome of series of individual traumas instigated upon their fellow villagers. Despite the fact that traumatic occurrences of the day diminished, the collective trauma persists with an air of uncertainty, destruction of communal trust and fear of lingering death.

In the light of Caruth's Trauma Theory, this novel particularizes the villainy towards millions of individuals. In verity, it is a source of catharsis for Khushwant Singh who could find no better way to end his traumatic experiences and memories related to partition other than by reliving them. The writer managed to escape the individual trauma but he confronted cultural trauma being a witness of the atrocities of partition. The aforementioned incidents of partition would surely have shattered the identity of those who were victims like Sundari and those who were survivors such as the writer, Singh, himself. However, the trauma that had been induced once in their subconscious, demanded to be known. Thence, Singh opted for reliving and expressing the torments linguistically by scripting the history of partition in order to be a carrier in fulfilling the claim of cultural trauma.

"Khol Do", by Manto, analyzes the ferocious thirst that could only be quenched with the genocide and molestation in the name of religion and nationalism. Manto shows proclivity for humanity over religion and nationality in his short story which substantiates the struggle of a father and daughter who strive to survive the afflictions during migration from Amritsar to Lahore via train. "He was lying on bare ground, surrounded by screaming men, women and children (1). The "screaming" of people around Sirajuddin, his inability to comprehend, "confusion and noise", "shock" and the "dead body of his wife, her stomach ripped open" (1) as an image that would not go away, as a whole, stands out for his individual and collective trauma. The "ripped open stomach" of his wife foreshadows the trauma that her daughter is going to suffer which would rupture Sakina's psyche. Manto keeps the identity of the rapists anonymous to divulge the aspect of universality. "Perpetrators were men within their own communities as often as those of others" (Tandon 2017). Women at the time of partition endured trauma to a greater extent as they were doubly marginalized i.e. as a female gender and for their religious/ethnic identity also akin to Shanta in Bapsi Sidhwa's "The Ice Candy Man". Sakina in "Khol Do" goes through an identical situation where she suddenly grows from being a seventeen year old girl to a woman "dupatta" is a

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metaphor for honor and dignity. Hence, the "slipping" of her dupatta symbolizes loss of her dignity as well as slipping into the depths of an upcoming trauma.

"Khol Do" ends on a note of queasy and blood-curdling revelation for the readers, as well as the father. "Then he pointed to the window and said to him [Sirajuddin], 'Open it'. The body stirred slightly on the stretcher. The lifeless hands untied the waistband and lowered the Shalwar" (1). These lines express traumatic memories which are still unknown to her but they insist on being recognized. It is prevalent that she acts in compliance to the trauma residing in her subconscious. The incident also embodies the relationship between language and trauma as Sakina's subconscious develops a particular meaning of being raped.

In a nutshell, the comparative analysis of Sundari and Sakina in both the primary texts unveil the gaping wounds of trauma endured at the time of partition. Those wounds are hard to diagnose in the first place and even harder to be cured. Both the female characters are destined to be a victim of traumatic hysteria whose remembrance is far more traumatic than the actual event. The titles of both the texts also corroborate their direct reference to the accounts of partition. 'Mano Majra', the original title of Singh's novel was replaced by *Train to Pakistan*. It emphasizes the significance of trains at that time. Millions of people migrated across border in trains which symbolizes the dynamics of displacement as well as a site of massacres and mass hysteria. Whereas, the title "Khol Do" is ironic and satirical which verifies Mantonian epiphany i.e. Manto's signature writing style of twisting the plot to let readers sink into a sense of stark realization. "Khol Do" is an Urdu phrase meaning 'loosen up'; hence the phrase literally speaks for Sakina's act of loosening her Shalwar. However, ironically the phrase also refers to the loosening and unfastening of hatred and violence on either side of the border. The bonds of love and ties of humanity loosened up which resulted in the epitome of catastrophe during partition. Lastly, it denotes the loosening of her vaginal opening which has been bombarded by the phallus as a tool of victory over the female body.

## Conclusion

The disquisition comprises of *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh and "Khol Do" by Saadat Hassan Manto as the primary source and Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory as the secondary source for the research. The critical study evaluates the literary works pertaining to South-Asian literature in order to bring into existence an affective configuration for analysis of violent turbulence that emerged during the exodus of 1947; eventually bringing about individual, national and collective trauma.

The thesis is inferred to be a delineation of traumatic occurrences rooted in the shattered memory of the victims as well as the historians. It is evident that the marginalized women of the Subcontinent are the peculiar consideration for the trauma studies as they were subjugated to revenge through sexual molestation and gang rapes. It was so because they were viewed as the symbolic representation of a certain nation or community and the diminution of their honor meant the deprivation of their community's dignity.

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The research vindicates the Indo-Pak partition as an upheaval which ended in despicable butchery, rape and vandalism. Put simply, the attempt of revising and scripting the history is a course of action to situate the wounds of trauma in a pursuit to mitigate them. By and large, Partition Literature is a saga of innumerable told and untold narratives of bigotry and despoise that invoke an urge for diagnosing the unassimilated wounds of partition's trauma.

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