

Emerging Out of Violence: A Study of Select Short Stories on the Partition of India

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Abstract: The Greek word *Tramatikos* for trauma means a severe wound to the body. Any emotional wound that leads to psychological injury or an event that causes distress can best be defined as trauma. Hence, it is undoubtedly an emotional response to a terrible event. Trauma theory examines how traumatic occurrences are processed. Trauma theory attempts to understand the different ways by which traumatic occurrences are demonstrated, processed, exposed and repressed through a variety of literary and historical texts. Trauma refers to the sudden intrusion of new and unexpected knowledge into someone's psyche, usually due to a sudden confrontation with violence or death. Keeping the trauma theory in view, the present paper will be based on the post-partition violence that has caused trauma to the victims of violence and the Holocaust. To validate the study, the short stories on partition, viz. "Separated from the Flock", "Post Box", and "Exile" will be analysed to know how acts of physical and mental violence—rapes, abductions, forced displacement and murders—leave permanent scars in the psyche of the main character that keeps on tormenting them even after the violence is over. The victims suffered distress, trauma, dishonour and disgrace, revealing that children and women, being the most vulnerable sections of society, are rendered helpless with no succour in sight.

Keywords: Abduction, Displacement, Memory, Partition, Psyche, Rape, Trauma

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (6th ed.) defines *trauma* as a mental condition caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last a long time (1384). Etymologically, it is a Greek word *traumat*—trauma that means wound—the physical injury. Of late, trauma is used beyond that as it refers to emotional wounds that are irredeemable. Though physical injuries may heal with time, traumatic events can leave lasting psychological symptoms (Merriam-Webster). In literature and

Freud's texts the term is understood as a wound but upon the mind (Muhammad 1). The psychological reaction to emotional trauma now has an established name—Post Traumatic Stress Disorder(PTSD).

As far as literary theory is concerned, it examines the ways in which traumatic occurrences are processed by and through texts. The different ways by which traumatic occurrence are demonstrated, processed, exposed, and repressed throughout various literary and historical texts find mention in literary theory. The dominant concerns that define the field of trauma studies are depiction of psychological trauma in language and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities. Michelle Balaev has rightly asserted, “Psychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities are the central concerns that define the field of trauma studies” (360). Trauma studies explores the impact of trauma in literature and society by analysing its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance (Mambrol).

Trauma theory relates to the study of literature on and about trauma and violence, identifying the connections (and disconnections) between theory and practice (Muhammad 4). Many psychologists, critics and theorists return to literature to describe traumatic experience. Freud himself turned to literature in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to describe traumatic experience for the simple reason as is described by Cathy Caruth:

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalyses, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literary and the psychoanalytical theory of traumatic experience precisely meet.

(3)

Different texts explore and speak about and through the profound story of traumatic experience. The texts engage with a central problem that emerges from a specific crisis's actual experience (Muhammad 4). The literature deals with the typical causes of trauma. The psychoanalysis trauma is caused by sexual abuse, employment discrimination, police brutality, bullying, domestic violence, catastrophic events, war, treachery, betray and sexual abuse (Heidarizadeh 789). The Partition

literature is replete with the catastrophic events resulting in both physical and mental violence that devastated the life of numberless innocent people especially women and children. History of the Partition is the history of violence and trauma. The violence that ensued the Partition of India left deep scars not on the women's bodies but also on their psyches. The Partition literature highlights how women and children became easy targets of the worst kind of violence with no succour in sight. That's why children and women have been targets of wide body of trauma theorists for being vulnerable to traumas especially sexual abuse. Those who were displaced forcibly were equally victims of violence resulting in trauma. In the present paper short stories have been selected as literary texts that perfectly apply to trauma theory interpretation.

The trauma caused by forced displacement from one's birthplace and consequential mental agony inflicted through past memories find mention in the short story "Separated from the Flock" (Ashraf 1). The story is a comprehensive portrayal of the anguish of leaving home. The narrator tells his own story of sufferings that resulted from his displacement from India triggered by the Partition of India. He suffers not because of material loss but the wounds left to his psyche are not healable. Though he is a Superintendent of Police in Pakistan and enjoys both Reputation and wealth, there are abrasions to his psyche that make his life more painful. His loss cannot be compensated. He has to pay the price in the form of uprootedness for being a Muslim. Though the Muslims get Pakistan as their 'own' country, this doesn't delight him. The uprootedness has resulted in deep, invisible gashes to his heart and mind. His longing for the lost home is so acute that he is always lost in memories. He holds the land dear where he learnt to speak the first words. The story brings out the trauma and poignancy of a lost home vibrantly.

The narrator shows a deep urge and yearning for the lost home when he is with his driver, Gulam Ali, on his way to a lake for duck hunting. He wants Gulam Ali not to remind him of his past because memories are painful to him. The violence that followed the Partition has devastated his life as he is separated from his land and dear ones. The memories of those good old days are more excruciating. Freud is correct in observing, "These experiences are stored at our particular

consciousness level and compulsively repeated without any verbal expression” Mandal and Singh 10256). On the contrary, he wants to share with Gulam Ali, “I no longer have any relationship with that part of the earth where my childhood was spent listening to my mother’s lullabies, where, as a boy, all the small things I beheld were dear to me—and where, in my youth, I first felt life’s upsurge and learnt to test my wings” (Ashraf 2). But he desists from saying anything to Gulam Ali as he feels Gulam Ali will not understand the pain of losing the place where one is born and brought up. The Partition has brought trauma and desperation with it to the narrator, “The hard deep lines of Partition have erased the signs of all other feelings—feelings which belong intimately to that place where a human being first opens his eyes on earth and catches a glimpse of the sky” (2-3). The world of memories becomes a haven for him where he takes shelter from the present sufferings. It is through the reeling memory that the wretchedness of the narrator is laid bare before us. All his near and dear ones have also migrated along with him, this doesn’t bring solace to him as he has left behind the world without which he feels incomplete. It is not only the family one wants. One longs for friends, environment and the memories. That is why nothing can “console” (3) him. The emotional loss that he bears is hard to be compensated with. It is hard for him to forget those good days and the girl that he loved in India. He failed to marry her. Both are separated. He has to pay the price of independence by sacrificing his love.

It is all owing to a rare coincidence that the narrator comes across his old friend, Nawab, during one of his hunting trips. Nawab, a decent and prosperous businessman, also suffers the pain of the Partition like the narrator in the form of displacement. His loss, like the narrator’s, is not material. He too suffers from the agony of being uprooted. Both the friends embrace each other and tears flow as they remember the childhood spent together in India. On seeing Nawab, the memories rage within the narrator like “uncontrollable wild fire” (11). Both the friends are victims of the same destiny. Both had been in love with young girls there. Both had to sacrifice their blissful love. Unfolding of their past love stories with an aching heart adds to the poignancy of their experience. They can never forget that land, those lanes, houses, fields, fairs, their friends, school and

their childhood. Both feel imprisoned by the circumstances and the changed reality. Going back is not viable in any way. The narrator says to himself:

... neither of us had any control over our lives; that we are helplessly trapped by circumstances over which we had no influence; that we were utterly defenseless... if I were to resign my job and go to India, how would my family survive; and, Nawab, if you were to neglect your factory and leave Pakistan, who would compensate you for loss...? Yes, both of us are paralysed, are unable to make a move.... (Ashraf 12)

This powerlessness to go back intensifies their agony and they feel shattered. Their business and job have become a hindrance between their past and present. They have relief only in memory where they can revisit their past, 'their childhood' and land of their dreams. Both are in the throes of suffering as both are 'separated from the flock.'

The grief-stricken psyche of the narrator and others of his ilk is exposed through the use of metaphors. The narrator and his friend are hunting ducks and when the ducks are shot at, their "wings are broken"; they beat the water frantically with their broken wings, "desperately trying to get away from the hunters" (14). The 'wings' are here used metaphorically. The wings of the narrator and Nawab are also broken as they are tied to their jobs and business. They, too, try frantically to get away but in vain. The ducks are migratory birds who have left their land behind like these refugees. But they will soon go back, when the season changes. But some ducks never reach their land, as their wings are broken or they get lost in the way. They, too, get "separated from the flock" (14). The life of the refugees is as excruciating as that of the ducks with broken wings. They, too, get lost and are separated from the flock. Both the friends feel like these birds with broken wings. The longing for the lost home tears their heart apart. The memories add to their trauma and shake their whole being.

The trauma of Gulam Ali's wife, Jameela and Vaziruddin's wife is more tormenting as they, too, are the victims of this uprootedness. During the Partition they had to migrate to Pakistan. Now they want visit India to see their homeland—the land of their dreams. Though they have no relative

there, they want to see the land where they had spent their childhood. The longing for that part of the country is so penetrating that they can do anything to see the lost homes. The husbands of these women consider their longing just a “whim” (4) and fail to realise the pain and trauma of uprootedness. They can never decipher their pull towards the past.

Vaziruddin’s wife has somehow saved some money to meet her expenses to visit India and has strenuously obtained a permit to visit India, to see her homeland, the place where she spent her childhood. But Vaziruddin cannot understand how intense is her longing to go to her village nor does he care for her feelings. First, he argues with her against her strong craving for visiting India but when she doesn’t agree with him, he thrashes her badly and throws her permit into the fire, thus shattering her chances of going back to the place she cherished. He does not want that his wife should go to India because, then, there will be no one to cook his meals. By burning the pass into the fire, he has clipped her ‘wings’ so that she may not ‘fly’. Similarly, Gulam Ali, too, wants that his wife should not go to India, as it will cost him some money. He does not want to spend money for her fare etc. The narrator is sad to know all this. He starts hating Gulam Ali and says to himself:

.... you and your friend will never understand what happens to a man who has been separated from the place where he was born, where he was suckled by his mother, and where he felt his father’s affectionate hand ruffle his hair. You won’t understand how strongly attached a man is to the place, where he has spent his childhood surrounded by daily acts of kindness and joy; you can never feel, Gulam Ali, how precious those moments of innocence are, how one nurtures them with one’s blood, how they are a part of everything that one has become.
(4-5)

The narrator himself, ironically, fails to help his driver’s wife Jameela who wants to visit India but for want of a permit cannot do so. Having known that the narrator, her husband’s boss, is a senior police officer she pleads before him to get her a permit issued so that she may go to India “to feel once again the spirit of the place where her mother used to sing her lullabies, to walk once again in the warmth of the village where she had flung her arms out in gladness to welcome her youth”

(6). Sadly, her wings are also sheared as her husband has already requested the narrator not to accede to her requests. Her dreams are shattered. Her condition is like those ducks with ‘dreams in their eyes’ that get killed and their dreams remain unfulfilled. The image of the ducks dying with ‘dreams in eyes’ intensifies the anguish of the sufferers. Jameela’s longing for the past is buried. She sheds her “last tears for her home and for her dreams” (17). The narrator is sad for not helping her. He just wants to tell her in pain:

Goodbye, sister. You’ll never again see that land where you grew into consciousness—hear its songs, swing from its trees on rainy days, play hide-and-seek in its chicken coops, dye your dupatta there in rainbow colours, collect flower with your childhood friends—never again will you see the place where you gathered tenderness in your hands and pressed it against your heart—Forget that place, sister...Why thrash your wings in vain, a hunter hidden in the shadow of the lake broke them a long time ago—There is nothing left now.
(17-18)

Undoubtedly, it cannot be denied that the selfish political and religious leaders were like hunters who had broken the wings of millions of people so that may not fly to the lands of their dreams. They have created a rift between people and forced them to live in the land where they have no one their ‘own’. Now they have lost everything and are forced to live in the “mirror house” (14) of their memories. These uprooted people have made “terrible sacrifices” (19).

The wounds inflicted to the psyches of the victims will never made good. They cannot go back to ‘their’ lost homes. There are so many hurdles in their way—material, jobs, and self-centered callous husbands—that block their way. They can only dream of those fields and friends. The narrator feels tortured to see that the pain has created millions of holes in their heart and soul. This distress comes out very distressingly in the following words, which the narrator wants to say to Nawab, his friend:

We are birds with broken wings and we can never fly back to those fields of desire—we are more helpless and defenseless than those birds because once their wings are broken, they are

ritually slaughtered—but people like us—our torment never ends, we die slowly, we are tortured at every moment of our lives, we are hunted without mercy and we can only beat our wings in the throes of death, but we cannot die.... (22)

Thus, for the narrator, like millions, the emotional losses are more painful than the material losses. Although these wounds are not visible, yet they keep on gnawing at their heart all life, refusing to heal.

The feeling of loathing and animosity had dazed the sensibility of the Hindus, the Sikhs and the Muslims so much so that even innocent children were made targets of the worst kind of violence not only to their body but also to their psyche. Children who had no knowledge of religion and were unaware of the two-nation theory were subjected to rapes and murders. Numberless children were rendered orphans and what is more painful and shocking is that no history of the Partition has anything to say about the sufferings of children. Even after the Partition was over and rehabilitation drive took place, people were reluctant to accept the children born as a result of their mothers had been raped. Tragically enough, the two countries did not fight over children as they did over women (Butalia, 187).

“Post-Box” (Vatsayan 105), the story of a five-year-old boy, Roshan, is the most tragic one. He is rendered orphan due to the riots. His father had gone to bring his sister and he never returned while this small child had to witness the brutal and cruel act of his mother’s murder. The attackers first tried to abduct her and when she resisted, a man “finally managed to push her away from him, had thrown her down on the ground, and then smashed her face in with the blunt end of his axe” (107). When Roshan opened his eyes, he had seen that “her eyes, nose, jaws had been reduced to a bloody pulp” (107). This act of bearing witness is the testimony that is a necessary and vital response to the ongoing consequences of traumatic theory (Elissa 3). Trauma haunts the body-mind of its victim, an unspeakable terror expressed through the symptoms of trauma (Testimony creates the trauma it discovers). Nasrullah Mambrol in his article “Literary theory and criticism” quotes Caruth who argues that trauma is, “not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the

individual's past but only identified in the way it is precisely not known in the first instance returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Mandal and Singh 10256-57). This haunting memory inflict trauma on the victim. Such dreadful happenings made a permanent scar on Roshan's psyche that even an adult would be shattered at such harrowing happenings and here Roshan had to bear it all at the tender age of five. Freud's belief that any trauma is capable of triggering unsuccessful repressed emotions from past experience (Balut 2) seems true in the case of Roshan.

The child walked a long distance to reach the refugee camp. There were "dry wounds on his legs and his feet were swollen. He was bare headed... and his eyes, which still had the innocence of childhood seemed to be full of sufferings" (Vatsayan106). The child lives in the camp where "all the others were strangers to him" (108). He has no one to speak to. He has lost all his dear ones. But he still has a hope that one day his father would come to him. And so he writes a letter for his father and stands near the post box, and it is here that the narrator of the story finds him. He wants the narrator to help him post the letter. But the letter cannot be posted because there is no address on it. The child, of course, does not know where his father is. When the narrator tells him that the letter cannot be posted till he writes his father's address his eyes are filled with tears. He is disappointed but he still hopes that someone will one day "tell him how to send his letter to his father" (109). The innocent child is cherishing a hopeless hope of meeting his father someday makes his tragedy all the more painful and traumatic.

Women, regardless of their religion and caste, were rendered a vulnerable target to male violence during the Partition. Men of all the communities were equally involved in persecuting women and that confirms the truth that during the course of rioting, all communities were equally involved (Singh 154). Jamila Hashmi's "Exile" is a story of deep human significance full of trauma. The writer explains the true magnitude of the events accompanying the Partition by showing their physical and psychological impact on human life. The story brings out not only the irreparable physical loss, but also the emotional loss—the loss of personality under the stress of this traumatic event. The story is a portrayal of the narrator's life enjoying the bonds of love of her parents and

brother before the Partition took place. It is all about her childlike, calm, easy and happy life before and then a huge change leading to her battered life after the storm of the Partition. “Exile” movingly describes the impact of forceful dislocation through abduction, rape and marriage.

The traumatic and sad tale of her sufferings starts from the day she is abducted by a Sikh, Gurpal, who brings her to his home. The narrator in “Exile” at least finds a home, but under most painful circumstances. What can be more agonising for her than that the murderer of her parents becomes her husband. It is Gurpal who slaughters her parents and abducts her and drags her to his house. She is “pushed” in like an animal declaring, “Look Ma, I have brought you Bahu. She is tall and good-looking. Of all the girl who fell into our hands tonight, she was the prettiest” (40). She is too tired to lift even a finger and her feet are bruised and wounded since she had to walk barefoot for miles. Physical exhaustion and mental trauma make her fall at Ma’s feet in a heap. Even the cattle are surprised at her helplessness and miserable state as if she belongs to their category. “The cows and buffaloes, who were chained in the courtyard, stopped eating their fodder and turned to look at me in surprise,” says the narrator (40). Badi Ma “scrutinises” her from head to feet as if she is not a human being. She is not happy that a Bahu has come and her response is of indifference. She is rather satisfied as the maidservants have stopped working in the house and the narrator will be a good substitute for a maidservant as is clear from the statement of Gurpal who asserts, “At least, look at her. You won’t have to put up with the insolence of maidservants any more. She will be your slave. Order her to grind corn, fetch water. As far as I am concerned, you can ask her to do anything you wish. I have brought you a Bahu!” (40). The narrator is forcibly made a ‘Bahu’ without any matrimonial ceremony. No one greets her at the door with music, no songs are sung with beating drums and there is no dancing to celebrate her arrival. Neither is her hair smeared with oil nor is she decorated with jewels and fine clothes, nor is *mehndi* put on her hands. Her dreams of becoming a bride in real sense, bidding good-bye to her brother, sitting in a palanquin are shattered. She is made a Bahu by her abductor without applying “sindoor” in the parting of her hair. Ironically, she has become a bride! Her sorrow only increases when even Badi Ma, a woman herself, does not bother to

talk to her. She turns her back towards her in indifference and leaves. She suffers for nine long years. She has children from Gurpal but she has never accepted him as a husband. How can she forgive a man who has spoiled her life and broken her dreams?

It is one act of the abduction and ensuing atrocities on her that she feels alienated. She feels all alone even in the company of her family. It is the separation from her 'own' people that tortures her psyche the most. She is constantly anguished over the separation. She ponders, "The very fact of separation stands like a wall between people who once loved each-other. Once separated they are fated never to see each-other's faces again... They can never return to their past again" (41). The narrator lives in a state of exile.

It is through the use of myth that her trauma and dilemma are made clear. Though the author of the story, Jamila Hashmi, is a Muslim, she draws the metaphor of 'exile' from the *Ramayana*—the great Hindu epic. Like Sita she is abducted and separated from her dear ones. She also feels that she is living in Ravana's home. There is a good use of words, images, and metaphor that portray her life effectively. Her two children are returning from fair holding the images of Ravana reminding her that she has been living among wicked people like Ravana. The words like "darkness", "meander", "mist surrounding them", "empty sky", a "single star" trembling like the "flame of earthen lamp" which make her feel sad convey her traumatic and aching condition so clearly. She says, "In the wilderness of my house, I am like that lonely tree which neither blossoms nor bears fruit" (42). No body tries to soothe her afflicted soul, "After all, one can never know how much a wound hurts, until one is injured oneself" (42). Her loneliness intensifies her trauma and she feels like a "boat without oars". Since her abduction, as she says, "All the lights of my life were extinguished forever. Since then, no ray of light has gleamed in the wilderness that surrounds me" (43). Remembering about her past, her family and her home makes her feel lonelier. She remembers the days when she would feel safe in the company of her brother. She thinks, "those old bonds, strengthened by sorrow, have not snapped. In fact, they have become deeper and stronger. How can I ever forget my past?" (44) The

narrator is in a state of hysteria and is unable to forget the angst-ridden past that is etched deep in her mind. Sigmund Freud writes:

Any experience which calls up distressing affects—much as those of fright, anxiety, shame or physical pain—may operate as a trauma of this kind; and whether it in fact does so depends naturally enough on the susceptibility of the person affected.... We must presume rather that the psychical trauma—or more precisely the memory of the trauma—acts like a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work.... (4-5)

The position of the narrator of “Exile” is like “a tree and earth” whose bonds are so intact that it is difficult to separate them. Their roots are very deep. She feels that the page on which her life story has been written is so smudged with “black” ink, that it is difficult to find a single straight line one it. She feels lonely without her brother and for her “loneliness is hard to endure. Life is difficult” (45).

She dithers between hope and despair. She hopes that one day her brother will come to rescue her but then she also realizes that “the road to the other land is desolate and passes through a burial ground. There is no one there who waits for me. Whoever paid attention to Sita’s lament?” (45). She is right. Woman’s fate is to suffer and bear the burden of atrocities done by her own people as well as ‘others’. It is the memory of the past that shatters her inner self into shreds. There is something about her past—her memories—that haunts her. She thinks, “Often when I carry a basketful of cow dung or milk the cows, or burn *uplas*, I suddenly catch a familiar fragrance in the wind, or hear a familiar tune near me. They make me forget myself...they are from a country which lies forever beyond my reach” (47). When her brother does not come to help her, she feels sad and thinks, “Oh why do I stand waiting at the door? For whom? How much longer will I have to carry this dead corpse of my hope? Why do my eyes fill with tears when I find that the lane outside is desolate?” (52). She has to surrender before her fate.

Even though she tries to reconcile with her fate, accepts her wretchedness and decides not to lament over her past and also decides to look after her children, tormenting memories again tear her psyche apart. Time and again, her hope for better future ahead is overpowered by the agonising memories of abduction, rape, beatings by Gurpal's mother and Gurpal's abuses. Here Freud's views that "all neurosis was a result of previous traumatic experience" (Rick 2) fit to the life of the narrator of the story. She is unable to forget; "When Gurpal dragged me out of the house, I saw my father's body lying in a gutter and his grey head outside it. with his eyes shut and his head soaked in blood... Amma's heart had been pierced by a gleaming spear... I can still hear her screams. I was as helpless then as I am now" (Hashmi 49).

The scenes of violence very often get repeated through her memories. Undeniably, she is a victim of trauma and her mind is rendered a complex web of conflicting emotions. Here it can be concluded that the narrator is suffering from what the trauma theorists term as PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder)—one of the deadliest illnesses (Abubakar 119). And this stress is caused in her mind by the excruciating memories as she herself admits, "The heart is very stubborn. I don't know why it refuses to forget the past" (Hashmi 52). In the end, she is, thus, forced to accept the home of Ravana. It is nothing but her instinct for survival and love of children that she goes on living. She says, "Like everyone in this caravan of life, I have to keep on walking." Yet she is unable to forget her past and feels sad and says, "I don't know when my journey will ever end" (53).

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