



Traumascapes, Temporality and Memory in Trauma Narratives

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ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Keywords:

*Trauma, Memory,
Traumascape, Partition,
Survivor, Temporality,
History, Victim*

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to theorize trauma, temporality, memory and place with reference to Partition Narratives from the perspective of trauma theory. More than a million individuals endured hitherto unheard-of horrors in the chaotic hours and days that followed the British flight, including disease, famine, rape, murder, and communal riots. However, the migrations and resettlements were not the end of the miseries of Partition; they are still happening today. Maria Tumarkin coined the word "traumascapes" to refer to places of trauma that recall memories of loss, suffering, and violence. In traumascapes, the memories of loss are repeatedly reenacted and time appears to be replayed. Traumascapes are eerie locations where the physical and the spiritual, the past and the present, the visible and the invisible, all converge in one shared area. These locations, which Foucault refers to as heterochronias, are where the past and present collide and where the recollection of the original trauma separates from the past.

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14852699>

Caught in a fragmented world torn between wars and genocides, it is high time to theorize trauma, which evades definition and closure. Trauma is closely connected with time and place. This paper attempts to study trauma, temporality, memory and place with reference to Partition Narratives from the



perspective of trauma theory. Trauma theory emerged as a tool to read narratives on trauma; it offered a nuanced approach and interpretation of the narrative.

The primary objective of this study is to theorise the traumascapes and how it becomes sites of trauma memory. The paper focuses on the temporality of trauma and how space and time correlate in the creation of trauma memory. The study elaborates on how traumascapes have become an essential part of people's experiences of mourning, remembering, and making sense of the traumatic histories imprinted onto their soil/place.

Trauma theory became popular in the academics in the 1980s and 1990s. It rendered a nuanced approach to hold a claim on historical experience in the wake of poststructuralist challenges to naïve recourse to authentic experience. This theory emerged focusing on the relationship of words and trauma, and helping us to 'read the wound' with the aid of literature. The awareness or the knowledge of trauma is composed of two factors which are contradictory. The first one is trauma as registered and not actually experienced. Trauma bypasses perception and consciousness, and goes straightaway into the mind. The second one is the memory of the event, which is fragmented and disordered.

More than a million individuals endured hitherto unheard-of horrors in the chaotic hours and days that followed the British flight, including disease, famine, rape, murder, and communal riots. However, the migrations and resettlements were not the end of the miseries of Partition; they are still happening today. Open combat has frequently erupted between India and Pakistan, and riots and sectarian violence are still common in several Subcontinental regions. The precedent that partition created for other countries embroiled in intercommunal conflict is just one example of the effects that partition has had outside of the region. As a result, the violence of the Partition was seen as an unexplained incident that had no bearing on the nation-building process as a whole.

But memoirs, oral histories, and recollections paint a very different picture of a time marked by cruelty, bloodshed, and mass killings—

all of which were the results of an arbitrary religiously motivated partition of the country.

Patriotism served as a cover for the bloodshed.

The defense of specific religious communities served as justification for it.

With millions of citizens uncertain of the term that would define their identities, the creation of two nations gave rise to two classes: the ruling class and the refugee class.



More than 14 million Hindus and Muslims were exchanged during the 1947 religiously motivated partition of British India, which mostly affected the provinces of Bengal and Punjab. Violence broke out and almost a million people were killed because the recently established countries of India and Pakistan (which were established on August 14 and 15, respectively) were unable to manage such a large-scale ethnic cleansing operation. In the new countries, the majority of the survivors lived in substandard refugee camps for months. As they traveled across a new border through perilous areas, they lost not only their houses but also friends and relatives.

People were shocked to see the hideous acts of brutality motivated by religious zeal. The grotesque scenes of violence evoked by religious sentiment were witnessed with shock and bewilderment. A fully communalized eruption of violence, action, and response suggested that religious faith and doctrines that might incite savagery needed to be questioned. At some level of awareness, religious and mythological values started to seem dubious to many. From the beginning of time, patriarchy has shaped and controlled women's identities and responsibilities. Partition's upheaval presented opportunities for a drastic reshaping of women's identities. Additionally, the idea of upholding women's "honour" as an a priori in connection to their lives was questioned. Sexual assaults against women are the most severe and heinous type of religious or communal violence. It seems to give one community authority and control over another, which is a way to degrade the other community.

The idea that women's "honor" should be protected is so ingrained in each community that women were either murdered or forced to commit suicide in order to avoid the humiliation of being sexually attacked and disgraced. According to Ashis Nandy, Veena Das, Mushir-ul-Hasan, and others, women experience strange sexual violence in which their bodies are disfigured and mutilated, their breasts and genitalia are tattooed and displayed "with triumphal slogans," their wombs are cut open, fetuses are killed, and rapes are commonplace. These acts of male savagery use women's bodies as an easy object to degrade the other community. Ironically, the residents of the target group also favored killing their women in order to protect their dignity. Memories created through various narratives literary or audio-visual become sources for diverse brutal historic events during partition. It cannot be relegated to mere numbers of rape, murder and refugees.

Partition narratives are paradigmatic of the close relationship between trauma and literature. Numerous books and movies have attempted to address the so-called "trauma" of partition as well as other types of intercommunal violence that are frequently described, at least in part, in terms of partition trauma narratives and their aftermath: Some of the films that have had a significant impact include



Garam Hawa, Hey Ram!, Dil Se, and Earth; books like *Borders and Boundaries* by Ritu Menon and Khamla Bhasin, *Colors of Violence* by Sudhir Kakar, *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia, and *The Partitions of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India*, edited by Suvir Kaul, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History* by Gyanendra Pandey, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition*, edited by Jasodhara Bagchi and Ubhoranjan Dasgupta, Anders Bjorn Hansen's *Partition and Genocide*, Brian Axel's *The Nation's Tortured Body*; and novels including Bhisam Sahni's *Tamas*, Kushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, and the exquisite *Shadow Lines*, by Amitav Ghosh. *Divided Countries, Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition*, by Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes and Rada Ivekovic', takes India as its starting point to analyze other considerations of potential or fulfilled partition: Ireland, Cyprus, Israel/Palestine, Bosnia, and Kosovo (as well as Cold War ideological partitions: Germany, Vietnam, Korea). In the light of trauma theory, literary narratives and other forms of discourse embodies and transposed trauma as an absent memory. In the absence of memorials and monuments, partition narratives serve as traumascapes incorporating the temporality and memory of that trauma.

There are traumascapes everywhere in the world we live in. They have been the scene of riots, genocides, intercommunal violence, climatic trauma, and more. Traumascapes are a unique type of location that has been physically and psychologically altered by suffering, far beyond being merely the setting for apocalypses. From Hiroshima to Auschwitz, Dresden to Srebrenica, Sarajevo to New York, Bali, London, Jerusalem, and New Orleans, they are a part of a global scar tissue. It may seem strange at first to think of traumascapes as the main protagonists of our era. In general, people use and go to locations. We feel a strong attachment to them, destroy them, and leave them behind. Most people believe that poetry and fiction are the only genres that may explore the possibility of a reciprocal relationship. But the notion that the earth beneath our feet might be incredibly powerful—that is, capable of immense resistance and haunting—is not only a lyrical device.

In recent decades, traumascapes have become much more than the actual locations of disasters, and their growth appears inconceivable. We are now learning how important traumascapes have become to people's experiences of grieving, remembering, and making sense of the traumatic histories etched on their soil because trauma is not contained in an event per se, but rather in how the event is experienced.

Tumarkin argues that the places we inhabit become bedrocks of our identity and “storehouses for individual and collective memory” (200). The term “traumascapes” from Maria Tumarkin describes the sites of trauma that evoke, legacies of violence, suffering and loss. Traumascapes are places where



time seems to replay itself and the experiences of loss are continuously re-experienced. Traumascapas become evocative spaces where the past and present, the absent and the present, seen and unseen, physical and mental tropes exist simultaneously. They are the places that compel memories, crystallize identities, and exude power and enchantment. Traumascapas help the modern man to come to terms with the trauma and aid to navigate through the tragedies causing severe trauma.

Foucault calls these sites heterochronias; places where the present and past collapse, where the evocation of the initial trauma leaves the past open in the present, constraining individual agency while giving agency to place. The trauma of partition and its psychological impact resonate through private and public memory even in contemporary times. Physical dislocation happened during Partition combined with violence converted the body into a site of personal and cultural trauma:

Consequent to this violence in which the most interior aspects of life were the most intruded upon--fleeing to another alien space led to a division of the self and the world according to a logic that made the self radically fugitive and the world radically fragmented. (Das 65)

These sites evoke trauma narratives because “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in the repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it” (Caruth 4-5). Although memory governs us, people frequently memorialize these painful locations in an attempt to cope with the anguish they evoke. Traumascapas have become much more than the actual locations of disasters, growing at an unfathomable rate in recent decades. Because trauma is found in how an incident is experienced rather than in the event itself. People's experiences of grieving, remembering, and making sense of the painful past etched onto their land or location now depend heavily on traumascapas.

The location itself, its devastation, and its survival are inextricably linked to the significance of the Partition as one of the most important historical catastrophes of the late 20th century. The location now becomes part of the event.

An impressive illustration of a location that influences both the experiences and perceptions of a specific tragedy is the tale of the border's severing as a traumascape.

In fact, it has taken center stage in efforts to grasp what transpired there when it broke apart, as well as in the pursuit of a true comprehension of recent history and, to a considerable extent, of world history.

Additionally, partition fiction serves as a site for the partial recovery of memory, bringing to light the individual and collective memories of marginalized groups and encouraging us to reconsider the im



personal, occasionally inhuman, and frequently debilitating mainstream historical narratives that obscure traumatic suffering and death. Granofsky outlines certain fundamental traits of the trauma novel so that readers in the future can determine with certainty whether the book they are reading is a trauma novel. He renames the three stages of trauma—stasis, disintegration, and resymbolization—to make them "more literary," assuming that psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton's theories are accurate. Regression, fragmentation and reunion, and Lifton's stages are the three renamed phases.

Memory exist in different forms whether it is collective, historical, personal, public, traumatized, autobiographical, repressed, narrative or cultural and are represented and transmitted through various narratives. Through their stories, trauma survivors and/or witnesses both become the agents of history as memory and oppose history as reality. The specifics of Partition, the personal and cultural recollections of it, are not spoken or written about, despite the fact that India celebrates her independence annually and that its history is publicly available. It still lives quietly and in the private sphere.

Caruth does not simply equate trauma with an actual traumatic event, but wonders, "Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?" (7), In *Glossalalia*, Julian Wolfeys, on the subject of thinking (or rather the impossibility of thinking) the origins of deconstruction, asks the question, "Does [this phrase, the origins of deconstruction] give us to read a disabling and impossible temporality in the same place as the desire for an identity?" (213). The same question should be asked in thinking of the origin of trauma (deconstruction is indeed a traumatic moment in the history of French philosophy, and is sometimes seen as an origin to post-structuralist thinking--a rather structural assumption).

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