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The Inheritance of Trauma: Partition, Children's Identities, and Parental Grief

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Abstract

The partition of India-Pakistan (migration) was one of the most violent and traumatic events faced by the people in contemporary time. Pali by Sahni is a story which explains the catastrophic fallout of Indo-Pak divisions which brings along with it, intense suffering on children, due to religious riots, and communal violence. Pali experiences series of emotions from alienation to identity crises. Children as a result of such mass migration not only lost their sense of belonging but also face psychological displacement. Children who witnessed the horrors of partition struggled with their fragmented identities and in the later stage, the unresolved trauma becomes intergenerational. Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory is employed to explore how unassimilated traumatic events in consciousness lead to the manifestation of trauma, which parallels Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the Third Space, where unresolved identities give rise to hybrid expressions. As a result, fragmented identities move to a liminal space and the Third space becomes a zone catering to fractured identities so



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both become a point of intersection. The trauma that is created by migration becomes collective and affects parents as well as disrupting fixed identities. The analysis demonstrates that cultural dislocation and unresolved grief lead to a liminal space of existence proving the connections between trauma theory and third space. The torment experienced by Pali, remains deeply stamped and indescribable, symbolizing a plea for humanity amidst chaos. This study breathes new life into “*Pali*,” offering its enduring message to those striving to understand history and envision a compassionate, inclusive future.

Keywords: children trauma, displacement, fragmented identities, hybridity, migration

1. Introduction

India Pakistan partition has been phenomenal in the history of modern world, due to large scale massacre, religious disputes, and violent and forced migration, which were based on their belief systems, irrespective of their free will, which resulted in fractured identities and extended intergenerational trauma (Bashir et al., 2021; Uma Maheswary & Lourdasamy, 2023). Newly drawn borders not only defined the regional territories, but also defined the arbitrary territories of immigrants also. The effect of that partition remained knitted in the cultural and psychological fabric of South Asia, due to its socio-economic reasons (Suttie, 1924). Literature has played pivotal role in documenting the sufferings of people’s experience, and it has served as a powerful tool to record the themes of trauma, alienation and identity crises.

Bashan Sahni’s *Pali*, portrays the suffering of child, who is caught between two regions and two parents due to partition. It gives him two identities, each of which is traumatic, which haunts the previous, and never let him be at peace with his present. He defies his connection with both of his parents due to psychologically fractured past. The partition becomes a source of agony instead of healing for both families and the child, who is shown dismantled between what his real name, creed and parents are. The story highlights the physical, emotional and cultural, fragmentation caused by partition. Widespread violence and displacement take away the innocence and carefree life of children, because it is shown lost in the submergence of communal violence and political division (Thien & Malapert, 1989; Yusin, 2009a). South Asian partition literature shows how parents and children experience dual trauma, not because of migration, but due to religious riots and broken family bonds owing to large scale unplanned migration. Children and their psychological issues are usually not discussed broadly in migration literature, especially from the perspective of fragmented identities due to broken units of families and the trauma which occurs by witnessing brutalities on a massive scale.

In Indo-Pak narratives religion has been used as a tool for cultural assimilation and shaping children's identities, through forced conversions, renaming and imposing cultural norms, which in the long run create wounded psychological memories, and dual identities, while adhering to none (Suttie, 1924; Wiese, 2010a; Yusin, 2009a). Parents suffer due to their lost children, while children suffer due to the loss of their parents. It impacts deeply and leaves scars on their psychological wellbeing, which creates an intergenerational impact of partition.

This paper investigates how literature of migration expresses the experience of children and parents, while touching the themes of innocence, identity crises, psychological trauma both at the hands of cultural dislocation and religious extremism. The translated version of Pali is used for this purpose.

2. Literature Review

Forced migration is associated with long term trauma which flows into generations after generations due to its bitter imprints on human psyche. Trauma must be understood with in specific culture as it is the cultural context which delineates the life experiences and attached meanings to them as for external perhaps they are not as painful and torturous (Shupe, 2007). Migration impacts the family and a massive interference is observed in the child's psychological development and mental health, which can be severe if related to acculturative stress or traumatic states. Young infants can develop insecure, ambivalent, or disorganized attachment; their lack of basic trust in their surroundings can result in negative effects in their exploratory behavior and autonomy, which may be reflected in disorganized behavior (Wiese, 2010b). Much work is needed to be done on the psyche of children who were the part of migration and bear many negative consequences and tragedies (Clauss-Ehlers, 2019; Shupe, 2007). Indo-Pak literature talks about the trauma, bloodshed and victimization carried out during migration in 1947. But it is silent on how the life is taken by children who experienced violent, migration. Migration brings with itself the sense of shame, guilt and unrest. It was registered by indo-pak migrants to die rather than living alive (Butalia, 2017). There was shame everywhere, and guilt persisted in their entire lives as an unforgettable memory, which assaulted them for not being careful in managing things in those hours. It is not a sacrifice as narrated romantically in the fictions by many. Migration entails many other problems which included to be assimilated with other culture and then the duty of nation building (Salim, 2001) . Migrants are rather victims of sociopolitical forces, where common masses are used as a scapegoat (Kamra, 2002). The border becomes the site of the simultaneity between empirically known realities that constitute specific historical contexts and the overwhelming experience of history that exceeds immediate understanding. From the borders of the 1947 Partition, the subcontinent inherited what it is called "a geography of trauma" – a conceptual schema that was at once a geographical and national reality in which

people lived and an ungraspable experience that refused boundaries. It is argued that the border created through the Partition became the geographical inscription of the meaning and impacted of history upon identity – both collective and individual – and demanded an impossible yet necessary witness (Yusin, 2009b).

Not one alive, not one

Mumbled someone near my head

I cried out with all my might

I am not dead, I am not dead

But no one heard me

My words had no sound (Kwaja 2007).

One cannot talk about partition without involving community violence, political upheavals, identity crises, and cultural trauma. It has been one of the biggest migration in the history of the world, where independence took birth in the mid of night, which ushered indelible imprints of trauma, which remain inscribed in their identities, as collective intergenerational trauma (Didur, 2006: Caruth, 2016).

Following questions have been investigated while reading the story.

- How does the trauma of Partition shape the identities of children, and parents with respect to loss of family bonds, cultural displacement and religious identity?
- How do the psychological effects of Partition trauma on parents reflect in their relationship with their children, and what does this reveal about the intergenerational transmission of trauma, due to socio-political power dynamics?

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

In this article, postcolonial theory (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978), trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; LaCapra, 2001) and identity and cultural studies (Hall, 1996; Butler, 1990) are deployed to investigate the pains of an arbitrary divisions, which trigger identity crises, and intergenerational trauma which delineates the lives of people, leaving deep scars on their behavior.

Postcolonial theory paves the way to look at how the divided borders inflicted agonies due to the difference of religion and socio-political different perspective. Pali, by Bhisham Sahni represents the story of child suffering along with his two parents, who suffered doubled, due to the regional division. Homi K. Bhaba's concept of *third space*

is used to analyze Pali's character how he assimilates himself first to a Muslim family, though originally Hindu, and later again into a Hindu family with the change of name, while performing all religious rituals. The story reflects the continuation of fragmented identities which is further intensified by the two characters maulvi and Hindu Chaudhri, who represent communal violence.

Trauma theory, particularly Cathy Caruth's concept of unassimilated trauma is essential to employ to understand the psychological and cyclic sufferings of characters. Manohar Lal and his wife Kaushalya's unended grief of losing their son, which lead his mother near to madness. Pali's confusion of accepting his parents, his name, his religion and culture, highlight intergenerational trauma and unresolved tensions. The trauma of displacement, portrayed in Pali, does not represent individual issue but it's a representation of collective trauma, which continues to affect the communities as explained by LaCapra.

Identity crises are explored through the lens of identity as a fluid, as put forward by Hall. Pali's identity is tailored by external forces including religious gravity, meeting societal expectations, and communal pressures. Further Butler's theory of performativity strengthens how gender performs its identity under different circumstances.

4. Analysis of the Narrative (Pali)

Bhisham Sahni's Pali is bitter narrative of trauma caused by the partition of India. It has documented the horrifying experiences of individuals that kept them haunting throughout their lives and transferred to the next generation as sinister and broken reality of what they have never imagined. It portrays the psychological impact of partition by emphasizing the importance of loss, displacement and alienation. In the story Manohar Lal's separation from his child and his continuous desperation to find his child in the refugee camps and all lorries by shouting out his name, with dry throat as shouting in a desert, while Kaushalya's continuous lament over his lost child that took her to the verge of madness shows emotional chaos which is inflicted upon them due to partition. "Even on reaching Delhi, Manohar Lal could not get over the sensation of being crushed under a heap of dead bodies... Kaushalya moaned as if she was on the verge of insanity"(Sahni, 2007, p. 64).

Unresolved trauma marked strong psychological scars even on Pali's character. For example, his submergence to Muslim family to mix into the cultural norms, disconnected him from his real parents, which caused identity crises and alienation. This confusion created intergenerational trauma, which gives way to the production of depressed nation with no connection to their roots and real identity as narrated by

Sahni in 2007, "Pali stood there looking utterly confused. 'What's your name, boy?' ... 'Altaf Husain, son of Shakur Ahmed" (Sahni, 2007, p.66).

Pains and sufferings need a proper closure. If the closure is not given, such wounds haunt the sufferer throughout his life. Zainab returned Pali/ Altaf to his biological parents not because she wanted, but just because of the fear of God, which left her in despair and perpetual grief.

Due to socio-political and faith-based disputes and violence, characters are portrayed as brutal and they lack empathy. The indifference of guard by saying, "Will the lorry keep waiting for your child? If you want to search for your child, you'd better get down from the lorry", (Sahni, 2007, p. 58) which shows that they need empathy. Similarly, Pali's adoption and his circumcision are another example of how powerless child is exploited by the couple to serve their own longing of a Muslim child. Bhisham Sahni says in his story that mullahs planted the seed of hatred and fanaticism in children at the young age.

The story becomes more poignant when the ending is left unconcluded and unresolved. It reflects societal weak and coward attitude to accept the brutality and the trauma that is attached with forced political migration. It criticizes people's unwillingness to confront the painful effects of partition on identities and relationships. Pali's internal conflict with his identity both religiously and by name is strengthened and lingered on till the end of the story and he is represented as the symbol of partition unhealed, unresolved and uncured emotional and psychological injuries. It is represented in the story as, "Pali stood there looking utterly confused... 'Your name is Pali—Yashpal!' The boy stood silent and then mumbled, 'Altaf.'" (Sahni, 2007.p. 72).

Sorrowful journey of families has gone through under endless cycle of agonies and sufferings due to partition. Zenab's wishful desire to see Altaf on Eids is the depiction to preserve connection with the ones who are gone. "Zenab said, 'He is gone, and with him is gone all the gaiety of this house... Well, what do you think? Will he come to visit us for Id?'" (Sahni, 2007.p. 73). Nothing ever finds its solace and emotional closure in the narrative of Sahni, rather the pains keep on rippling as an aftereffect of partition.

India and Pakistan's division was made on the basis of religious and ideological differences amongst the people of two different communities. It caused immeasurable suffering due to displacement and people inherited split identities. This led Manohar Lal's family to leave their family and during this, their family was displaced and lost, uprooting them and causing incalculable sufferings in their lives. Religion was used as a tool to unite people, but it caused emotional upheavals for others. One's happiness

was a lifelong suffering for others. For instance, Pali was Altaf from Yashpal. His arbitrary new naming under societal pressure created a new identity which kept on rotating him like a pendulum throughout his life. It is narrated that Hindu identity was buried after his conversion and adaption into a Muslim family. He got assimilated into Muslim culture, which later on became a traumatic experience for him when he returned to his biological parents. It is also narrated that every afternoon at the particular hour, he would know that it was *namaz* time. “He instinctively knows that it’s time for *namaz*” (Sahni, 2007).

Religion has been used to control people and exhibit power dynamics. Religious trauma has been penetrated deep into individuals’ lives, that it had created upheavals after partition. In the story the child was forced to say *Kalma* without convincing and without his will. He was not trained to embrace faith system through kindness. Similarly, his adopted parents were made afraid to adopt a child who is not Muslim. Clerics demand for circumcising and recite *Kalma* did not child’s faith psychologically rather it developed resistance against the community. Moreover, his parents were traumatized by calling a child snake if not converted to Islam. As written in the story, “Why don’t you speak? You give a kafir’s polluted child a place in your lap... Do you want to nurture a snake?” (Sahni, 2007, p. 61).

Similarly, after his return to his real parents the societal pressure propelled him to raze his head to be a part of Sikh community which alleviated his prevailing trauma. The child kept sobbing throughout the ceremony. His weak protest could not be better registered than this, where he was shown helpless at the hands religious scholars.

Throughout the narrative, Pali has been exploited religiously. Both communities dehumanized and traumatized the child to enforce their religious superiority and penetrated their ideologies. The child’s individuality was erased, and each of the community has used him as a symbol of their triumph, if he surrendered to their faith system. Zenab’s sincere love for Pali/Altaf was also dominated by the societal pressure to assert Islamic identity through his conversion. Her ultimate surrender for the boy was motivated more by fear of societal repercussions than by her private drive.

Religion which should be the source of solace, had been a perpetual cause of continuous torture for Pali. It did not let him reconcile peacefully with his parents and damaged his personality and caused long-term trauma. His attachment with his adopted parents was shattered, when he was taken aback and it led him to a confusion about his identity and place in the world.

The trauma experienced by the immigrants is beyond physical displacement. It became generational trauma, sprouting identity crises. Forced implementation of new identities and immediate reconciliation with the new community brought continuous trauma and

feeling of alienation. Pali, who was too young to understand the reason of migration, the trauma was coupled with the removal of his previous identity and later again, a new identity was given, which eventually inferred confusion in his own existence. The identity crises, triggered by religion and forced displacement is not individual but collective which vibrates across generation. Manohar Lal and Kaushalya carried the burden of their lost child, which was doubled by the land separation. The guilt of losing her child fetched haunted challenges for her own motherhood and traced her till she lost her sanity. In the same way, Pali's adopted mother lost her identity of motherhood, as soon she sent him back to his biological mother. Pali's Muslim cap was removed on his return to India. It was another forceful continuity of religious and communal violence/trauma, which aggravated confusion in child's mind. The story highlights how the personal and collective wounds of Partition remain open, unresolved, and deeply rooted in the psyche of those displaced, making trauma a continuous and intergenerational experience.

Partition narratives have hardly touched upon the issues of children trauma. Children are the symbol of innocence and purity but while reading Pali, it is realized how cruelly their innocence has been butchered. They are fragile and vulnerable and powerless Infront of the society. They are shown as a powerless witness of the chaos and brutalities, due to the politics of religion and powerful institutes. In Pali, Pali's parting from his parents during the chaotic expatriate drive accentuates, how the turmoil of Partition torn apart families and dislocated lives without regard for age and innocence.

Children during partition who were lost or orphaned, usually took the identities of dominant culture for their safety and survival (Saint, 2019). It is a deep disruption for a little child, as they are caught between their real and imposed identities (Arshad, 2021). Children are also not the agent of change, but they were used an instrument to reshape the superiority of culture and religion. The child's lack of agency in these descriptions highlights the illogical and traumatic nature of these conversions (Raj, 2000). Children in Partition accounts not only embody the immediate effect of the incident but also represent the long-term, intergenerational trauma it leaves behind. Their experiences serve as reminders of the scars Partition has imprinted on families and communities (Ali, 2024; Nadeem, 2022). The ordeal experienced by children often influences their relationships with their families and communities, perpetuating the emotional and psychological toll of Partition. Children in these narratives often act as metaphors for the fractured states of nations and communities. Their dislocation mirrors the physical and emotional displacement experienced by millions during Partition.

4.1. Discussion

The trauma partition is replete with the issues of identity crises, broken familial bonds, enforced cultural displacement, and imposed religious identities. It is studied that whole movement was an arbitrary movement for some external socio-political causes at the expense of common people's life and peace. For children like Pali in the story of Bisham Sahni, the psychological war is never extinguished within himself. He was too young to understand and fell into the deep pit of fear, silence, isolation and an unresolved trauma. An immense burden of fractured sense of self is observed, which is provoked further by the religious intolerance. Pali's struggle illuminates the narratives of suffering, and magnifies the effect of hatred on the human psyche. Pali was renamed as Altaf, and his struggle to be a part of Muslim community, consequently erased his original identity. Which later on prepared him to face another encounter of meeting his original parents. It highlights that enforced transformation how religion and cultural norms during the Partition were used as tools to define new identities, often disregarding individual agency (Wiese, 2010; Yusin, 2009). For children it's a war to be thrown outside your culture, religion and snatched away by your real parents, as it creates a psychological burden that disrupts their development and understanding of self, which make them constant outsider in both communities, without any deep-rooted identity. It creates a sense of shallowness and hollow being, where one cannot adhere to any culture.

Parents, on the other side, underwent a strange type of trauma, where their children are killed, snatched or lost, which broke their familial bond, and consequently, it effects their psychological state, from which they cannot heal ever. As it is felt that a part of them has gone due to their own negligence. Manohar Lal and Kausalya's efforts to rescue and find their son back caused disintegration of their family, which could not let them reconcile psychologically till they found him again. The literature review highlights how parents carry the burden of guilt and loss, often projecting these unresolved emotions onto their children, whether through overprotectiveness or emotional withdrawal (Butalia, 2017). The constant and reckless efforts of Pali's biological parents to get united with their lost parents is ironically explained through their failure to build a harmonious relation with him, as his previous identity came always in clash with the new identity in the new culture, and it didn't go in alignment with their expectations. It resonates how trauma deeply fractured the identities and even family relations. 09u8

The parents of children are also psychologically tested, which took their sanity. This lingering trauma took the shape of pain and alienation. Manohar Lal's and Kausalya's experiences of displacement and violence trickle into their relations with Pali, forming a sense of withdrawal rather than determination. Similarly, Zeinab withdrawal, because of religious and societal pressure, did not bring solace to her, rather it made

him barren again and snatched its new identity. Maheswary and Lourdusamy, (2023) stressed that intergenerational trauma is the result of socio-political dynamics, where religion and identity are used as a tool to control people. The prolonged trauma is further intensified because the sufferings have been left unhealed, and a proper closure is not given. Crauth, (2016) claimed that if the emotional wounds are left open and they are not properly acknowledged and, they turned into unresolved grief and alienation, which is never healed and cured. Pali's confusion about his name, parents and religion emphasized this absence, which made him to oscillate between Yashpal and Altaf, never fully embodying either. For parents, the guilt of failing to guard their children during Partition becomes a problem they unintentionally pass down. Kaushalya's near-madness and Zenab's quiet despair validate how socio-political power dynamics prescribed personal lives, leaving both parents and children powerless to reconcile with their sufferings.

5. Conclusion

The story Pali, revolves around the psychological struggle of a four-year-old child, who became the victim of identity crises and adheres to this lingering trauma, due to external power dynamics. It is investigated that his individual identity, personal emotions and patriotic love were considered trivial and baseless Infront of religious doctrines and societal collective decree. Throughout the story it is observed that Pali has experienced tremendous emotional turmoil, by assimilating himself with religious doctrines, by completely disregarding his own feelings. His individual consciousness was never questioned and asked and It was always shadowed by powerful institutes. The physical pain of circumcision as part of his adoption into the Muslim community is intensified by the emotional turmoil of being returned to India and subjected to Hindu rituals, including the shaving of his head. Neither community nor religion provides him with solace or a sense of belonging, leaving him perpetually alienated and emotionally scarred. The story is ended with emotional sentiments which are heart-wrenching, but boy's sentiments were never taken into account and foregrounded and his feelings left quite unrecognized

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