

Female Violence and the Force of Trauma in “The City of Sorrow”

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Abstract

The focus of this study is on the area of traumatic affect. Intizar Hussain represents female violence and displacement during India's partition in neutral way keeping identity politics away. Such a study is important to observe trauma literature in the light of pure affect and critically evaluate the trauma literatures which are found to have been valorizing one side and demonizing others for the vested interest. The research approach adopted in this study includes literature review of women violence during the partition and a brief comparison of 'The City of Sorrow' with 'Train to Pakistan' to identify two different approaches of representing trauma. The findings from this study provide an insight on pure affect evoked by Hussain. The conclusion drawn from this study sheds light on how the hatred and the violence create the vicious circle of trauma and the chain can be minimized in trauma art by 'moral working through', keeping identity politics at bay.

Keywords: violence, traumatic affects, soul, redemption, identity politics, displacement, morality

The force of trauma in literature evokes 'affect' in readers arousing sympathy, empathy and self-introspection concerning the painful events. The story *The City of Sorrow* by Intizar Husain is concerned with displacement, forced migration, family detachment, violent attack in general; sexual molestation and rape of women and girls in particular. Soul in pain after death is the agency of trauma. Departed souls of different people hover in search of their

recognition. The author attempts to force readers to fill up the gaps and absences in the story avoiding identity marker of characters and places. Reminiscences of hovering souls in purgatory symbolically portray the attempts of characters/souls to get redemption of trauma. This paper argues that, in *The City of Sorrow* pure affect is evoked about the sexual assault to female and pain of people during the partition of India keeping identity markers away. This paper shows how the story forces the readers to think over the gaps or absences but it does not fill up them.

Victims turn to be perpetrator and perpetrators turn to be victims. In *The City of Sorrow*, the first man commands the young man to strip his sister naked threatening with sword. The young man entreats the first man not to do so. "Slowly with shaking hands, he reached for his sister's saree. She screamed and covered her face" (49). Sympathy of readers goes to the young man but in course of story it does not last long. The first man found the young man commanding an aged man to strip his wife naked. The young man grabbed the aged man by the neck. There is an encounter between the young man and the first man. The first man is caught in the crowd. The young man reappears with a girl who is found to be the daughter of the first man. The young man threatens the first man to 'strip her'. Readers are forced to ponder on who is to blame. Striping women seems to be the action of revenge to make others' dignity down. Both perpetrator and perpetuated have traumatizing experiences. The conversation takes place in 'Mirtyulok'(purgatory). It is not sure who are the people whether Hindus or Muslims or Shikhs. All people are responsible for violence to female.

The general trend of showing one person or community glorious and another nefarious is absent in the story. The readers' pity is evoked neither to the first man nor to the young man but to all females who are the victim of male's supremacy at first. Pity is aroused to all women irrespective of their caste and religion. If the author had named characters such as Hindus, Shikhs and Muslims or had he kept particular place in India or Pakistan, the 'common memory' of people regarding history and identity politics would be barrier to evoke 'sense memory' to some extent. When the young man commanded the first man to strip his daughter naked, the girl began to tremble and the first man fainted. The father cannot protect his daughter. Entire environment is out of his control. On the street the familiar dog unusually barked at him, in the bazaar he encountered a girl with tattered saree, face covered with dirt, slim body with swollen belly. At home his wife bolted door from inside and does not open easily. Whole street, market, homes are unsecured. Females are treated as commodities of males' 'gaze'. In the 'Mirtyulok' the memory of the souls is not clear. Entire picture of devastating violence to female is not shown in chronological order. The characters are not sure where they are and from where they come. Dim memory of violence is triggered by the questions of others as Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin say in *The Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, "Once the floodgates were opened, that we always could not determine the flow. Sometimes murky, sometimes clear (18). The inability of a father to save his daughter being raped and his helpless condition before the rapist is very poignant. At the same time readers remember the violent behavior of the protagonist to the sister of the rapist of his daughter. The young man has taken revenge against the protagonist by raping his innocent daughter. Thus, it captures the specialty of trauma residing in the body of traumatized person and directly transports it to the body of the readers.

The honor of a person, a community and a nation is seen in the body of females. During the partition riot of India, revenge to another side was taken by peering, leering and raping women. The book by Ritu Menon and kamala Bhasin *The Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* is the hallmark record of violence to female during the partition riot. They state, "The extent and nature of violence that women were subjected to when communities conflagrated, highlights not only their particular vulnerability at such times, but an overarched patriarchal consensus that emerges on how to dispose of the troublesome questions of women's sexuality" (20). In *The Cities of Sorrow* the female are subjected to torture and they do not have their own voice to express their pains. They are in compensatory role, not in the contributory role though the story is about them. Females are the most vulnerable innocent victims in the story which is similar in *The Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin further state, "Women's sexuality, as it had been violated by abduction, transgressed by enforced conversion and marriage and exploited by impermissible cohabitation and reproduction was at the center of debates around nationality, honor, identity and citizenship in India"(20). Chastity of girls and women is the matter of males' pride. Husain shows the series of sexual assault to female intended to make the reputation of other down.

The pain of the soul in mirtyulok(purgatory) touches viscerally. The departed souls are struck failing to recognize their own faces of dead bodies. Their failure to carry the dead bodies of their fathers show their displacement and separation from their families. When the second man was questioned why he did not bring his dead body with his soul, he answered, "I should have brought it with me, who knows how they will treat it?"(51). This expression shows he did not die natural death. He was killed in violence that it was even difficult to recognize his disfigured face. His soul even after death is not sure how people will treat his body. Symbolically, his trauma is not over. It is haunting him. The suspicion of the protagonist's wife to males' voice, even to her husband's voice and her waiting for the safe return of her daughter touches the sense organs of people and compel them to think on such terrible condition. The protagonist does not tell anything about the sexual assault of his daughter though he had seen her being sexually assaulted. The soul of the first man does not know that he is dead. Symbolically, the traumatized soul of the protagonist has not got redemption. He saw his father praying in dim light. He was mistaken that he was alive and his father too. His wife says, "Your father is dead, your daughter has been raped and dishonored... you are dead" (51). Ellipsis after the rape and dishonor of daughter shows there is something inexpressible or more to convey about the daughter which forces readers to think more and excavate the partition violence. The dead father of the protagonist found to be praying in dim light may imply that he is praying for his granddaughter's safety. The protagonist's forgetfulness that he was dead indicates his traumatized soul is not in rest as he could not release his daughter from the hand of perpetrator. In *Emphatic vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Jill Bennett refers Deluge's 'encountered sign' stating, "Pain conceived as a call for acknowledgment implies that a response is compelled. And it is compelled at a level that engages affect. That is to say pain touches us viscerally" (48). The readers tend to think and assimilate the similar incidents, though imaginatively, gives a type of sensation to readers. Jill Bennett further writes, "There is something innately uncountable about the phenomenon of pain within representation. If is not transferable as a condition pertaining to the subject, it is apt to 'shock' us at the level of inducing an autonomic, pre-reflective response" (50). The thought of the readers is provoked. Readers rationally look at the incident

and condemn it. The readers' emphatic identification with the traumatized souls creates 'pure affect' in Deluge's term. The restless soul of the protagonist being fed up traumatic events finally reaches to the open field only to encounter even more traumatic events. The protagonist observes the affect in males, females and children as it is written in the story, "Finally, I came to an open field. A large crowd was gathered there. The children were crying with hunger, the lips of the adults were chapped, the breast of the mothers were dry, fresh faces had withered, fair women were covered with dirt" (52). The extreme economic crisis is reflected here. The cause of economic crisis in a level that pushes people below absolute poverty line is questionable. Readers do not find the answer of this question in the story which forces readers to fill the gaps searching the partition violence and the humanitarian problems caused by it. This expression reflects the severe crisis appealing our body to feel, though imaginatively, and awakens rage to the situation and compels to introspect. The introspection brings stimuli, that is the pure affect by the story. The real incidents dropped out in the story are filled up with the self-interrogating and searching the contextual facts.

Husain concentrates on the consequences of trauma but does not express much about the causes of trauma. He wants to show that traumatic events are good for none. When the third man challenges to recognize their faces, both (the first man and the second man) claimed that their faces were disfigured. When the first man was asked when his face was disfigured, he replies, "When I forced the young man to strip his sister" (53). We know that the first man forced the young man to strip his sister. As a reaction, the young man forced the first man to strip his daughter naked. We cannot find in depth description how their faces were disfigured. How painful it was. The disfigured faces can be taken figuratively. It may portray two meanings. First, the torture was so much violent that the face could not be recognized. Second, forced migration pushes to facelessness, that is to say rootless condition, causing the problem of identity crisis. In *Traumatic Affect* by Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson under the chapter "Torturous Affect: Writing and the Problem of Pain" Richardson expresses citing the example of torture to Amerey by the Nazis, "Figural language cannot do justice to his experience of torture, there remain an irreducible gap between what his body knows and words can express" (148). Pity is aroused to disfigured faces. It indicates that people were killed during the partition in such a brutal way that they were attacked making their faces disfigured. Traumatized souls in the mirtyulok (purgatory) are hanging to find out their real faces. One man claims his face saying that his face was disfigured but another man claimed that disfigured face belonged to him. Both of them had the similar experiences. It is mentioned that at least they were not butchered. This reference shows that many people were beheaded. In the story the details of beheading, butchering and disfiguring and are absent.

The pain is inexpressible or incommunicable. Words cannot express the intensity of pain. By showing the consequences of torture, Husain makes reads to think on the incidents. Richardson further expresses, "To have pain is to have certainty, to hear about pain is to have doubt" (149). Instead of attempting to illustrate the pain and torture Husain forces the readers to introspect and feel. If the readers are the survivor of partition violence they can feel the intensity bodily than in the words. Others reader who are not related to partition violence have 'shock to thought' that leads to certain sensation or feeling which is transmitted from the text to the body of readers. It also appeals them to find out the facts of partition violence to fill the lapses or gaps. Language is culture. Culture comes from experiences. Trauma leaves the traces in mind. Good writes try to tell about the pain not by focusing on narration

of the story but by transmitting the pain. In the story the pain of hanging souls, their inability to recognize their disfigured faces forces readers to feel the pain viscerally. The writer does not use many words to describe the pain.

The given morality is evoked in the story. The readers cannot identify the caste and religion of the characters. The readers assimilate the restless soul of the characters to their own souls. Awakening given morality the author is attempting for redemption of traumatized soul. The incidents condemn itself which helps to come out of trauma. 'Moral working through' has been applied to come out of trauma. 'Cultural working through' play identity politics. Identity politics brings back cycle of violence. When there is identity politics, trauma loses its agency. In *The City of Sorrow* trauma itself speaks as there is not any identity marker of characters. For instance, in *Train to Pakistan*, Khuswant Singh speaks on behalf of trauma. At first Khuswant Singh seems neutral showing the facts of killing, torturing, raping of all sides. Later, identity politics overshadows his neutral approach. Historical facts are drawn to demonizing Muslims. Muslims are generalized that they deserve punishment for their heinous crimes. The following extract from *Train to Pakistan* shows how the identity politics is played in the novel:

The Sikhs were sullen and angry. 'Never trust a Mussulman,' they said. The last Guru had warned them that Muslims had no loyalties. He was right. All through the Muslim period of Indian history, sons had imprisoned or killed their own fathers and brothers had blinded brothers to get the throne. And what had they done to the Sikhs? Executed two of their Gurus, assassinated another and butchered his infant children; hundreds of thousands had been put to the sword for no other offence than refusing to accept Islam; their temples had been desecrated by the slaughter of kine; the holy Granth had been torn to bits. And Muslims were never ones to respect women. Sikh refugees had told of women jumping into wells and burning themselves rather than fall into the hands of Muslims. Those who did not commit suicide were paraded naked in the streets, raped in public, and then murdered... These were reasons enough to be angry with someone. So they decided to be angry with the Muslims; Muslims were basely ungrateful. Logic was never a strong point with Sikhs; when they were roused, logic did not matter at all. (77)

Contrary to *Train to Pakistan* in *The city of sorrow*, there is no ventriloquism. In the story if protagonist realized that he was not died, he would still carry the trauma. But he comes to realize he is really dead which symbolically represents his trauma has got redemption. The reference to Gaya, the place of enlightenment of Gautam Buddha, by the protagonist adds flavor to spiritual instinct. The protagonist states, "I was born in a place called Gaya, the mendicant of Gaya learnt that in this world there is only suffering that it is impossible to attain nirvana here, and that this earth cannot be trusted" (53). Spiritual touch is again evoked stating that as the faces were disfigured they could not be recognized to be trapped again in the violence as the third man was told, "Your disfigured face was your salvation" (57). Disfigured faces of the characters and difficulties to mark out their own faces seem ironic. It can be assumed that their face was disfigured due to violence but it is not known in depth by whom it was done how did they do it. The disfigured faces themselves are sufficient to evoke the feeling of violence.

Displacement faced by people has been portrayed in the story in the dim memory of traumatized souls. Readers cannot find the chronology of the violence and agents of violence

in the story. Being born and grown up in Sahranpur, Uttar Pradesh, India, Husain was forced to migrate to Pakistan. In the story 'nowhere-ness' caused by violence has been reflected. But readers do not get any subjective detail of partition of India. In the story, the third man says, "During the first migration, we left graves of our ancestors behind. This time, we left the bodies of our recently dead"(54). This expression shows that many families were separated during the partition. First generation left ancestral homeland. Ancestral tie was snapped. Second generation found their rootless condition. The memory of the ancestral bond was in the dim memory of the displaced first generation. For the second generation, narration of the first generation haunted. Stories touched them. The third man/soul further adds, "I do not know whether I migrated or not but all these bright faces have vanished before my eyes"(54). 'Bright faces' may imply ancestors, relatives or social circle. They are not available at present ensures that his migration was not voluntary. It shows that after the partition people did not get opportunities to meet their 'bright faces'. In *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, Gyanendra pandey writes, "After partition, individuals, families and communities in the subcontinent remade themselves in radically altered setting. They had to struggle to overcome new fears"(16). Partition survivors had stories to share with new generation to which new generation were not concerned with. Pandey further adds a fact, " It was in December 1947 that the government of India declared Pakistan to be 'foreign territory' for the purpose..."(68). In *Proust and Signs*, Deluge writes, "Truth depends on encounter with something that forces us to think and seek the truth. It is the sign that constitutes the object of an encounter and works this violence upon us" (16). 'Bright faces' of the ancestors and the 'disfigured face' of the third man are in opposition. This makes readers to find out the truth or to dig out the history of partition and make the meaning of this opposition. In the story, a woman disappears in the forest in Nepal shows that it is the story of Nepal's neighboring country. "I was born in Gaya" further clarifies the fact. These help to locate the place but Gaya was not the place that was affected much. The author has brought the reference of Gaya to show the unbearable violence in the land where the 'message of peace' brought forward by Buddha. The third man further says, "Instead of hiding in the cities of torment, it is better to find refuge in some dark and dense forest" (57). This expression shows that so called civilized cities were not secured. People had to choose hinterland for their safety. 'City' is the term that is generally understood as civilized and safer place. During the partition violence even cities were not safe. In the stories we do not have any references of any cities in India or Pakistan. This forces readers to find out the major affected cities during the violence and assimilate the story with the real incidents scattered in history, autobiography, art and common memory. So, 'bright faces', 'disfigured faces', 'graves of the ancestors', 'disappeared women in the forest' etc. are just the encountered signs in Deluge's term. These signs force us to dig out the truth.

In the partition violence, innocent women and children were the target to defame another community or to show that they are so vulnerable who could not protect their women folk and children. In the *City of Sorrow* too, women and girls are tortured not due to their involvement in the violence but just to take revenge against the relatives of the women or girls. Women and girls are assaulted either to provoke or to take revenge against another side. In *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationality and History in India*, Gyanendra Pandey writes "Several observers described the violence that erupted so fiercely between Hindu-Shikhs and Muslims in 1946 and 1947 as a 'war on each other's women' a war specially on women and children" (68). Although there are series of assault to women and girls in the

story, we do not get detail about the causes of such violence. There are gaps in the story. Once we try to fill the gaps of partition violence the entire scene of partition riot plays out. Those readers who are the survivors of such events or witness of the events feel more traumatized because they have 'vicarious witnessing'. For those readers who are not been the witness of the events also, imaginatively scene plays out in the mind.

Pure affect has been evoked/ forced upon readers without playing any identity politics in the story. Women and girls seem vulnerable during the partition. They have been sexually harassed and raped to fulfill the vested interest of males of defaming others. The plight of innocent victims and restlessness of souls in the 'mirtyulok' arouses the sense of morality. Displacement and disfiguring faces tend to reawaken the condition of separation of families with their ancestral bond and barrier for their reunion due to the policy of government after the partition. The vicious circle of violence upon women and girls reflect that none of the communities were untouched from violence. Husain is successful to show that violence is disastrous for all whatever is the cause without demonizing any groups and communities.

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