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Title: Politics of Pain -- Reading Trauma & Memory in Literature

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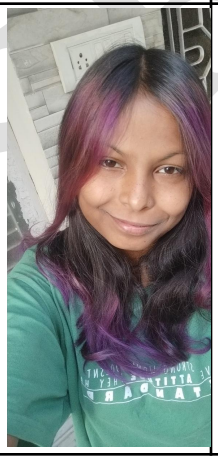
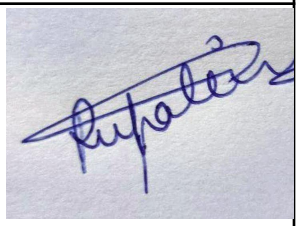
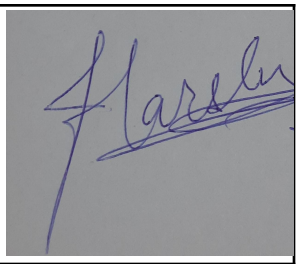
2		Rupali Singh	0221037	B.A(H) English Sem: V	

3		Harsha	0221058	B.A(H) English Sem: V	
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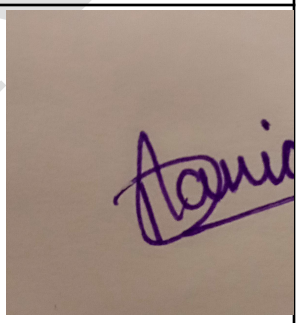
5		Dania Siddiqui	0221013	B.A(H) English Sem: V	
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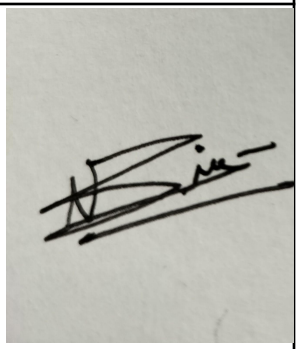
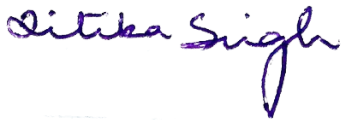
7		Narjis Bint Islam	0221027	B.A(H) English Sem:V	



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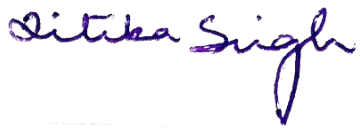
Certificate of Originality

This is to certify that the aforementioned students from Sri Venkateswara College have participated in the summer project SVP-2356 titled "**Politics of Pain -- Reading Trauma & Memory in Literature".** The participants have carried out the research project work under my guidance and supervision from 15 June 2023 to 15 September 2023. The work carried out is original and carried out in an online/offline/hybrid mode.



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Pierced by a Paradox:

Ritual, Self-Mortification and Altered States of Consciousness in the Thaipusam Festival

Keywords: Religion, Ritual/Spectacle, Self-Mortification, Altered States of Consciousness (ASC), Aporia/Paradox.

"Pain is the most familiar and universal aspect of all human experiences" (Glucklich).

Pain has always been a primal human experience, which the body is pre-programmed to shrink away from. The nerves jerk the body away from the source of the pain, to keep the body unharmed and safe. In 2020, the International Association for the Study of Pain (IASP) attempted to revise the definition of pain to "an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with, or resembling that associated with, actual or potential tissue damage" (Srinivasa N Raja, Carr and Cohen). This definition includes both sensory and emotional aspects of pain, and taking this definition forward, pain can also be a societal and religious experience. The word 'pain' derives from the Latin word 'poena' which means 'penalty' and 'punishment' (Grant), which highlights the judicial and the societal nature of pain.

Religion, as an institution of society, has historically used pain in various ways. Christ's pain was considered to be redemptive for the human race; Buddha deprived himself of various worldly needs to achieve nirvana; monks, nuns, priests all have endured pain to achieve some religious aim. This paper specifically looks at the religious ritual pain experienced by the devotees participating in the Thaipusam festival in Malaysia. This three-day festival dedicated to Lord Murugan was carried over by Tamil Indian immigrants during 18th century colonial rule. On the second day, as part of the ritual devotees pierce their cheeks, foreheads and tongues with *vels* (spears; Murugan's symbol) and some even insert long skewers into their backs pulling small chariots of images of Murugan (Collins). They are put into a trance while getting pierced by the priest. Their accounts of experiencing pain will be viewed through the lens of Deconstruction, as viewed by Derrida especially the concept of 'Aporia'. He developed this concept further in his work 'Aporias' with the word deriving from Greek terms 'a' and 'propos' meaning 'without passage', referring to a paradoxical situation or "im-possibles" (Raffoul). In 'Aporias' Derrida mainly attempts to unravel the aporia of the question, "Is my death possible?". He deconstructs the language, culture and every aspect relating to his 'death'. When asked what was

deconstruction in an interview in 2004, Derrida replied- “deconstruction is 'what happens, *that is to say, the impossible'*.” (Raffoul)

Derrida accuses Aristotle, who first uses this term of repeating “its aporia without deconstructing it" and his successors in the philosophical tradition from Kant to Hegel of only inheriting this aporetic (Derrida). For Derrida, aporia was something that “recurrently duplicates itself interminably, fissures itself, and contradicts itself without remaining the same, that is, concerning the only and single "double, contradictory imperative"” (Derrida). Thus, aporia becomes a paradoxical state of being in itself, with the two contradictory states melting into one fluid state. Opposites become the same; as Derrida explains with an example “"possible" is not simply "different from" or "the opposite of' impossible, and why, in this case, "possible" and "impossible" *say the same thing*” (Raffoul). Hence, possible and impossible stop being sharp opposites of each other which need to be contrasted, but impossible can fuel the possible, and the possible can become the impossible.

Derrida asks in his work, “Can one speak- and if so, in what sense- of an experience of the aporia? An experience of the aporia as such? Or vice versa: Is an experience possible that would not be an experience of the aporia?”. Here, I would like to propose the ritual pain experience of the Thaipusam devotees as an aporia. As Fuller observes in her witness accounts of the festival, “the most striking and unchristian part of the ritual was that the devotees of Murugan did not seem to experience any pain, because they were in a trance state.” (Collins , 6). The arises a paradox of experiencing a painful process, yet not feeling pain due to the trance they are under. Then, is un-felt pain, pain? Or is felt pain, un-pain?

In 1975, Tart defined altered states of consciousness or ASC as “a qualitative alteration in the overall pattern of mental functioning, such that the experiencer feels his consciousness is radically different from the way it functions ordinarily.” It is difficult to define what the ‘ordinary’ consciousness is, especially since one enters certain levels of ASC while sleeping, daydreaming or meditation. But ASC does include observable physical changes reflecting the altered state of consciousness. Ritual trance is a naturally occurring ASC, under religious contexts (Ward). Ludwig explains certain strategies that can be adopted in order to induce trance, especially bombarding the individual with extereoceptive stimuli, such as rhythmic sounds, strong smells; lack of external stimuli; decreased alertness; increased alertness; and some somatopsychological factors (Ward). The very strategies adopted to induce a trance seem to

contradict each other. How can loud, rhythmic drumming of a festival can induce trance in some contexts, while the total silence of a place can also create trance? Thus, the state of going into trance is an aporia. The state of simultaneous alertness and unawareness of both the self and surroundings is a paradoxical state. Factors of sleep-deprivation and starvation also contribute to trance inducement.

Van der Walde observes certain two prevalent characteristics of trance-

> “First, hypnotic subjects and people in trance may exhibit extraordinary control of involuntary parts of the nervous system, so that they are anesthetized against pain... Second, central to [the] phenomena is the dissociation that prevents the trance experience from being admitted to conscious awareness, hence the normal amnesia for experiences in a state of trance or hypnosis.” (Collins)

The subject undergoing a trance thus experiences analgesia and amnesia. Collins supports thus in her accounts, “the most striking and unchristian part of the ritual was that the devotees of Murugan did not seem to experience any pain, because they were in a trance state.” Devotees are able to describe many sensory and emotional aspects of their subjective experience although they experience amnesia (Ward). Some devotees reported feeling “weightlessness”, “feelings of upward movement”, “pure consciousness”, or the sensation that they "were not existing." Entranced, they are detached from the external world and they may feel “depersonalized” (Ward). These experiences reveal the disconnect from reality, how the un-pain results in uncertainty of the physical world. Trance has often been seen as a disconnect from the world, but that is not always so. Some devotees stated that they began to feel ““something” moving up from their feet or legs”; others described trance as a “feeling of heat, or of cold, or of lightness” (Ervin, Prince and Simons). “Most all remarked that their arms, legs, and bodies were shaking, and some noted that the hairs on their arms stood up. Several spoke of seeing Murugan or another god” (Ervin, Prince and Simons). These set of devotees felt their senses sharpened, their connection to their body is enhanced as they felt sensations yet spoke of seeing their god. Hence, a mental ascension while maintaining the connection to the body is seen. This breaks the idea of only ascending to a higher plane after fully disconnecting from the body. These two sets of examples prove that the state of trance is aporetic in itself, with devotees feeling both connected to their bodies as well as a connection to their God. Devotees can feel both grounded and weightless at the same time.

In the Thaipusam festival, this state of trance is called ‘arul’ translated to ‘grace’ or ‘blessing’ (Collins). Ward describes trance as a “dissociative state [which] is temporary, voluntary, and reversible and is generally attributed to the power of sympathetic deities”. An ideal experience of arul is analgesic and often amnesic too. As Collins observes, “unlike spontaneous trances, arul must occur in an appropriate context—during a pilgrimage, at a temple, on a festival day, or during worship. The trance of divine grace also should be preceded by a period of spiritual preparation and ritual purification”. Collins went to devotees and asked the question most people ask when they hear of this ritual, why do they pierce themselves? Glucklich in her book *Sacred Pain* argues “that religious individuals have hurt themselves because the pain they produced was meaningful and is not only subject to verbal communication but also figures in our ability to empathize and share”. The ritual is seen as the fulfilment of a vow taken “asking [Murugan] for help in their everyday worldly lives. [The devotees] wanted good health, success in an examination, a job, a love marriage, a son” (Collins). The aim is not enlightenment like most religious pain, but to overcome worldly issues. Devotees who pierce their bodies do so to “demonstrate that they are worthy in the eyes of God and they show that Murugan can empower his devotees” (Collins).

Ronald C. Simons, Frank R. Ervin, and Raymond H. Prince conducted a study of the nine-day training period before the Thaipusam and the day of the same. They observe certain pre-training factors that enable trances- a two-week period of fasting, reduced social activities, no drinking, smoking and some sleep deprivation. “It is believed that if devotees fail to observe these restrictions they may be unable to enter trance and hence may suffer pain during the insertion of the vels” (Ervin, Prince and Simons). The devotees train under a guru every night for this period, in which there is singing, clapping, loud, rhythmic drumming by musicians. They are trained to enter and exit trances with cues, with the application of holy ash being a common trance exiting strategy. Sometimes, entranced dancers are protected from harm by other onlookers and family forming a circle around the frenzied dancer. This shows the societal nature of this festival. Vows are made often for the family, training for trance is supported by family and society, and the festival is attended by hundreds. The individual experience of trance is expanded and supported by family and society, connecting the two through religion. This societal nature also exerts pressure on individuals to enter the analgesic state. According to Guru K in

Ronald C. Simons, Frank R. Ervin, and Raymond H. Prince's study, around five percent of devotees fail to enter trances. In the study, a seventeen-year-old devotee failed to enter into trance for the whole training period, which resulted in pain during piercing, but also the irritation of his father, who blamed him of "failing to fast properly".

Elaine Scarry states, "To have pain is to have certainty". Pain makes one certain of existence of the body. For the Thaipusam devotees who claim to not have pain, is there then a lack of certainty? Does the existence of the body become less certain in un-pain? Or is their un-pain give them the certainty of existence? These paradoxical questions can only be answered through the experiences of the participants. Ervin, Prince and Simons note that "remembering the activities of Thaipusam day, most reported that during the insertions of the hooks and spears they felt no pain. Many said that they could not remember the insertions at all. Some said that they remembered the insertions vaguely and told us that the pricks were noticeable but not painful". Thus, the un-pain seems to result in vagueness of memory and could reflect the uncertainty of reality. It is the trance state that helps convert the pain into un-pain, thus creating an aporetic state of flux. Some devotees reported that once pierced and waiting for others to be pierced, the sensation of pain returned, but they "could diminish awareness by moving closer to the drummers and singers" and re-entering trance (Ervin, Murphy and Palmour).

Collins records an episode of an entranced male-

> "A man, who appears to be a laborer in his fifties or sixties, takes a stylized martial pose in front of the deity and then moves to the tray that holds the sacred ash and a piece of burning camphor. He picks up the cube of camphor and places it on his extended tongue, so that the flames leap out of his mouth. He shows no pain. People do not interfere or even take much notice as he dances, tongue aflame, until the camphor is burnt up. One bystander explains that the heat of the flame, manifesting the power of the goddess, will drive out the spirit that has possessed the man."

Inability to enter a proper trance can result in painful piercing as the seventeen-year-old in Ervin, Prince and Simons's study who "unlike other devotees… winced during these insertions. Also unlike the other devotees, he gave us a wan smile of recognition after being pierced. The following day he recalled having given us this sign." Referring to Van der Walde's two characteristics of trance, namely analgesia and amnesia are absent, showing the trance was improper.

Devotees in trance states, also report a feeling of "cosmic unity" (Ward) and a connection to something bigger than themselves. Sigmund Freud saw this feeling as induced by religion. He says that people call it a sense of "eternity, a feeling as of something limitless, un-bounded, something 'oceanic'". This oceanic feeling of oneness, Freud attributes to the "religious spirit". This belonging to a bigger plane of existence, can extend to the unity felt by the devotees, in case of Thaipusam, hundreds of like-minded people gathering to celebrate Lord Murugan. Hence, trance becomes a societal experience, and as it is 'performed' at festivals, it becomes a spectacle. Especially in the case of ritual possession, it is more often a "public, ceremonial occasion" and can even be viewed as a "stylized performance, serving purposes of linking man with natural and supernatural forces", again tying into the idea of the "oceanic" experience (Ward).

Philosopher J. L. Austin developed the concept of 'performance theory', in which "there is an emphasis on ritual's dramatic and aesthetic qualities". "Ritual often involves expressive action and heightened emotion, brought to life through a range of media—music, dance, and the visual arts" (Stephenson). In Thaipusam, we see the performative aspects of dance, music, processions and the elaborately decorated '*pandals'* (pavilions). Certain extreme forms of self-mutilation such has 'hook-swinging' and having very long skewers inserted has been looked down upon especially by the upper castes of the areas and Hindu reformers, who see this as a 'lower caste' performative act to attract attention. They labelled hook-swinging as an "exhibitionistic gesture of individual grandiosity" (Collins). The emotional outburst is channelled through frenzied dance and trances.

If ritual is performative, such as a play, then the onlookers can be considered as an audience to this performance. Mitchell perfectly captures this audience mindset as she views the piercing rituals as one would see the climax of a movie unfolding-

> "I could feel the moment climax, and at the height of its intensity, a priest (pujari) leaned in, rubbed ash on the man's face, and then pushed the *vel* through his cheek, into his mouth, then out of his other cheek. The buildup to the piercing is agonizing because every instinct in you screams that this is an impalement you are watching, even as you're reminding yourself that this is religion, that you are a foreigner, and that you do not understand what is happening here."

In these lines, Mitchell is aware of her standing as an outsider to the ritual and the culture; she is "watching" this performance. The usage of words such as "climax" and the "buildup" of the ritual adds to the film-like quality of it placing her as the 'viewer'.

Mitchell, Collins, Ervin, Prince and Simons were eye-witnesses to the Thaipusam festival. They viewed the festival with their own perceptions and formed the audience to the performance. Their position of witnessing pain, is also a part of the ritual. The onlookers experience the ritual pain or un-pain through the devotees, and share in the experience. The idea of un-pain also being a second-hand experience, is represented in the second-hand witness accounts, which record the devotees' experiences.

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Submitted by: Dania Siddiqui

Corporeal Dis/connections: Healing self and community in The Color Purple.

This paper studies how healing from trauma in both body and soul is a collective phenomenon connected to restoration of lost identity and self esteem. In particular, it will analyse dissociative trauma defined as an emotionally overwhelming response and feeling of nothingness in an attempt to highlight modes of recovery from traumatic experiences.

Abstract-

Trauma-Related Dissociation as defined by the American Psychological Association is a coping mechanism where the person is emotionally overwhelmed to the point of emotional paralysis and feeling of nothingness. This possibly happens due to exposure to adverse traumatic experiences in childhood. This paper examines the pathos of the African-American community and the horrors of rape, sexual abuse of the female body, physical and emotional neglect, incest and spousal abuse of black women leading to their identity crisis. Further, the paper explores the collective healing procedure through sisterhood, female bonding and a search for development of a mature female identity with the perspective of psychoanalytic development as proposed by a Freudian reading of trauma. Finally, the paper will discuss the procedures involved in restoring and affirming the lost self while exploring the following questions - Do we forget the traumas we suffer, losing them in an amnestic haze, or do our moments of deepest pain remain available to us? (traumatic amnesia) Do we overlook the spiritual wounding of sexual abuse in discussions about the impact it has on the lives of survivors? Does the celebration of restoring one's lost identity help in the healing of the community? To examine these questions this paper will look at the novel *The Color Purple.*

The term "trauma theory" was first coined by American scholar Cathy Caruth. She has further thought about psychological trauma on the basis of the analysis of Freud's trauma theory. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History,* she defines "trauma theory" as "a

sudden, disastrous, unavoidable experience", and the reactions of people to the event are often delayed,
uncontrollable, and repeated through hallucinations or other intrusions. Trauma related dissociation is a defence mechanism with paralysing effects. This expresses itself by blocking memories and transferring the trauma to a body part,manifesting itself in body language.This fragmentation happens after experiencing trauma that completely disconnects a person from his surroundings,his own body and causes considerable damage to their perception of self esteem and idea of self.

Throughout *The Color Purple*,Celie's body narrates a story.It traces her past experiences and how it affected her present,a path from abandoning to reclaiming her body.Peter Brooks argues in his book, *Body Work*, that, as in the case of Celie, "[…] our early experiences of our own bodies may not be necessarily those of oneness and unity, but rather those of otherness and displacement which notably affects relations of erotic love to others" (Brooks 14). Celie's experiences of physical and emotional rape from the beginning of novel triggers a fragmentation of the self, which will be integrated later on in the novel, through her erotic relationship with another woman. Celie is highlighted as a depressed survivor who is a victim of parent loss,emotional and physical neglect,rape,incest,trauma and spousal abuse. Harris,a black female critic finds this dramatic literary portrayal of Celie unbelievable and calls it a clinically accurate description of soul murder as told by Leonord Shengol (Harris,On *"The Color Purple"* 155-156). The repeated episodes of rapes and incest forced Celie to stop feeling pleasure in her own body,she starts hating and annihilating her own body as a defense mechanism against her husband's assault that leads her to disconnect and disown her body.

> *He beat me like he beat the children. ... It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood.I say to myself, Celie, you a tree. That's how come I know trees fear man. (30)*

Celie's disconnection with her own body and turning herself into an immobile object,a tree highlights the dehumanization that she experiences while facing traumatic episodes of rapes and beatings.Processing this traumatic experience became so difficult for Celie that she disconnected herself from the event, a sense of fragmentation that arises with a traumatic experience. As

Herman writes, “this kind of fragmentation, whereby trauma tears apart a complex system of self-protection that normally functions in an integrated fashion, is central to the historic observations of post-traumatic stress disorder” (34). A sense of disconnection from both the present and the community acts as a barrier for traumatised people and challenges them .

This sense of disconnection continues to other feminine experiences of the female body.Celie is an example of motherhood denial as she was the victim of incest at the hands of her stepfather while her own children were snatched away from her and were taken away by Pa. There was an absence of executing motherhood which she later on learns to re execute as she nurtures herself back into being with the help of Shug Avery.Adrienne Rich talks in her book “*Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*” about the challenges that women face in society and the restrictions placed on women's bodies and the impact it has on their lives. (p. P) Rich suggests that women have been historically limited in their intellectual pursuits because they have tried to distance themselves from their female bodies, resulting in reproducing old forms of thinking. She adds that in order for women to make intellectual advancements, they need to surmount old attitudes as we can see in the course of the novel how Celie was not mothering certain ideas. She further explains: “But fear and hatred of our bodies had often crippled our brains. Some of the most brilliant women of our time are still trying to think from somewhere outside their female bodies— hence they are still merely reproducing old forms of intellection.” (1976, p.284)

Daniel.W.Ross in his article, ‘Celie in the Looking Glass: The Desire for Selfhood in The Color Purple’ says that women's bodies have been heavily exploited and targeted by male aggression, leading women to develop fear or even hatred towards their own bodies. He further explains that: “One of the primary projects of modern feminism has been to restore women's bodies. Because the female body is the most exploited target of male aggression, women have learned to fear or even hate their bodies.” Consequently, women often think of their bodies as torn or fragmented, a pattern evident in Walker’s Celie as we saw that after being repeatedly raped, Celie stopped feeling the pleasure through her body and being deprived of the sexual consent,her body was treated as a playful object which was used and thrown in the hands of patriarchy leading to Celie’s disconnection with her own body. To confront the body is to confront not only an individual's abuse but also the abuse of women's bodies throughout history, as the external

symbol of women's enslavement, this abuse represents for women a reminder of her degradation and her consignment to an inferior status as highlighted through Celie who only limited herself to household chores and looking after Albert's children.

Celie's defensive mechanism was to suppress both her physical and emotional aspects as Ross describes "But Celie's ignorance of her body is even more shocking than her desire to annihilate it, as her language makes clear." (Ross, 1988, p. 70-71). However, through her sexual relationship with Shug, Celie begins her journey toward independence. She has the courage from this experience to resist her husband's mistreatment and to gradually get the self-assurance she needs to lead her own life. According to Ross: "Celie's orgasm suggests a rebirth or perhaps an initial birth into a world of love, a reenactment of the primal pleasure of the child at the mother's breast."(Ross, 1988, p.69).

Celie's body becomes a site for renewal only by transforming herself from a subject of oppression into a whole and liberated woman. Love becomes a catalyst for change, resistance, and transcendence through the power of the erotic. And because making love with Shug "feel like heaven", love is also sublime because it remembers divinity; however not the white male God with whom she was accustomed to, but a God that is everywhere and in everything:

> "But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all" (203).

Celie's individual trauma is intrinsically intertwined with the community of women around her.It is through the sisterhood that flourishes between Celie, Shug, and Sofia, Celie is able to attain body freedom. The individual gets into the collective and results in healing and liberating the community by breaking the shackles of patriarchy. Nettie loved Celie the most and both sisters shared a support system where Nettie always encouraged Celie to fight back and stand up against all injustices she has been bearing. Nettie says, "Don't let them run over you … you got to fight. You got to fight" (17). It is through this mutual love, patience and epistolary conversation of two sisters, Celie was able to transform herself from submissive to a resisting strong woman with a voice of her own and therefore carrying the voice of the whole community of African women.

Towards the end of the novel, her erotic relationship with Shug, the woman she falls in love with, marks Celie's transcendence which turns her body-Other into a body that is her lover, her friend, her companion, her way out of victimhood, and most importantly, her own. Through Shug, the protagonist's body has become also her "hope for a radical renovation" (Eliade 90).
Shug educates Celie a new way to express herself about her physical body, leading to a newfound sexual consciousness to understand her body as a source of life, beauty, and pleasure is, as the researcher Linda Abbandonato suggests "it is her love for Shug that enables [her]…[to] construct a new identity within a feminine domain" (Abbandonato 1111)

There has always been bonding among African women that cannot be broken—genuine sisterhood. This sisterly bond is a reciprocal one, one in which each gives and receives equally. In this community of women, all reach out in support of each other, demonstrating a tremendous sense of responsibility for each other by looking out for one another. They are joined emotionally, as they embody empathic understanding of each other's shared experiences. Everything is given out of love, criticism included, and in the end, the sharing of the common and individual experiences and ideas yields rewards. (Hudson-Weems 2004,P. 65)

In the pursuit of reclaiming the body and the self, Celie also opens up to spiritual reawakening by redefining the notion of God. In the early part of the novel,Celie associates God to be the white patriarchal God as she says,

> "He big and old and tall and gray bearded and white. He wear white robes and go barefooted. . . . Sort of bluish-gray [eyes]. Cool. Big though.White lashes" (201).

With this image,she considers God to be a white man who upholds patriarchy and supports oppression against Black women. The conversation with Shug and her description of God who breaks the images of gender and race becomes a catalyst for Celie to redefine the notion of God as Shug says,

“God is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with God. But only them that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if you not looking, or don't know what you looking for. . . . God ain't a he or a she, but a It. [It] [d]on't look like nothing. ... It ain't a picture show. It ain't some- thing you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself. I believe God is everything. . . . Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found it.” (202-03)

This reclaiming of the spirit and restoring the ability to feel became a catalyst to heal the spiritual wounding of the sexual trauma faced by Celie. She not only broke through the shackles of patriarchal God but also regained her lost self esteem as she identified the God within her. This also helped her in corporeal connection and feeling pleasure in her own body, as Herman explains that dissociative trauma can be recovered by connecting with the self and community. Although the victim’s sense of self has been damaged, “that sense can be rebuilt only as it was built initially, in connection with others” (Herman 61)

The last letter written by Celie is addressed to "Dear God. Dear stars, dear trees, dear sky, dear peoples. Dear Everything. . Dear God." This highlights her reintegration with her lost esteem and ability to discover God in everything around her. It arrives at a notion of the Divine that is not oppressive, domineering, or harmful to an individual or community but that is more free, recognizing the Divine in all of creation and claiming the spirit within the individual while reconnecting with the body. The flowers that once withered, now blossomed with the change of season from autumn to spring into The colour Purple symbolising healing and recovery of Celie’s selfhood and identity.

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Submitted by: Harsha

Ours is an empty memory. We have few names, and fewer faces

- A quote from the Introduction of

Men with the Pink Triangles

History as an empirical tool of recording events (by the process of archivalisation) goes on to become a tool of dominance when recorded with a certain hegemonic position. With such kind of a dominant historical narrative comes a need to reinterpret and rediscover parts of history which pertain to communities which have been dominated over, thus Subaltern studies. But in reinstating historical position for a specific identity group, the methodology involved needs to be sensitive so as to authentically and empathetically represent the historical oppression, and in the case of systemic erasure, suppression. Erasure thus becomes a systematic process of undermining the position of the oppressed. Largest book burning as well as destruction of the ***Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*** *during the holocaust era firmly showcases the staunch approach towards a deliberate erasure of queer social positioning through academia. Similarly, the space for pink triangles in holocaust testimonies as well as literature has been created to provide a history to a historical subaltern by giving a prominence to personal narratives thus making the personal political. This paper focuses on analyzing the representation of subjugation faced by the members of the queer community as mentioned in the text,* ***The Men with the Pink Triangles*** *by* ***Heinz Heger*** *while trying to locate violence induced trauma in personal testimonies. The paper then goes on to question the foreshadowing of personal history by larger historical discourses while locating the aforementioned personal histories in the gaps of memory produced by a deliberate erasure in popular hegemonic history*.

Holocaust and the World War II opened up a vast conversation about trauma studies which correspond to the impact of violence (experienced or inherited) that a community, in this case, Jew as well as Queer, faces. *Men with the Pink Triangle* by *Heinz Heger*[1] is one of the first testimonies/autobiographies (/biography) to have been recorded about the Gay persecution in

[1] [1] *Heinz Heger* was a pen name. It is contested whether *Josef Kohout* himself took up the name or did someone else write this book

Nazi Germany. Being published in 1972, it started a perspective of rethinking the experiences of Homosexuals, and further on Queer, in the era, besides (as well as including) Jewish eradication. The proliferation of the Gay and Lesbian Movement in Europe and USA adopted With an extreme implementation of paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code, the Gestapo was said to have arrested over 100000 and convicted 53,000 Gay men of several origins while almost 5000-15000 men were sent to concentration camp for the same[2]. The kind of subjugation that was experienced by Homosexuals was not only limited to concentration camps, it extended to penal structures after the WW2 as well. It talks about the struggle of an Austrian gay individual who had been persecuted on the basis of his sexual orientation in the Nazi Germany and was sent to concentration camps at *Sachsenhausen* and *Flossenbürg* in the time period of 1939 to 1945. The text then becomes key in locating the historical erasure, traumatic amnesia and the otherization of Queer community in the fight for recognition. Being one of the first Holocaust testimonies of a Gay survivor, the text goes on to become a critique of the idea of the totalitarianism, not just in terms of governance but also absolute history. The main area that this paper will focus on is revisioning history through a personal lens while amplifying the subjective emotional experience. In order to go from '**I to We**' it is important to analyze and critique the loopholes in re-presentation in history which systematically led to Queer Erasure. In order to discuss erasure, it is imperative to look at violence, de-legitimization as well as systemic subaltern-ization of Gay history. The paper also deals with Queer history as subaltern in terms of the dominant historical narrative of the Holocaust. It is not possible to look at erasure, subaltern-ization, violence as well as the subjugation of identity without discussing induced trauma of the self, the emotions, the body, the psyche and the dialectical relationship between Primary as well as Secondary experience of the trauma. Finally, the paper will explore whether it is possible to reconstruct the diasporic identity of Queer community due to historical erasure to provide a history that is beyond interpretation and based on actual individual experiences, taking the instance of Holocaust.

Men with the Pink Triangle as an autobiography stands as a testament to the homophobia showcased by Nazi Germany. The text showcases history that has been left out of the dominant

[2] It is a roughly estimated figure due to lack of official documents supporting the same.
Source: https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/gay-men-under-the-nazi-regime

narrative of the Holocaust. Being published in 1972 for the first time, it becomes imperative to critique the delay in recognition of Gay experiences during World War II. The text features historical pictographic details of the violence underlining erased history, which will be elaborated further on. For Queer community, which goes beyond a clear distinction of oppression in the form of binary of recognition (meaning something that exists as the "intersectional", in every community in the socio-political hierarchy), personal narratives are one of the only sort of marked history which recognizes the violence inflicted upon individuals. Testimonies also formulate history for communities which have been systematically excluded from the dominant narrative by encompassing the traumatic experiences of the said communities. The text, as a memoir, thus goes on to explore the history denied to or rather unacknowledged for the Gay (Queer in extension) community. Therefore, the text can be treated as historical evidence of the experience of gay individuals in Nazi Germany, which, in turn, also goes beyond the "rational"[3] history into the history of emotions. To relocate the history of an erased identity, the emotional/ disregarded components of past narratives become important because they refer to the traumatic memory of exclusion. As Theodore Zeldin mentions in their article, *Personal History and History of Emotions*, 'Focusing on the individual as the central figure in history means more than a multiplication of Biographies.' (Zeldin). Testimonies provide a new arena of revisioning and reinterpreting the history of Queer community by keeping violence and silence at the center with a new perspective of subjectivity rather than normativity. As Penny Summerfield puts in her book, *Histories of the Self*,

> 'A key difference is that characteristics of the memoir that are regarded as 'distortions' by historians who aggregate and average, such as selectivity and the refraction of later ideologies, are seen as vital clues to the history of emotional and psychological processes by those who focus on subjectivity.' (Summerfield)

Similarly, when the text produces statutory evidence of history which opens up a new conversation, it is important to recognize the fault lines of not recognizing the anti-normative identities which have been oppressed. The memoir not only opens up a conversation but provides

[3] "Rational" history here refers to the empirical history as a colloquial understanding of recording a chronological order of events in history. Thus rejecting subjectivity and focusing just on objectivity.

a history to struggle for the Queer community. Summerfield mentions in the same chapter that 'The diachronic relationship not only shapes the past constructed in the autobiographical text but, in these cases, transforms it.' (Ibid, 94) Moreover, as a testimony, *Heger's* memoir reintroduces the violence in holocaust memory. In fact, on larger terms, the choice of the author to use a pen name instead of their real name implores the idea of traumatic memory of being identified and subjugated against. It also represents the traumatic amnesia induced by violence that the Queer community has had to systematically face. This argument of recognition in reference to trauma will be elaborated further but before that, the role of testimonies as well as the difference between primary and secondary experience of trauma must be analyzed with reference to the text. Since testimonies showcase themselves as a personal take of the historical event, the emotive aspect of testimonies becomes extremely important to analyse. Trauma also manifests itself in the form of inherited trauma wherein the violence experienced by the survivor also affects the witness of the said violence. Secondary trauma thus manifests itself in various forms pertaining to a community including generational trauma, collective traumatic amnesia, etc. Dominick Lacapra refers to Shoshana Felman's class at Yale wherein she explains the impact that holocaust videos had over the students watching them. He comments,

> 'Empathic unsettlement may, of course, take different forms, and it may at times result in secondary or muted trauma as well as objectionable self-dramatization in someone responding to the experience of victims.' (Lacapra)

Thus, it becomes important to analyze the role of secondary trauma in bringing together a collective through a traumatic consciousness. The secondary witnessing of a trauma so much so on the scale of experiences during the Holocaust also has the capacity to erase the memory in the form of traumatic amnesia of the collective (including several socio-political factors as well) thus revisioning the history which comes from testimonial progress of the narrative becomes very important to relocate the struggle of historical reinterpretation. Secondary experience of trauma also induces the self with very extreme emotive experience, for example, in the memoir, Kohout mentions being "hysterical, thrown into a deep depression, and breaking into more fits of sobbing" after witnessing the torture and death of the Austrian Homosexual prisoner in the bunker. Such an exposure to extreme violence on a secondary basis has an inherently traumatic impact throughout one's lifetime and even beyond to future generations. In any case, the space of

difference between primary and secondary trauma is where the identity politics of relocating history of the Queer community lies. Moreover, coming back to the question of to be visible or not to be visible, it is important to understand the relationship between personal and collective. When the trauma is experienced by the individual in the form of a survivor, especially violence related to being identified, cornered, and subjugated against, the option of invisibility becomes sought after. As Kohout mentions in Chapter 10, *The end and Home Again*,

> "Our caution might seem childish, but we concentration camp prisoners were so filled with mistrust for everyone that this was a natural feeling to preserve our lives. We didn't want to open a door that would bring us back into the arms of fascism; we wanted to survive." (Heger)

When it comes to recognition of the traumatic event and its impact on the community, visibility becomes imperative to relocate the identity of the community in history as well as recognize the systemic violence that was inflicted upon them. Thus, in the case of Queer community, Holocaust testimonies become an agent of relocating the history of struggle against homophobic-queerphobic subjugation and attain visibility in the denied landscape of history, for example, reclaiming of the *Pink Triangle* as a symbol of Queer liberation (Waxman). The diachronic relationship between visibility and invisibility becomes complex in terms of primary/secondary traumatic exposure. Therefore, to go from 'I to We', acknowledgement of invisibility due to trauma is important so as to resist for visibility in the struggle for liberation.

Moving on to a very important aspect of queer struggle, Erasure. Germany as a center for liberal European gay culture developed during the Weimar Republic from 1918-33. Many activist groups were working to decriminalize homosexuality. The Gay culture was also at a significant rise with gay clubs and bars coming to the forefront along with art and culture. During this time, a very important institution emerged, *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*. It was a scientific research and counselling center founded by a sexologist, **Magnus Hirschfield** (GAY MEN UNDER THE NAZI REGIME: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum). The institute was one among the first to introduce gender reaffirmation surgeries and also provided protection to Queer individuals. But with the rise of Nazi Germany, Hirschfield's center was destroyed and all the books pertaining to gender-sexuality were burned in a mass book burning in 1933 (Ibid). Similar

was the assassination of Ernst Julius Günther Röhm, a Nazi officer who was murdered on the grounds of being homosexual (Dawsey). While keeping the entirety of this extreme hatred in mind, this is one of the facets of social erasure when it comes to the Queer community due to its non-heterocentric existence. Such an example of erasure indicates towards the social oppressive hierarchical system which privileges the heteronormative order and anything beyond that becomes threatening to the system. This insecurity thus leads to a forced exclusion from the narratives of history as mentioned in the case of Hirschfield's *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*. The pre-existing voice of struggle of Queer liberation is suppressed in order to re-establish the racist-patriarchal order of 'Aryan Race' in the face of fascism which entails punitive action against those who have the power to showcase an alternate reality of existence, be it Homosexuals (Queers), Jews or German empaths. This kind of violent suppression not just generates trauma in the survivor but also passes it on to future struggles as mentioned in the earlier paragraph. So how is it that the erasure is reversed? Acknowledgement of Erasure as an act of violence by the dominant identity groups in order to maintain their power structures over the marginalized groups is necessary in the entire domain of identity politics. Moreover, the idea of revisioning and reinterpreting historical struggles is important because the loopholes of lack of representation tell a story of deliberate erasure. As talked before, personal histories and testimonies are the backbone of the struggle to relocate the marginalized, specifically the Queer community because they go beyond the 'Empirical' and showcase the violence subjugated to the community to erase its history. This entire argument goes on to refer to the subaltern politics of identity politics. The assimilation of such erased identities/subalterns is almost an impossible project because it also erases the traumatic history associated with the community. As Spivak mentions in her cult classic text, *Can the Subaltern Speak*: "[T]he networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive—a persistent critique is needed".

The entire project of subalternizing also emerges from various modes of erasure throughout the institutional systems of power for example, law, language, morality, etc. In linguistic terms, Spivak points towards the process of "catachresis" which systematically excludes the subaltern identity groups from the colonial linguistic hierarchy. Similarly, laws become very poignant in terms of testimonies of queer survivors to be revealed. Kohout mentions multiple times in *Men*

with the Pink Triangles that even after surviving the concentration camps, homosexual prisoners were denied compensation post WW2 due to still implemented Paragraph 175 of the German penal code and persecuted the victims of concentration camps on grounds of homosexuality. In the *Introduction* by Klaus Müller, it is mentioned that,

> 'While other Holocaust survivors were recognized as survivors by the outside world, the men who wore the pink triangle never received that recognition. They were ignored in the memorials and in the museums. Still seen as criminals and perverts, they never had an opportunity to regain their dignity in postwar society. They survived, but they were denied their place in the community of survivors.'

Furthermore, Kohout also recounts his experience as a homosexual individual in post Nazi Germany as a pink triangle prison survivor after his rescue from the concentration camps in chapter 10, *The End and Home Again*,

> 'My request for compensation for the years of concentration camp was rejected by our democratic authorities, for as a pink-triangle prisoner, a homosexual, I had been condemned for a criminal offense, even if I'd not harmed anyone. No restitution is granted to "criminal" concentration-camp victims. I therefore found employment in a commercial office, which hardly fulfilled my ambitions of a career, but nonetheless provided me with an income.'

Therefore, laws also play a miserable role in re-erasing the oppressed identities in order to maintain the system of power which deems peace at the cost of subalterns. This kind of a subjugation also brings about a diaspora of identity. Diaspora in literal terms refers to the dispersal of natives from their homelands, especially in Jewish terms (Diaspora: Britannica) , but diaspora of traumatic memory also causes a rift of acknowledgement of social roles and individual identity. The kind of diaspora that is visible in the Queer community due to a lack of history is also a testament to the kind of subjugation that leads to a diasporic identity between what is perceived to be the identity of an individual and what the individual perceives their identity to be. The diasporic identity of the queer individual thus itself becomes the starting point of friction between the socio-cultural identity that has been assigned to them and the identity they perceive. That subjective reality within this identity diaspora is where the violent

subjugation to uphold oppressive structures begins by the oppressor. Kohout questions the way in which homosexual individuals are treated in society for their "how and whom he should love" several times, 'This was in no way a "rational" feeling, for who gave them the right to set themselves up as judges over us and classify us in this way, we who had done no harm to anyone'; 'The same narrow-mindedness, of course, is still with us today, more than twenty-five years later, as far as most "authorities" are concerned'; 'All of us felt homesick for the civilized customs we had left behind. After years of vegetating in the Nazi camps, we were sitting down once again, for the first time, to a holiday meal. Many of us, perhaps, had never eaten at such a fine table, and their joy was doubled'; 'What in one case is accepted with a smile is completely forbidden when it is openly proclaimed or made public' (in context of sexual relationship between "heterosexual" men in the concentration camps versus the treatment of pink triangle prisoners); etc. The kind of dysphoria that is generated from the oppression that is inflicted upon the marginalized groups due to their individual identity thus becomes a context of distinction between perception of identity by the oppressor versus the oppressed. William Safran in his article, *The Jewish Diaspora in Comparative and Theoretical Perspective* states that,

> 'In many cases, diasporas have been subject to several relocations from primary to secondary homelands, so that a confusion has arisen about the question of which is the homeland and which is the hostland.' (Safran)

The article itself is about jewish relocations and dispersal throughout history, which itself is pertinent to the topic of holocaust. But particularly for Queer diasporas, the entire mental as well as emotional confusion brought about by the tussle between individual identity (homeland) and social identity (hostland) could be interpreted in terms of diaspora of identity in place of diaspora of homeland. This entire conversation about diaspora of mind and existence transforms into the struggle as soon as the separation of oppression from the self takes place (as in acknowledging that oppression is something that was inflicted upon the subaltern rather than an innate part of their existence). To conclude this argument, the diaspora that is experienced by the subaltern (in this case, Queer community) takes place due to the deliberate erasure of the said subaltern history and recognition of this deliberate erasure is what starts the process of collective consciousness in terms 'Becoming' one's identity as Queer.

Now comes the question of what it is exactly that the inference of Queer struggle with Erasure, Diaspora, Trauma induced collective, Subalternized and Oppressed Queer community want if such a topic of testimonial history has been raised. The answer to this is complicated because the two binary options of 'Assimilation' and 'Assertion' do not recognize the trauma inclusive progress into social fabric. Assimilation requires the subaltern to let go of its traumatic historical identity in order to move inwards from the periphery and Assertion requires a pronouncement of differences by fixating at the periphery. The diasporic nature of this question needs to be considered in the same way the question of homeland/host land is recognized. Safran mentions,

> 'On one hand, a democratic and culturally pluralistic polity has facilitated the continuation of diasporas by permitting the existence of ethnically and religiously pluralistic communities; on the other hand, such a polity has also made it easier for individuals to opt out of their diasporas and has been enticing enough for them to give up their diasporic separateness.' (Ibid)

The statement can again be interpreted in the same way for Queer diasporas wherein the same question of Assimilation and Assertion are being put forward. In the recent landscape of activism, the space for active decision between either asserting their difference to stay away from the dominant narrative or assimilating into the dominant narrative without recognition of the traumatic past as well as diasporic identity, has been poignant because of the heterosocial understanding of identity politics which refers to the idea of objective solution. This is where the third option of Inclusion must be taken into consideration wherein both redeeming qualities of Assertion as well as Assimilation are considered i.e., rejection of an imaginary uniform narrative and acceptance of diverse narratives of identity politics which practically makes up the socio-cultural fabric. Therefore, Inclusion refers to the acknowledgement of traumatic past and building a struggle based on that to move from the periphery to the center of the narratives of identity politics, thus, keeping the spirit of resistance alive (in this case, against systemic Queerphobia) while progressing in involvement in the restructuring of the identity discourse to provide space for the subalterns. Moreover, the traumatic past of a community, as subjugated as the queer community, formulates the struggle to go from 'We' to 'I'. This struggle cannot be effaced in order to be assimilated into a dominant discourse formulated by the oppressor. Even in the dominant discourse of the oppressed, the subaltern still remains at the periphery. This

discourse thus becomes an idea to be revisioned and transformed to provide a space for the oppressed or in fact for those lower in the hierarchy of oppression. As is mentioned at the end of Chapter 10 of *Men with the Pink Triangles*,

> "May they never be forgotten,
>
> these multitudes of dead,
>
> our anonymous, immortal martyrs."

To conclude, it is imperative to analyze the trajectory of Queerphobic violence and the kind of impact it has on marginalized individuals. The entire project of subalternizing the community comes with an erasure in history through the dominant narrative of subjugational hierarchy. Testimonies thus become a way of relocating the identity which was denied to the subaltern. The history of trauma experienced by the community thus becomes a way of analyzing the traumatic response of the subaltern identity groups. They also become a way of acknowledging the violence that took place in order to maintain the hierarchical dynamic of the social fabric, thus becoming a starting point of the struggle against oppression. This then becomes a conversation of what does it mean to be visible and what does it mean to be invisible and what are the nuances of identity in order to understand the subjectivity of traumatic impact on a community throughout history. The traumatic response to erasure thus also depends on the kind of violence that the community has faced and trauma on the scale of concentration camps for homosexuals also goes on to produce an ingrained feeling of diaspora. Therefore, it is important to then look at how it is that the subaltern group identifies themselves in the reinterpretation of history and how is it that the struggle for identity shapes further while keeping intact the traumatic memory or rather the absence of memory. The next step is, i.e., Inclusion becomes key in revisioning the goal of diverse narratives of identity politics while taking into consideration the hierarchical socio-political fabric wherein 'subaltern' itself is a varied phenomenon.

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Submitted by: Rupali Singh

Child and the Fantastical Isolating Reality

Abstract

This paper examines the pain of childhood abuse. In simpler terms, this paper will look at how trauma, verbal and physical abuse given in childhood by the child's caregiver shapes the mental condition and social environment of a child. It will analyse how the presumed safe space in which a child is supposed to grow and learn can become an equally unsafe space. Through the autobiographical account of David Pelzer who was the survivor of third worst child abuse case in California, the paper will look into some important questions about the child's perception of abuse such as:-Is the child able to identify the abuse and abuser? Or how a child identifies

himself in such a position? It will further analyse how reparation of notions of selfhood and healing are possible for the abused. It will further analyse how reparation of notions of selfhood and healing are possible for the abuse

keywords : childhood trauma, abuse, selfhood, reality,

Thesis statement: This paper is going to examine the outcome of childhood trauma and abuse given in a domestic space by the caregivers on the mental and social environment of a child through the autobiographical accounts of David Pelzer.

Child and the Fantastical Isolating Reality

"If you carry childhood with you, you never become older" - Tom Stoppard

How does an individual carry one's childhood with himself? Is it through the memories of his childhood or through the changes he suffered throughout the childhood? If it is believed that a person who carries his childhood with himself can never get older. Then Is it possible for the

child who has suffered through childhood abuse and trauma to never properly become a functional adult but always remain a child trapped by the trauma and abuse?

> “When did my childhood go?
> Was it when I found my mind was really mine, To use whichever way I choose,
> Producing thoughts that were not those of other people
> But my own and mine alone
> Was that the day!”
>
> -Markus Natten, Childhood

In the above lines, the poet, Markus Natten questions himself about the time when he lost his childhood and he introspects within himself if it was during the time when he found out that he carries his own consciousness. Carrying his own consciousness means the poet has some idea of selfhood, it means the poet realises he is an individual with independent thoughts. Can the same be applied to an adult with trauma and memories of abuse? An adult with childhood trauma and experiences, how does a person like that realises his own self or identify, that it is his consciousness and his own independent thoughts? To understand how a child growing up with childhood identifies himself or herself, the knowledge of how abuse affects a child is important.

"Trauma is a toxic stress. Toxic stress is created when the trauma is prolonged and where the child is powerless and can't change the continually frightening experience. It can impact a child immediately in the short term and can cause impact in the long term unless there is appropriate response given to help the child recover.” - Betsy de Thierry, The Simple Guide to Trauma

The above paragraph has some important keywords such as, powerless and continually frightening experience. The "powerlessness" of a child suffering through trauma hinders his growth process and ability to recognise himself as an individual whereas the "continually frightening experience" plays a role in shaping the child into different identities which the child takes upon during the period of trauma.

> “Whilst my mother could not give me access to the world, she at least made sure to let me know it existed. A kid cannot dream of being an astronaut if he doesn't know about space.”
>
> -Trevor Noah, Born a Crime

The above statement from Trevor Noah clears two things. The first is that a child needs the help of a caregiver to realise his identity because the child has yet not developed such apparatus to recognise his own self. A child's perception of himself is built by the caregivers around him. They are responsible for the child to be able to identify himself and then further develop a consciousness of himself through which the child survives in the world. And another thing that the above statement clears is how a child's imagination is also limited by an adult. It means not just the selfhood of a child is constructed by the caregivers but the reality in which the selfhood is exercised by the child is also constructed by the adults as well. Therefore the child who grows up with childhood trauma and who has not healed properly cannot identify himself in the adult world yet the child is forced to be in the adult world and function as an adult.

> "You are a nobody! an It! You are nonexistent! You are a bastard child! I hate you and I wish you were dead!"
>
> -David Pelzer, The Child Called "It" , Mother—Chapter 7, pg. 82

The above lines are from the autobiography of childhood abuse survivor David Pelzer and here it should be noted how he was called an "It" by his mother. This illustrates how the child's identity is distorted in an environment of trauma and abuse. The child becomes an "It" from a human being. And this is then how a child learns to identify himself. In the environment of abuse and hostility, a child is alienated from reality and his selfhood. And the supposed caregivers who are the abusers at that time forces the child to construct a fantastical reality around himself initially as a means to escape abuse. And then the child holds onto this fantastical reality for a longer period of time and just continues to change the form in which he perceives himself. The child at times tries to escape the abuse through identifying himself in this fantastical reality and other

times the child shapeshifts himself into an antagonist and identifies himself as the a reason for abuse. The child continues to live in this fantastical reality until he realises actual selfhood and identifies himself as a survivor. The child who is alone in his fantastical reality finds it hard to recognise and relate with the real world. Furthermore, I am going to show you a few examples to explain it better.

> "I imagined myself like a character in a comic book, who overcame great odds and survived. Soon my head slumped forward and I fell asleep. In my dream, I flew through the air in vivid colors. I wore a cape of red … I was Superman."
>
> -David Pelzer, The Child called "It"—Chapter 5, pg.59

As a child, David Pelzer often used to imagine himself as Superman to escape the trauma given to him. This was an incident where he nursed an open wound given by his mother. When he felt proud of nursing himself with the rags he found, the abused David recognised himself as Superman. It happens in the initial stage of the fantastical reality where the child's desperate need to escape from the abuse and not finding a means and lack of understanding about the abuse led the child to imagine himself as someone strong enough to protect himself.

> "At night I no longer dreamed, nor did I let my imagination work during the day. The once vibrant escapes of watching myself fly through the clouds in bright blue costumes, were now a thing of the past. When I fell asleep, my soul became consumed in a black void. I no longer awoke in the mornings refreshed; I was tired and told myself that I had one day less to live in this world. I shuffled through my chores, dreading every moment of every day. With no dreams, I found that words like hope and faith were only letters, randomly put together into something meaningless - words only for fairy tales."
>
> David Pelzer, The Child called "It"—Chapter 7, pg.77

The development in a child's senses to recognise the functioning of the world renders the escapist fantastical reality useless. It serves no purpose anymore. Because the child has been suffering from the trauma for a long time. The child finds himself alienated in the escapist world.

> "Inside, my soul became so cold I hated everything. I even despised the sun, for I knew I would never be able to play in its warm presence. I cringed with hate whenever I heard other children laughing, as they played outside. My stomach coiled whenever I smelled food that was about to be served to somebody else, knowing it wasn't for me."
>
> David Pelzer, The Child called "It"—Chapter 7, pg.78

The escapist reality is not the only place where the child feels alienated but the real world isolates the child too. There is a bigger gap in the reality in which the child is trying to survive and the reality in which everyone else exists therefore the child starts antagonising the world as well as his own self. Due to this the fantastical reality changes its shape and previously a child who used to imagine himself as a superhero starts seeing himself as an antagonist. This is due to the excessive guilt of abuse that the child bears. The abused child sees it as his own fault for getting abused because the reality in which he is living is an isolating space constructed by the abuser.

The longer a child identifies himself as an antagonist, the more threat it poses to his future. Because if a child identifies himself as a cause of abuse then it can show in his actions. Because the child already believes himself to be an antagonist therefore he is not afraid to behave in such a way which justifies this identity as well.

> "One Friday afternoon in the winter of 1973, for no apparent reason, I stormed out of the classroom, screaming at everyone as I fled. I slammed the door so hard I thought the glass above the door would shatter. I ran to the bathroom, and with my tiny red fist I pounded the tiles until my strength drained away"
>
> David Pelzer, The Child called "It"—Chapter 7, pg.78

Here, it is clear how the abuse is making the suffering child violent and the child is unable to comprehend as to why it is happening with him. The only way the child can navigate through this and break the barriers of this made up reality is if someone from outside interferes. At this point of time the role of teachers becomes important as they spend a large amount of time with children after their parents. The vigilance of teaching professionals in noticing the signs of abuse is important because a child does not believe in anything outside his fantastical reality. And this is the way the abuser controls the child. “It takes a community to save a child.” (David Pelzer, The Lost Boy— pg.188).

Teaching professionals help in identifying the abuse and the abuser and get the abused children to protection centres. But this is the end of their services. Then a new phase starts in the life of abused children in foster homes. And that is again challenging for a child. Because this sudden shift from an abusive household to a safe space causes confusions and a child does not find himself to adjust to this different social space. And for the child to reach his selfhood he needs support from his foster parents. Because when a child suffers through abuse he loses a sense of safety and trust as suggested by Betsy de thierry in The Simple guide to Child Trauma, "Trauma shatters our sense of safety, stability, trust and innocence”

> "Liesel would sit up and hum, her cold toes clenched with excitement. No-one had ever given her music before."
>
> Markus Zukas, The Book Thief—pg.38

In these lines, the foster father of Liesel played music for her to calm her down after she had a nightmare about her dead brother. The author says,"No one had given her music before." It's not just music that Liesel's father gave her but through music he gave her a sense of safety and protection while she is going through the memories of trauma. Liesel's foster father is sensitive towards her and understands her need and communicates a safe space to her through music.

Giving music is introducing Liesel to something she never knew. It's opening a new horizon for her.

The child with trauma can only break through the fantastical isolated reality the abuser left them in, when they are given proper acceptance and a chance to grow and learn. This is the way in which a child can gather his own consciousness and recognise his potential in the real world. Then the child does not need an isolating reality and he doesn't identify himself with made up characters.

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The Maddening Womb:

Unwanted Motherhood and Intergenerational Trauma in Jerry Pinto's *Em and The Big Hoom*

A child is a machine that makes you a second-class citizen in your own life.
– Jerry Pinto

In the Indian context, the decision about motherhood—whether to have a child or not—may not always be framed as a choice. Women may not see motherhood as an optional role that they can accept or refuse. In fact, the cultural drumbeat about motherhood makes women see it as a mandate.

– Amrita Nandy

The denial of abortion rights in the twenty-first century and the perpetuation of the modern Indian mother figure in popular media has brought one thing to the forefront: motherhood and childcare are still considered the most 'natural' paths that every woman must embrace, regardless of its potential physical, emotional, and psychological toll. In *Mother Pious Lady: Making Sense of Everyday India*, Santosh Desai observes how the representation of the Indian mother has changed to unravel a 'dynamic cheerleader' figure, a jack-of-all-trades, a mother who is simultaneously the 'aggressive alert monitor' of the child and a 'fun playmate' (33). Such are the expectations from women even in this day and age. To add, theorists like Adrienne Rich have since long alerted us to this 'institution of motherhood' (58) that reinforces

women's role as mothers first and individuals later, riddling them with ambivalence as they struggle to hold onto their individuality without feeling guilty or selfish.

This paper explores the disturbing effects of unwanted motherhood on the woman, family, and the subsequent generations. The attempt is to examine the trauma emerging from the structural institution of motherhood and its impact on the woman and beyond, permeating the family unit. Further, it will focus on domains of intergenerational trauma and healing. To what extent can hegemonic discourses of motherhood and marriage be held responsible for instilling and facilitating intergenerational trauma and pain? How does the masculine symbolic order play a part in engendering this trauma? And can there be healing from these patterns of pain? To address these questions, the paper hones in on the mother-son duo in Jerry Pinto's semi-autobiographical novel *Em and The Big Hoom,* exploring the long-term psychological and emotional impact on adult children who act as primary caregivers and witnesses to this trauma.

1. The Maddening Womb

Em and The Big Hoom is an emotionally charged text that opens the reader to the complexities of motherhood right as we step into the "one-bedroom-hall-kitchen" (Pinto 8) that contains Imelda's mania and depression, the poignant love that intertwines a broken family, and the fight to cope and heal from a pain that comes from hurting someone you love and being hurt by them in return. Beside these throbbing interpersonal bonds runs another narrative that constantly draws our attention back to Imelda as a *"mud-dh-dha"* (Pinto 38), her aversion to the title, her struggle with the hegemonic discourse, and her unconventional ways of dealing with her children. In doing so, the text questions the naturalisation of the pious Indian mother figure who is "never absent, never too ill to look after others, never bored, never just tired" (Desai 34). The novel presents exactly the opposite of the dominant image, telling us what happens when the mother is 'too ill to look after others' because of the masculine symbolic order she's circumscribed in.

The representation of the Indian mother post-independence forms a colourful mix of the mother goddesses worshipped all over the country and the self-sacrificing "Mother India" figure: "an all suffering being dedicated to the welfare of her sons" (Krishnaraj 1). Motherhood is her "natural" instinct and her goal in life is to nurture strong sons. Reinforcement of this image

further strengthens the hegemonic discourse that has since long naturalised women as mothers first and individuals later. Maithreyi Krishnaraj remarks,

> It is not the fact of mothering that makes women vulnerable, but their social construction, the implications for women flowing from the meaning attached to the idea of motherhood, and the terms and conditions under which it is allowed to express itself. (7)

One such implication 'for women flowing from the meaning attached to the idea of motherhood' is explored through Imelda in the text. Much like Rich, Imelda encounters motherhood in a world where the wants of the mother are dismissed, where motherhood becomes mandatory for her instead of a choice, and where she is told to have a child if she wants to 'assume adult womanhood to the full' (42). This pressure put on a woman's womb is what maddens Imelda.

Imelda's encounter with this 'institution of motherhood' (Rich 58) happens late in life. For thirty years, Imelda was conditioned to become the sole breadwinner of her family. While the other girls learned how to sew, cook, and be a "good wife and mother," Imelda learned how to make ends meet:

> I don't think I ever worried about how food was coming to the table or what was to be cooked. It appeared and I cribbed and I ate it and the plates went away again to be washed. I had no hand in any of that.' 'As the wage earner?'... 'Maybe it was. After all, other women earn but they also do the housework.' (Pinto 31)

At sixteen, her mother forced her into a teaching arrangement that she hated. At eighteen, just when she started liking her job, her mother decided that she should join the 'Standard Shorthand and Typewriting Institute' so she could earn more as a secretary. At thirty, her aunt and mother fixed a marriage with her boyfriend of twelve years without asking for her consent. We know this through the narrator that neither Augustine nor Imelda wanted to marry but it was expected of them since they were 'moving around' (Pinto 81) for a long time:

> Because that was also part of the family legend. That Augustine and Imelda spent their courtship in a variety of bookshops, that they would still have been doing that if they'd had their own way... neither of them seemed to want to get married (Pinto 34)

Fed up with others controlling her life and faced with the news of marriage, rage took over Imelda's body and she screamed at her family. She mourns for the loss of her individuality in a letter to Augustine:

> I am no I. I am now part of a we. Wee wee wee, I wanted to weep… (Pinto 74, 75)

What we see here is a gradual disintegration of the sense of self as Imelda realises she has no control over life because the cultural system she's prescribed in never grants her the agency to develop as an individual.

Yet, guided by what society deems 'proper,' Imelda marries Augustine with an ambivalent heart. Soon after the birth of Susan, her firstborn, Imelda "broke down and could no longer go to work" (Pinto 124):

> 'He made me resign,' she would say angrily. 'Or I might still have had my job to fall back on.' (Pinto 124)

In an interview with Shivalika Agarwal and Nagendra Kumar, Jerry Pinto remarks in this regard:

> I think Imelda here speaks for many women who find that their identity is suddenly subsumed into the identity of a child… In many cases, it is assumed that a woman who has borne a child will give up her job whether this has been an important part of her identity or not. In Imelda's case, her work, I imagine, would have been an important part of her identity. She is the breadwinner of her family (5)

While talking with her children she confesses that she had wanted 'none of this' (Pinto 90):

> 'You didn't want to get married?' I asked. 'Who wants to get married?' Em asked rhetorically. 'Only those who want children.' 'You didn't want children?'... 'Oh God, no. I saw what children do. They turn a good respectable woman into a mudd-dha. I didn't want to be a mudh-dha. I didn't want to be turned inside out. I didn't want to have my world shifted so that I was no longer the centre of it... For the next hundred years of your life, you're stuck with being someone whose definition isn't even herself. You're now someone's mudd-dha!' (Pinto 90)

Clearly, Imelda's biggest fear is the loss of her identity as an individual. Her aversion to constructs like marriage and motherhood sprouts from the potential threat they pose to her individuality which she has tightly held onto for years. Therefore, the word 'mother' comes out

as an insult and since the decision to become a mother was never a choice and always a mandate, birthing children turns her 'inside out.' It is as Imelda says,

> You got married. You had children. This was assumed. This was what people did. If you didn't do it, it was because you had a problem (Pinto 114)

Her identity has been subject to 'multiple colonizations' (Agarwal and Kumar 6), one of them being the masculine symbolic order. Many of her manic episodes, therefore, centre around a certain 'they' who threaten to destroy her and her family if she doesn't adhere to 'their' demands. This fear of what 'they' might do if she doesn't listen to them translates directly into the fear of non-adherence to the norms of a patriarchal society:

> 'Come and sit down and have a samosa,' Susan said. Em grabbed the samosas and threw them into the dustbin. 'No one is to eat a thing that hasn't been cooked in the house,' she said. 'They might poison us.' 'They' were back. (Pinto 52)

That's why after marriage her sense of self gradually disintegrates. As soon as she gives in to the mandates of this masculine symbolic order, she loses herself. And yet, at the same time, she is conscious of the patriarchal control over her being and despises it. This gets manifested every time she declares that her son's birth is the cause of her depression. This also becomes visible in her radical choice to worship the Virgin Mary instead of Jesus:

> I can't take too much more male will in my life. No thy-will-be-done for me. I surrender nothing. I surrender nothing. I'll take my chances with a woman's kindness (Pinto 129)

Thus, her detestation for her son, her refusal to have sex with her husband, and her religious belief in the powers of the Virgin Mary instead of Jesus, all come down to her hatred for the gendered power structure she's part of. Simultaneously, all this also becomes an attempt to escape the male-dominated cultural paradigm that restricts her agency. In fact, Srikanth Mallavarapu talks about other ways through which Em tries to 'reclaim a degree of control over her narrative' like her frank conversations with her children about sex, and the writing of a diary (185).

Therefore, the trauma that plagues the Mendes family takes root in the structural realities of the patriarchal society that embodies Em. Her gradual realisation of how this structure takes over her being through institutions like marriage and motherhood maddens her and in the process, passes on this agony to her family.

2. Those Who Suffer From Mental Illness and Those Who Suffer From the Mental Illness of Someone They Love

Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja while explaining Cathy Caruth's poststructuralist take on trauma remark on how trauma is characterized by:

> a delayed response to an overwhelming event that cannot be processed at the time of its occurrence but manifests itself through intrusive thoughts, flashbacks or nightmares. (4)

This is exactly how Imelda's son (and the narrator) narrates the story of the Mendes family. The telling of the tale almost feels like a 'delayed response' to having cared for a mother who makes it clear in the harshest words possible that she never wanted to be a mother. The construction of the narrative takes the shape of an adult child processing the years he lived through his mother's mania, depression, and multiple suicide attempts. The toll that it takes on him is manifested through intrusive thoughts plugged in as asides between snippets of conversations with Em that he recalls as mental wounds:

> 'It's a tap somewhere. It opened when you were born.' I was repaid in pain, a sharp thing. (Pinto 13)

The fine line between past and present gets blurred as the narrator remembers all that he witnessed vis-a-vis his mother over the years. This act of witnessing Em's pain, her mania and depressive phases, becomes one of the significant modes of transmission of trauma in the text. The son, as one of the primary caregivers of Em, becomes a 'surrogate voice' (Davis and Meretoja 118) who is not the traumatised victim, but someone who provides aid to the victim. Thus, witnessing Em's physical and mental scars, and the resultant impact of this act of witnessing a loved one in pain, becomes a recurring motif in the text. For instance, in a conversation between Imelda and her children, she tells them about her first suicide attempt when she jumped in front of a bus, hoping for death. As she's talking, the sheet slips and the scar from the accident becomes visible. Witnessing the scar triggers the memory of her recent attempt at killing herself to which the children were primary witnesses and caregivers. The narrator is reminded of the time when he and Susan returned from the movies and encountered Em drenched in her own blood, having slit her wrist in the bathroom:

> She was drenched in blood. It was in her hair. It was on her hands. It was dripping from her clothes… I picked up one of her arms and turned it over to look. The cut was a single line, dark red. It said nothing. (Pinto 16)

We know that the trauma is transmitted when the narrator records his own reaction to the incident. Having taken care of his mother, he goes into a state of shock. He remembers cleaning the bathroom and watching the blood clots clogging the drain. He remembers the iron-like smell of the blood but nothing else:

> I don't remember what we did that evening. I don't remember going to sleep or waking up the next morning. (Pinto 17)

What one chooses to remember about an overwhelming event becomes important. The narrator remembers the shock of witnessing his mother drenched in blood and the pain of cleaning up after her in the bathroom, all the while knowing that she blames him for opening the 'tap.' He remembers incidents in patches and images, often focusing on parts that altered his sense of self, conversations that left mental wounds on his being, and his deep longing for a 'normal' childhood:

> But I loved talking to her [Gertrude] because she had known Em when she was whole. I loved it also because talking to anyone normal was an invitation to the world of ordinary people who had ordinary woes and worries: money, sex, sin and real estate, for instance. They were not, or so I imagined, people with ambivalences about their mothers or fears about their own acceptability (Pinto 21)

The guilt of going to the movies instead of watching over Em, the guilt of being the cause of her pain, and the guilt of not being able to help her heal, plague the narrator throughout the text. We know the trauma has been transmitted when the narrator acknowledges the disturbing effect Em's mental state has on his mental state:

> Depression means nothing more than the blues… until you find its black weight settling inside your mother's chest, disrupting her breathing, leaching her days, and yours, of colour and the nights of rest. (Pinto 51, 52)

We know that the trauma is transmitted when the narrator's response to one of Em's 'episodes' is to scream, shout, and demand death:

> this seemed to be the last straw for me. I began to scream and wail and carry on in the manner of the people I despised most. I screamed that I was leaving the house.

> I said I could not live with someone like that. I said I wanted to kill myself. I said I could not bear my life. (Pinto 133, 134)

Furthermore, the transmission of this trauma is not just limited to the narrator, it goes on to affect all members of the family, all of them having to deal with it in their own way:

> For two or three days, we will all live with the knowledge that one of us is gulping for air, swallowing sobs, experiencing pain that will not let up. We will rearrange our lives so that someone is always with her. (Pinto 46)

All of them have different ways of negotiating through this pain. The narrator took to excessive witnessing, harping on his mother's words, sifting through her letters and diaries, trying to trace the origin of her mania hoping to find a possible way to cope and live with the trauma:

> … each time Em told me something about her life, I would examine it for signs, for early indications of the 'nervous breakdown'. It was an obsession… Every fact, every bit of information had to be scanned. (Pinto 27, 28)

Susan takes to avoiding her mother's letters and diaries, afraid of what she might find there. Her method of dealing with Em is likened to a 'stoic,' (Pinto 100) bearing her without complaining, much like her father, The Big Hoom. Both the father and the daughter negotiate the pain through silence and a mask of resilience. Rarely does this mask slip through to reveal a sliver of vulnerability. The narrator, along with the reader, is often left to wonder at the effect Em's illness had on them:

> she told me about the tap that opened at my birth and the black drip filling her up and it tore a hole in my heart. If that was what she could manage with a single sentence, what did thirty years of marriage do to The Big Hoom? (Pinto 17)

Another mode through which the trauma is passed on to the children is through the use of language. More often than not the conversations with Em end up wounding the children to a point of no return. Words become sharp weapons, hitting the nerve where it hurts the most. On some occasions, Em would use her words with the intent to hurt deliberately:

> 'Ooh, he's had a tough day at work. And for what? For some three thousand rupees. Can't buy much with three thousand rupees. Can't go far with three thousand rupees. Can't even live on his own with three thousand rupees.' I could not remember ever feeling so violated and hurt. (Pinto 94)

On others, she would do the same but unintentionally:

> I remember the hurt I felt when he [The Big Hoom] tried another tack once. 'I might go to jail,' he said, 'and who would look after the children?' 'I don't know,' she said and she didn't have to add, 'I don't care'. Both Susan and I knew it was the subtext. (Pinto 112)

Where words aren't used, silence becomes an important channel of transmission of Em's pain. Between Augustine and Imelda, the former was the silent parent, the wall of support that the children could lean back on whenever they felt tired of dealing with Imelda. And yet, this silence also meant that the children couldn't reach their father, just like they couldn't reach Em in her madness:

> Most days I saw him as the perfect man, even in his dense silences that could leave you bleeding for a word in either direction... No, he was not a paragon… A paragon would have been more than a mere crisis manager. And a paragon would have expressed his feelings. (Pinto 59)

Similarly, silence from Em, whom the narrator always considered a 'rough, rude, roistering woman' (Pinto 44), also became a matter of unease, almost like an indication of things turning from bad to worse:

> I knew instantly that she was beginning the slide into depression. Perhaps it was the silence that had disturbed me... she was in the kitchen, silent, and the slow sounds of the pan being put on the stove, the tins being opened, her feet dragging across the cramped space told me that she was sinking into night, that the black drip had started inside her (Pinto 97, 98)

The social and cultural framework in which an individual is coded can also become a possible channel for the transmission and facilitation of trauma. In *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma*, Meera Atkinson looks at 'trauma as a social phenomenon,' examining how 'transmissive cycles of trauma' are rooted in one's 'structural social organization' (4). A social framework that fails to provide the necessary support required in caregiving for a mentally ill parent eventually ends up furthering the trauma. Thus, the narrator notes how:

> Mad is an everyday, ordinary word. It is compact. It fits into songs… But it is different when you have a mad mother. Then the word wakes up from time to time and blinks at you, eyes of fire. (Pinto 138)

The impact of being labelled 'children of a mad mother' (Pinto 138) in one's adolescence and facing the dehumanised treatment of mentally ill people as an adult, affects the narrator deeply, so much so that he starts fearing the possibility of going mad like his mother:

> I feared most the possibility that I might go mad too… All I had was my mind and that was at peril from my genes… I feared her depression. (Pinto 44)

Fighting his genes becomes an important motto in his life because he lives in a society that penalises the one who attempts suicide and gives shock treatments to the mentally ill:

> It occurred to me then that the mad in India are not the mentally ill, they are, simply, mad. They have no other identity. (Pinto 131)

Having visited the Thane Mental Hospital and seeing the patients go through Electro-Convulsive Therapy, the narrator's fear of losing his sanity escalates. His dementophobia then is grounded in the realities of the social organization of his world. Many of his fears are grounded in structural problems that worsen any attempts at coping with the trauma. For instance, the narrator also feels burdened by the norms set for him as the 'man of the house.' Just like the male symbolic order maddens Em, it plays with the narrator's sanity as well. One of his biggest fears is not being able to take care of Em in the absence of The Big Hoom:

> But the real fear was not that I wouldn't know how to earn money. It was this: life without The Big Hoom meant life with Em on her own – no, life with Em and no buffer. What if I had to open another door to find that she had sawed at her wrists with one of the knives we had blunted?... If she died, would I know whom to bribe and how to bribe to make sure it would not turn into a police case?... At that point I realized what it meant to be a man in India. (Pinto 58)

How does one then live with this trauma? Is healing possible? Or is the narrator bound to fall into the same cycle of pain that Em went through?

4. Me, I Believe In Metaphors

The novel ends on an ambiguous note with the family facing the death of Imelda from a heart attack. Far from providing any kind of reprieve, the absence of Imelda creates a gaping, throbbing hole in the family, a wound deep enough to never heal from. The Big Hoom behaves 'as if a large part of his personality was dissolving' (Pinto 153), Susan tries to take on the role of the family matriarch, and the narrator finds himself suffocating in the emptiness of the same

home he once wanted to run away from. On one hand, we see an attempt to resume the family routine, hoping to heal with time, but on the other, the text ends with a sense of defeat, a giving into the cycle of pain:

> 'I seem to have lost my taste for this,' he sighed, looking into his glass. I went to make us some tea. (Pinto 157)

This ambiguity vis-a-vis wanting to break the intergenerational chain of pain by seeking coping mechanisms and not being able to, plagues the whole narrative. On one hand, the text ends up on a dismal note, suggesting a possible continuation of the cycle of trauma. On the other hand, the text also gives us hope that healing is possible, that one can in fact live to deal with trauma by taking recourse to art, cinema, and literature. All the members of the Mendes family find coping mechanisms in the world of art and literature.

Healing is possible because we are told that 'Em loved a good story' (Pinto 11), that she wrote letters and diaries whenever she couldn't speak her thoughts out loud, that she would read books to annotate them, write in odd places, never tear up even a scrap of paper, and keep all the notes, letters, and fragments in 'cheerful cloth bags' (Pinto 18). Even if everything else about Em was a mystery to her family, one thing was still certain that 'Em wrote' (Pinto 35) and she wrote with an effortlessness that was hard to master:

> She wrote when she was with us. She wrote when no one was around. She wrote postcards, she wrote letters in books, she wrote in other people's diaries, in telephone diaries, on the menus of takeaway places... In some of the letters she wrote Augustine, she was obviously flaunting her ability to write. She was demonstrating her charm, her effortlessness, her skill. She was suggesting to the world that she be taken seriously as a writer. (Pinto 35)

Writing provides Imelda with a freedom that she lacks otherwise in her life. Writing becomes the only constant in her chaotic world. Writing is something that provided her with an outlet for her overflowing thoughts. Writing healed, even if for a moment.

It is not surprising then for the narrator to have opted for a career as a journalist, or for Susan to teach English Literature at college. It is also not surprising that The Big Hoom and Em spent most of their courtship years in bookshops and libraries. For all of them, recourse to literature, writing, and art becomes liberating. Recourse to cinema also forms some of the happiest memories that the narrator remembers. He smiles at the memory of him, Susan, and Em

watching Satyajit Ray on a Saturday evening, and cherishes the evening he spent watching Amitabh Bachan's *Coolie* with Susan:

> The memory makes me smile: Em, with her beedi, and Susan and I watching Satyajit Ray on a Saturday evening, with The Big Hoom working overtime or busy in the kitchen. (Pinto 30)

Furthermore, even as a child, one could trace the affinity for literature in the narrator. He mentions his love for the word 'hypothesis' because it sounded adult-like and beautiful. He remarks how he thought if he had enough words like this, he would be able to deal with the world.

To conclude, literature and writing play a significant role for all four members of the Mendes family in dealing with the world that was always out of proportion for them. It is as Em remarks, "A well-told lie can heal. Otherwise, what's fiction?" (Pinto 39)

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Submitted by: Narjis Bint Islam

Starving Sentences:

Understanding Linguistic Dynamics of Pain Through Hunger

Abstract:

Language serves as a tool for knowledge acquisition, learning and communication. It is believed to not only convey information but also shape cognitive processes. Linguistic representation of emotion enables us to share and understand intricate feelings. However, pain's universality contrasts with limited expression in narratives due to vocabulary constraints. While pain is an intrinsically personal and individual experience it is universal and has multifarious aspects, intensity, location, and quality that demands nuanced description, often hampered by lexical limitations.

Complex emotions like hunger or deprivation are depicted through language via metaphor, imagery, and descriptors. This paper focuses on how these representations integrate cognitive and physiological responses through the autobiographical novel of Yeonmi Park, "In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom." When experiencing hunger, the brain processes bodily signals, yielding thoughts and urges related to finding sustenance. Language articulates this interplay, shaping the motivation and action. The gap between pain's universality and its narrative representation highlighting language's intricate role in conveying human experiences within a system of authoritarian regime of North Korea where freedom of thought and language is denied. *Linguistic constraints that are there for expression but does it in the same way control felt emotions that motivate the decisions and actions of an individual.*

Keyword - Deprivation, Repression, Hunger, Truth

“I was starting to realise that you can’t really grow and learn unless you have a language to grow within” (Park 171). Desire and deprivation drives thoughts and actions, disregarding the access one has to vocabulary and the language taught to them. Language can limit expression but is the inherent human perception also dictated by it. When the language is as formulaic as that used in North Korea’s official discourse, it hides many things in broad daylight, making it difficult to see how it works (Ryang15). In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl’s Journey to Freedom is an autobiographical novel by Yeonmi Park, her identity as known to us is of a North Korean Defector. Our information about North Korea is limited as all the publication and mass-media is state sanctioned while foreign media is banned both from reporting and shooting inside or broadcasting about the country. In such circumstances the narratives of people who formerly resided within the country became crucial to help us understand the structure. Through Yeonmi’s narrative of North Korea and elaborate studies by anthropologists Sonia Ryang and Sandra Fahy we will look into the role played by language in understanding and explaining pain. Starting from 1945 and division of the Korean subcontinent along the 38th parallel to 1948 to the declaration of formation of the nation Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the continuation of the totalitarian regime till date. The gradual changes that have come to being over the course of many decades and several authoritarian changes, controlling the access to what people are allowed to consume, both in terms of language, literature and food items. The famine of the 1990s lead to the collapse of the public distribution system (pds) in DPRK, although termed as natural calamity it was a political occurrence, this brings us to the concept of hunger and the extremities that people can go to fulfil the necessities. Sandra Fahy talks about understanding the relationship of language to the famine in her interviews with various North Korean defectors, associating the historical censorship, “silencing” and “unspeakable”. It is clear that the language of informants can tell us a great deal about those former stages of silencing and this can reveal aspects of the social environment where the violence took place (fahy 232). She mentions the consistent ambiguous pattern of speech amongst the survivors of famine, as an alternative development that was used by them instead of direct criticism of the government in fear of punishment, “whole bodies of language grew up in the space left behind in the absence of accurate expression” (fahy 233). The expressions they used to talk about the famine were

encoded with deprivation and uniform ambiguity such that communication about immediate circumstances took place but well wrapped under the restrictions of the language allowed to them.

“The hunger had become unbearable; I was willing to risk my life for the promise of a bowl of rice.” (Park 10) “It’s still so painful to think about that time. That’s all any of us wanted: just to eat.” (Park 91) The physical pain is related to hunger, symbolising deprivation of food and individual agency to earn means for feeding oneself and their family is what Yeonmi Park writes in her autobiography, she writes about her desperation to feed herself just before she and her mother were about to escape from North Korea to China. Their conditions in China were not favourable but still for quite a while she tried to rationalise it as a better place. “But here in China, there was so much rice that you were allowed to eat a whole bowl by yourself. And there was more food in the garbage can in this apartment than I might see in a week in Hyesan. I was suddenly very happy with my decision.” (Park 100) Her initial perception of China was from the smell of food she got from across the border in her hometown and the fireworks that they witnessed in the Chinese part of the sky during Chinese new year celebrations. There was a longing for the unfamiliar, it can be understood both as desire for food and freedom. “I wasn’t dreaming of freedom when I escaped from North Korea. I didn’t even know what it meant to be free.” (Park 10) Craving for Chinese dishes that she had never tasted before, similarly craving for freedom that she had never earlier experienced shows us how even though she like many other North Koreans did not have the knowledge of vocabulary and meaning of the term freedom but as an inherent desire it is there. Food is necessary for survival and food security being the base for any society’s existence can also lead to extreme risks taken by deprived individuals to satiate this need. Hunger in this context can be looked upon as a metaphor for the helplessness in the face of politically thrusted starvation, “a highly correlated experience for people of all cultures, namely, the correlation between hunger and desire.” (Gibbs Jr.a, 1199) Hunger is a common metaphor used in many cultures drawing comparisons to desire although desire is fundamentally abstract with no tangible fulfilment, putting forth the argument that people express their thoughts in intuitive and plausible ways. Correlating desire for freedom with hunger but it cannot be satiated with food it is an abstract feeling that is whole another concept in its own.

Language as a means of expression is necessary, to think it is not, an individual may lack vocabulary but realisation is an inherent feature.‘They did not use the expression “famine” nor did they use the expression “hunger” rather they used the term shingnyang t’agyok, food ration downturn.’ (fahy 234). Sandra Fahy mentions that certain terms like “hunger” and “famine” were never used by the survivors, infact the whole time period of the famine is called as Konan-uˇi haenggun “The March of Suffering” drawing parallels to the historical march of Kim Il Sung with guerilla fighters against the Japanese imperialists, givings the citizens an illusion that their struggles are on par with that of the revolutionaries and their deprivation and suffering is all for the sake of the country. The state sanctioned language referred this whole period merely as food shortage, urging the people to eat two meals a day while significantly reducing the PDS rations. People were still able communicate their oral accounts, no written proof can be found, the written media represented the famine as approved by the state but “these state initiated terms were used in ordinary, private discourse, yet people managed to manipulate their meanings just enough to secure a degree of linguistic freedom” (fahy 539). People find loopholes to the system to express their dissatisfaction, they are not as naive and unaware as believed from outside perspective. The prevalent question of the truth, in North Korea there are different truths one that is projected by the government through printed media, journalists and politicians which we also have access to but then then there is the truth that is different that is unknown to us, that is the truth of the people living there “when defector recollections are assessed, we are more often than not given the polar opposite of this version: that people are aware of how deceptive the state is, that they want to leave, and that they resist the regime” (Ryang 5) the term “double think” is used here to discuss about the different lives these people are living, they confirm to the state sanctioned norms and practices, termed as propaganda. It can be however argued that individuals adhere to distinct paradigms of truth across various domains of their lives, encompassing their professional environments, educational institutions, introspective evaluations, mass gatherings, or moments marked by fervent collective indignation towards perceived imperialist entities like the United States. It is crucial to acknowledge that even within a tightly controlled regime such as North Korea, diverse forms of knowledge persist, encompassing empirical scientific understanding, sexual awareness, and conventional and customary wisdom about life. We however, need to focus specifically on the prevailing paradigm of truth within North Korea. The aim is not to unveil or expose hidden facets of this truth but rather to intricately examine the

construct of truth as presently upheld in North Korea. The gradual dismantling of certain layers that obscure the underlying rationale, with the intent of illustrating that what is frequently categorised as propaganda within the North Korean context should be understood as a specific variant of truth. To be more precise, this version of truth is intricate, internally incongruous, yet it retains the potential for considerable efficacy. North Koreans have developed their own awareness of the correct language and linguistic tools to locate their statement within the territory of state approved truth while voicing the actual truth.

'No matter what I say, you will not understand what it was like', Mr Yoon told me. (fahy 235) Mr. Yoon probably wanted to convey the exceptional nature of the experience, emphasizing on the distance it has from the ordinary. For us these are stories they are telling, not having directly encountered the famine, we may eventually pave the way for justification while for them it is recollection of a painful past. In the realm of social suffering, it is often argued that "understanding will lead to justification" (fahy 235) Yeonmi writes that after her resettlement in South Korea she got access to all kinds of knowledge, through books, institutions and other resources, the language was richer in words in this part of the world which helped her shape her critical thinking, not having access to facts and general knowledge is one thing but that cannot be equated with "critical thinking" all the ordeal she and family went through to survive inside North Korea, afterwards in China and in South Korea was all somewhere a proof that critical thinking helped them in surviving. Taking informed decisions is a different thing than thinking critically, language and vocabulary can facilitate or inhibit access to facts but the truth is still visible to people as we saw even in the case of North Koreans who then communicate these thoughts under the wrap of state sanctioned terminologies that probably can not be understood by outsiders like us without context but nonetheless realisation is there, intellectual understanding is there. State is able to control what one is allowed to say, thinking and realisations take place even in absence of words but one can not express those thoughts due to lack of vocabulary or use a different kind of vocabulary that is different from the generic understanding when access to vocabulary is controlled.

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Submitted by: Syed Sameed Anwar

THE PARADOX OF LONELINESS

How the Muslim Identity Understands *Loneliness*: A Reading of *Othering* in Umar Khalid's Prison Diary Author: Syed Sameed Anwar

"زلم کا زہر
گھولنے والے
کامران ہو
سکے آج نہ
کل"

فیاض احمد فیاض ~

Is loneliness always a monolithic negative affect? Can it be the source that paradoxically creates the very entity that can challenge its hegemony - Community? For Muslims living within India, loneliness becomes a prolonged state of being, felt in such a unique manner, that for many, attempting to find the language to communicate such an affect to those who do not experience it becomes impossible. However, all one needs is a single word when expressing this anguish to a fellow Muslim for that shared look of pain and understanding. *"Loneliness is not only an idiosyncratic, individual experience of suffering; it is the outcome of specific conditions that arise when social forces work together on a particular group of people to bring about isolation" Enns (2022, p. 65)*. This becomes especially important in a nation like India, where *"one of the primary concerns of all tyrannical government is to bring this isolation about" Arendt (2018, p. 474)*. Umar Khalid's Prison Diary from January 2022 is a succinct example of the *'organized loneliness' (Enns, 2022, p. 67)* hinted at here. This affect then brings forth an assumed silence, the breaking of which creates a *"memory citizenship" (K. Nayar, 2013, p. 19)*. This, in turn, allows for the *internal* to become the *external*, thus, creating opportunities for the recognition of a *'communal loneliness'*, a catalyst to bring the affected group closer together, thus, forming *"affective communities" (Zink, 2019)*. A close reading of Umar Khalid's aforementioned prison diary can allow us to understand better how *'othering'* becomes a key factor in the creation of this loneliness. A human rights activist, Umar Khalid gained prominence in the eyes of the state

and the larger public in 2016 when the right-wing dominated media of the nation turned its eyes towards Jawaharlal Nehru University and its left-dominant politics. He only rose in prominence, becoming a well-known Muslim activist, highly vocal during the Anti-Citizenship Amendment Act (then Bill) protests in 2019. He was arrested under the draconian Unlawful Actions (Prevention) Act (UAPA) in 2020 for allegedly inciting the Anti-Muslim Delhi Pogrom (labeled the 'Delhi Riots' in national discourse) that took hold of the city in February of the same year. As of now, it has been over one thousand days since his incarceration within the Tihar Jail Complex of New Delhi began, without a single trial being held for the same, an action completely legal within the framework of the aforementioned law *(Outlook Web Desk, 2023)*.

For Arendt, '*organized loneliness', that* is, *'systemic loneliness' (Enns, 2022, p. 67)*, poses significantly more danger than *'unorganized loneliness'* owing to the absolute and total nature of the devastation that it can cause *(Arendt, 2018, p. 478)*. This *'organized loneliness'* causes *'uprootedness'* and *'superfluousness'*, which she theorizes to mean *"to have no place in the world, recognized and guaranteed by others"*, and *"not to belong to the world at all," Arendt (2018, p. 475)* respectively. Indian Muslims exist in a transitionary stage, where their historically questioned seat on the table of India post-partition is now, transitioning to that of an *'alien'*, *'the foreign invader', 'the other'*. This is evident in the *"aap log"* - *'you people'* that Umar hears so often in his interactions with his fellow prisoners, and the frequent associations with Pakistan and Afghanistan, Muslim-majority nations. As Umar himself puts it, *"I have also realized that a Muslim is always seen as part of one large national, or rather a transnational, group. They are bereft of any individuality", (Khalid, 2022).* This loneliness is unique, for it seeps into the personal as well, and is not just restricted to the public sphere, a phenomenon that makes it *"the most radical and desperate experiences of man," Arendt (2018, p. 475).* Umar mentions how the people who speak in such a manner to him are otherwise *'nice people'*, for whom *'hate'* is not an agenda. They share food with him, share stories of how they ended up in prison with him, and seek legal advice from him. Yet, for them, bigotry is so internalized, that to display Islamophobic sentiment is equivalent to speaking a universally known truth. This bigotry is achieved by the state and larger society through *"Fear and the suspicion it generates…neighbor is turned against neighbor…friend against friend," Enns (2022, p. 66).* This fear and its ensuing suspicion is quite evident in

Umar's acquaintances in prison, who repeatedly question the loyalty of Indian Muslims, with cricket being the outlet for this distrust. *'Isolation'* and *'loneliness'* are imperative for a tyrannical regime to function successfully. *"It has frequently been observed that terror can rule absolutely only over men who are isolated against each other and that, therefore, one of the primary concerns of all tyrannical government is to bring this isolation about. Isolation may be the beginning of terror; it certainly is its most fertile ground; it always is its result", Arendt (2018, p. 474).* Said affects are necessary to destroy the ability of communities to *'act in concert' (Burke, 1855, p. 151),* as Arendt puts it. Therefore, the affect of the *'organized loneliness'* becomes a deliberate crippling action, robbing a community of a base for it to exist on.

However, a noteworthy fact to be accounted for is how these affects are in a way, subversive to their own existence. *"We are lonely because the social is failing us,"* Enns (2022, p. 65). For Enns and Arendt, our capacities to not be subjugated to *'loneliness'* are dependent on the *external,* that is the social relationships that individuals occupy. Thus, an *internal* affect is dictated by the *external.* This internal affect, as mentioned previously brings forth an assumed monolithic silence. For, how are individuals expected to express *'loneliness'* when *"I as a person feel myself deserted by all human companionship," Arendt (2018, p. 474)?* To whom is this expression to be carried out? For that, Enn's understanding of the communal nature of *'loneliness'* comes in handy. She argues that *'loneliness'* as an affect is *'the outcome of specific conditions that arise when social forces work together on a particular group of people to bring about isolation," (Enns, 2022, p. 65).* Here, she is also acknowledging the *'communal'* nature of the affect, expressed in the above paragraph. Thus, *'communal loneliness'* creates the possibility of an audience for expression, allowing for the *'internal'* to become *'external'.* This creates three essential paradoxes: the dialectic relationship between the *internal* and *external,* the subversive relationship between *silence* and *expression*, and finally, the revolutionary relationship between the *individual* and the *collective.*

As mentioned above, it is through the breaking of the assumed silence of *loneliness* that the affect is expressed and becomes *external.* Thus, the *external* creates the *internal*, and the *external expression* of said *internal* creates the catalyst for that which can challenge the

hegemony of *loneliness* and *tyranny* as a whole - Community. In conclusion, the *external* brings to life the possibility of the subversion of itself.

The way *loneliness* is expressed is also crucial to this dialectic relationship. For tyrannical governments to exist, the affect has to be so devastating, that it can ensure that its victims fall silent, for any possibility of collective unity can enable the regime's downfall (Arendt, 2018, p. 475). Therefore, the very act of breaking said silence becomes a subversive act against the affect and the causes behind it. *"It is in the emotional disconnect, dissonance, and unstable cultural citizenship documented in survival literature that the nation's identity is called into question," K. Nayar (2013, p. 21).* The language and the general tone that the narrative garners then become the *dialect of loneliness*, relatable to any and all that have had to undergo it. Essentially, the language then becomes a tool for voicing not just one experience, but rather, a collective expression of the community as a whole. As Zink writes, "*affects function as implicit translators between social bodies that sensuously converse and create a dynamic sphere of sensual experiences," (Zink, 2019, p. 289)*. Umar's notes on the alienating nature of his incarceration, his hours spent in a confined, solitary environment, his hostile interactions with his fellow inmates, and his explicit admittance of his attempt to not turn bitter towards his imprisonment, then become the voice of not just Umar, but the Muslim community as a whole. Thus, a relationship between *'private pain',* and *'corporate pain'* emerges*,* where one becomes a metaphor for the other, defying the silence imposed by tyranny on not just a personal level, but rather, a communal level as well. In conclusion, a tyrannical government's attempts to isolate an individual as a means of securing its own future (Arendt, 2018, p. 474) instead creates an *'affective community'*, whose existence is itself revolutionary in nature.

The Tihar Jail Complex is made up of several layers of walls: layers, and layers of cages. *"As the police car that was shifting me from police station to jail kept moving inside, the sounds of the outside world slowly started to recede and were overtaken by silence," Khalid (2022).* It is an institution that serves a *"dual function: to keep us [non-prisoners] out as well as them in" Rhodes (2001, pp. 67–68).* It is inherently designed to isolate the individual from the world outside. Umar's incarceration goes one step further owing to the public nature of his prison term. The prison authorities take "special care" of his safety, placing him solitarily in a cell for

vast periods of the day, away from all, bound by three walls and a barred gate to seal the room. Thus, a prison can so easily close down around an individual, as Umar himself mentions, *"I keep telling myself not to turn bitter about my circumstances. It is quite easy to succumb to bitterness."* Yet, he subverts that forced claustrophobia, *"But bitterness would not leave me good for anything productive, certainly not for the fight we have set out to fight—of reclaiming our country from the forces of hate and divisions," Khalid (2022).* By speaking out in the first place through the genre of the *"Prison Diary"*, Umar refuses to be caged by the walls he finds himself in. His mere decision to exist and speak, as highlighted in the above paragraphs, is subversive. Moreover, the structure of the narrative he follows, in his emphasis on the relationship between the *'communal'* nature of the bigotry he faces, merges his *'personal pain'* with *'corporate pain'*, an exercise which is a *"tragic way of belonging for the survivor," K. Nayar (2013, p. 19).* He thus exercises his *'memory citizenship',* contributing to a *"larger collective and cultural memory," (K. Nayar, 2013, p. 20)* For Umar, the mentions of his *'personal pain'* and his emphasis on *'corporate pain'* essentially become a way of expressing his belonging to the Muslim Community.

"The memoir, the atrocity account, the survivor's chronicle of horrors – is highlighted for its role in producing a cultural legibility and cultural legitimacy for larger political concerns about human rights," K. Nayar (2013, p. 14). Umar's decision to speak out about the injustices he faces in prison, the monotony of his incarceration, the forced solitude that he has to endure, and the state's larger attempt to isolate and demonize him provides a language and legitimacy to existing discourses surrounding the violence faced by Muslims in India, all via the *'prison diary'* he pens down. The questions he raises then, *"Is this where the 'tryst with destiny' was to bring us after 70 years? Are these the destiny's children? (Khalid, 2022)* become an interrogation of the state and the nation at large. As Nayar writes about Homi Bhabha's thoughts, *"Survivor narratives must be treated as performatives that defy the pedagogic narratives of the nation," (K. Nayar, 2013, p. 21).* Umar's incarceration and its symbolism for the general treatment of Muslims in India then offer *"civil society a chance to bear witness to something larger: to the collapse of an ideal, or of constitutionally vouchsafed truths," K. Nayar (2013, p. 23).* The *'prison diary'* thus becomes subversive through the nature of its very existence.

The Muslim Community in India is one that is hurting, every second of every day, for the corners that it has been allowed to occupy in that which is defined to be India is ever shrinking. Soon, perhaps, there will be no more corners left, no more avenues for the community to turn to, and perhaps, the 300 million people who fall within the category of Muslim will be made to stop existing. Umar's attempts at peace through his Gandhian vision for love landed him in prison, while his contemporaries like Kanhaiyya Kumar, enjoy party tickets from national political parties in constituencies. The difference between them is obvious. The nation it seems, has now, officially taken down its facade (its actions have proven it to be a facade) of *"unity and diversity"*, and fully adopted the idea of a people's erasure. It certainly seems to be the case in the eyes of the most powerful people in the country. Yogi Adityanath's election pitch of 20% Vs. 80% *(India Today, 2022)*, roughly the population divide between Muslims and Hindus in his home ground of Uttar Pradesh *(Kramer, 2022)*, and his love for 'Bulldozer Raj' which seems to exist only when the houses and shops are demolished are owned by Muslims *(Fatima, 2022)* seems to be indicative of that. Perhaps Umar's dream of a nation united in love and unity will never be bestowed upon the nation of India, or perhaps, Umar's life, writings, and trial will become the very things that hammer the final nail in the coffin of tyranny, like the Chilean Human Rights Lawyer he looks up to. One can desperately hope that it is the latter.

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