

TRANSGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN MADHURI V IJAY'S *THE FAR FIELD***Megha Santhosh**

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Journal DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56602/TDJ>Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56602/TDJ/12.1.1641-1645>**ABSTRACT**

Even after seventy-five years of Indian Independence, terror and fear grip Kashmir Valley. From this emanates the trauma of its natives, which is recorded in varied forms ranging from news clips to literary narratives, fact to fiction, an area that deserves rigorous academic study. Despite the flux of terrible events recurring in the state, most of the Pandits strive to return, while the local Muslim residents fear to live there. Kashmiri trauma is disturbingly diverse and contradictorily complex for many reasons. On the one hand is the longing for the homeland; on the other, is the repulsion towards what happens there. In addition, trauma has now transcended time and space. It is not just a part of the lives of the victims alone, but it has its clutches on the next generation as well. This paper attempts to explore the idea of transgenerational trauma in Madhuri Vijay's *The Far Field* describing the trauma of a Kashmiri Muslim family. The cyclical nature of trauma will also be studied, using the framework proposed by Meera Atkinson.

Keywords: Kashmiri Muslims, Trauma, Transgenerational Trauma, Cyclical Haunting, *The Far Field*, Meera Atkinson.

INTRODUCTION

Trauma Studies in the twenty-first century focuses on a plethora of subjects. The roots of trauma studies lie in war and its effects. Far ahead of time, in literature, the reference to 'Philomela's Tongue' (Horace 1) in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* foreshadows trauma and its negative impacts. Shifting the angle to the amputated tongue marks the beginning of testimonies, which tell the tales to the world.

Recent academic interest in the area of trauma studies varies from Holocaust trauma to trauma in digital memory, transgenerational to transnational and transcultural trauma. Cross-cultural currents have already carried trauma studies far and wide. In research emerging from India, Kashmiri Trauma is an area pertinent in the current scenario. For Kashmiris, it is a trauma in continuum spanning more than three decades. An analysis of Kashmiri Literature in

English (KLE) from the perspective of Transgenerational Trauma (TGT) might be a fruitful exercise to understand the lasting, if not the everlasting, effect of trauma on human minds and generations.

Meera Atkinson, a Sydney-based writer, has proposed her ideas of TGT and cyclical haunting in her work, *The Poetics of Transgenerational Trauma*. The chapter titled, “Family Snapshots to Big Picture: Cyclical Haunting” from Atkinson’s work provides the framework for a critical reading of Madhuri Vijay’s *The Far Field* presented in this paper.

Atkinson defines transgenerational trauma thus: “The poetics of transgenerational trauma is literature that tells the stories and charts the topography of interlinkages and movements of intensities within assemblages inhabited by a given subject, family, and society” (143).

Atkinson synthesises the ideas of Massumi, Derrida and Laplanche. Atkinson’s framework suggests that the autonomy of affect goes beyond the ‘subjective containment’. She also recapitulates the vision of Freud that ‘the unconscious admit the possibility of autonomy of affect operative beyond, but also involving, subjective containment and conscious awareness.’ Atkinson elaborates on the autonomy of affect as Massumi proposes it, along with Derrida’s idea of ‘virtual.’ Atkinson sketches the path of trauma, which escapes the ‘subjective containment’, with or without a form from the past, hunts down the present by influencing the existing assemblages. Here, she uses Manuel De Landa’s assemblage/network theory to analyse the transmission of trauma from micro to macro subjects. Hence, trauma will continue to inflict other assemblages thus capturing the future as well, making the trauma cyclical in nature. Laplanche’s idea of affect along with LaCapra’s, is used to understand the structural, historical (h) and Historical (H) trauma, which makes trauma, transgenerational. According to Atkinson, acknowledgement of the trauma is the sole way out, as it seeks nothing but ‘recognition’.

Tracking the eccentric ways of fear and guilt, Vijay’s *The Far Field* aims to chase ‘cowardice’, which, like a phantom figure, eerily crosses over from one generation to the other causing intergenerational trauma, and a transgenerational transmission of trauma. It becomes a self-inflicted pain, and continues to inflict pain on the victim and other subjects. Atkinson uses Derrida’s ‘virtual’ to define the ‘space of Transgenerational Trauma’ that is transmittable between different assemblages, making it cyclical in nature. TGT happens to family members and people associated with the family. TGT in these characters can be comprehended using Atkinson’s idea of traumatic affect in which the characters are studied based on the fear and sadness they experience, due to their cowardice.

The novel opens with a confession about the disappearance of a Kashmiri commoner, Riyaz. Shalini reflects: “...a man I knew vanished from his home in the mountains. He vanished in part because of me, because of certain things I said, but also because of certain things I did not have, until now, the courage to say” (Vijay 3). Admittedly, her lack of courage seems to have brought ill fate to another being, and this haunts her till date.

When Shalini says, “I am thirty years old, and that is nothing” (Vijay 3), she is actually making a collective confession; a confession to Kashmir itself. The novel itself is a tribute to the Kashmiris and the sufferings they had been incurring, for thirty years since 1991.

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The roots of the trauma can be traced back to the ‘cowardice’ of the protagonist, Bashir. There occurs an attack in his village, but Bashir remains in Bangalore while all others return to the native land to protect their families. In this context, Shalini’s mother accuses Bashir, “Because you are a cowardA coward. Your home is full of fighting, and you are here, carrying around your stupid clothes...”(Vijay 139). At a later stage, Bashir, as a father and a family man, concludes that he has been a failure, and announces himself as a ‘coward’ for not being able to save the life of the innocent villagers. He takes up responsibility for their fates, and admits, “I did not kill them, but their deaths are still my fault...I *am* a coward” (Vijay 349).

When the army assaults Bashir, his wife decides to keep him in hiding to save his life. Thus Bashir becomes a living ‘ghost’ of the past. Nicolas Abraham in his “Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud’s Metapsychology”, defines the term ‘phantom,’ as “nothing but an invention of the living” (qtd. in Blanco and Peeren 8). Bashir’s presence in the story as a phantom figure is caused by the insiders and outsiders of Kashmir.

Abdul Latif, an assemblage within Kashmir, is not surprised when he gets to know that Ahmad Bashir was missing; he treats it as a casual piece of news. In Kashmir, it is the new normal. When he responds, “No one really knows,” he is pronouncing the immutable verdict hovering over Kashmiris. The dismissive approach to the ‘disappearance cases’ will not necessarily lead to avoidance of the spectral effect. Out of sheer helplessness and hopelessness, a callous attitude is in display. This, however, does not wipe out the possibility of trauma brewing in their minds. In fact, every instance they hear of it reminds them of their own lost/disappeared loved ones, which continues to haunt them.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN *THE FAR FIELD*

In *The Far Field*, the father and son linkage operates beyond the physical spheres for the traumatic transmission to happen. The absence of the father in the later part of the son’s life impacts the latter’s nurturing. Riyaz, the son, pines to find a place outside Kashmir. He hopes to find a safe haven for himself. The traumatic experience of the father had never been shared with Riyaz, nor did he ever attempt to decode his father’s silence. Riyaz, thus, starts to dwell on the hope that there was a world outside, waiting for him. Hence, “the radically non-present(ational) figure of “the heterocryptic ghost that returns from the unconscious of the other, according to what might be called the law of *another generation*” (Derrida qtd. in Blanco and Peeren 7) influences Riyaz. It, as observed by Blanco and Peeren, “...strongly foreshadows Specters of Marx’s discussion of the specter as a figuration of presence-absence, the negotiation of which compels a ‘politics of memory, of inheritance, and of generations’” (Vijay 7). He asserts: “... one thing I can tell you for certain. If I had been born in a place like Bangalore, or any other city in the world, believe me, I’d have done the smart thing and stayed there... . Heaven is not at all what you think” (Vijay 189). Riyaz denigrates the land that is the cause of his trauma. Being born as a Kashmiri itself becomes the central reason for his trauma.

Blanco and Peeren in “Introduction: Conceptualizing Spectralities” term intergenerational trauma as a haunting force: “What ensues is a consideration of

intergenerational trauma as a haunting force, where the notion of haunting, as site of comparison, clarifies both the temporal and spatial aspects of the affliction, while its resolution is described as the phantom being ‘successfully exorcised’ (8). Haunting cowardice transmits itself despite the differing temporal and spatial aspects. Riyaz, like his father, is afraid to stay in Kashmir; thus for survival, he chooses escapism. Riyaz’s silence is not different from Bashir’s.

Riyaz’s wife, Amina in her casual talk with Shalini, elaborates on the silence that Riyaz carries within him. She says, “See, he has problems with the soldiers, Murgi ... You have seen yourself how they like to ask questions. The best thing is to answer them and most of the time they let you go on with your business. Well, Riyaz doesn’t answer them. He just stands there, so they get angry and kick him” (Vijay 287). In contrast to Riyaz, Amina accepts the phantom legacy of cowardice in Kashmiris, when she says, “... we try and avoid soldiers. Even babies try.” However, for Riyaz it is different, “But him? He always finds them. Every single time. He *wants* them to beat him up” (Vijay 287). Though Riyaz’s silence is a mark of his resistance, it is also a self-inflicted pain, an outcome of his cowardice, emerging from his trauma. And this is not different from that of other Kashmiris.

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As per Lisa Blackman, “Affect or emotion is not, she stresses, “simply ‘caught’ or transmitted between subjects” (qtd. in Atkinson 124-125). Atkinson agrees with the same: “It is more a case of subjects getting caught up in a force field of relational and affective dynamics” (125). Thus, those who are not directly associated with Kashmir also are influenced by the trauma. Shalini reaches Kashmir, in search of Bashir, despite the news of danger that lurks there. As a kind human being, she helps Riyaz to escape from Kashmir and they encounter the soldiers in the cornfield. There, while Riyaz, along with another Kashmiri boy, passively takes the blows from the subedars, Shalini hides and witnesses it in silence. And then she admits, “So: It was not Riyaz’s command that kept me hidden. It was cowardice” (Vijay 372). The bravado transmuted into cowardice; transgenerational trauma was setting in on Shalini, a complete outsider.

The Far Field shuttles between the past and the present, bringing out the differences between life inside Kashmir and life outside Kashmir. There is compulsion and repulsion, which remain constant, for both the insiders and outsiders in Kashmir. This is clear, when Shalini as an outsider contemplates, “... I was an intruder, no matter how many years I stayed, I would still never fully belong to this place, or it to me?” (Vijay 338). Shalini decides to leave Kashmir out of fear. Back in Bangalore, she has the option to share her first-hand observations of Kashmir with the media. However, her choice to remain silent shows that transgenerational trauma had indeed been transmitted.

However, at the end of the novel, Shalini makes an attempt to overcome her cowardice. This is clear in her statement, “... I have tried to excuse myself in the telling of it. All the same, whatever the flaws of this story or confession or whatever it has turned out to be, let it stand” (Vijay 30). And to take that ‘stand’ she had to leave Kashmir.

CONCLUSION

Intergenerational and transgenerational trauma of Kashmir circulates within and without the boundaries of the state. Atkinson argues that unless there is the conscious recognition of trauma there shall be no resolution of trauma. Outsiders in safe zones fail to understand the trauma in conflict zones. A cyclical haunting is the result.

However, Madhuri Vijay as a writer uses the text as a medium to record and reflect on the trauma of Kashmir. Here, Vijay herself becomes an assemblage affected by the Kashmiri Trauma; she carries it, circulates it, making it cyclical in nature; she transforms the TGT of Kashmiris into a cyclical one. This makes Kashmir itself a site of trauma, making the trauma transmittable and 'seeking recognition.'

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