

**Countering Trauma and Unspeakability in Narratives
Based on the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots**

A thesis submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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Registration No. TZ203961 of 2024



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March, 2024**

CONCLUSION

The early scholars of trauma have pointed out that trauma may provide a link between different cultures. However, because trauma studies could not initiate a cross-cultural engagement with traumatic experiences around the globe, Caruth's prediction remained essentialist. Trauma studies is dominated by the paradigm that is focused only on Western experiences. So, it can be examined that the Western trauma paradigm that was based on the unspeakable nature of the traumatic experience is limited only to the West, and might be inaccurate and inapplicable to understand the non-Western experiences of trauma. It would be logically wrong to agree to the inaccessibility of trauma or the accessibility of historical truths only through such literary efforts in the narration of trauma. Trauma is expected to give unique access to the truths of history too. The early scholars of trauma saw history as inherently traumatic. So, the textual ruptures and inaccessibility were in fact supposed to communicate the truths of history and its traumatic character. Such indeterminacies of representation which are characteristic of a trauma text open doors to the truths of atrocities committed during an atrocious historical event and the traumatic impact resulting from it. But it seems fallacious to limit the explorations of trauma only in such literary indeterminacies. This is what becomes clear in the literary analysis of the selected works of fiction.

Literature serves as a powerful medium that not only mirrors but also actively shapes the intricate dimensions of traumatic suffering. It moves beyond being a simple reflection of individual and collective traumas, taking on a dual role as both a reflector and a constructor of these experiences. The present study reveals a dynamic interplay between the constructive and reflecting processes of trauma in the literary works evaluated. These texts serve as a platform upon which the traumatic memories of a community are depicted, while simultaneously engaging in the active construction of the traumatic narrative. The literature surrounding the Anti-Sikh Riots of 1984 is viewed through this lens, revealing its role in a socio-cultural process that is actively engaged in rewriting the history of the incident. Literature here becomes a medium for expressing and shaping the experiences of the victims and survivors of the traumatic incident.

Exploring the depictions of traumatic experiences in literature on the 1984 Riots reveals a more advanced observation. It shows that trauma defies rigid definitions and literature

in this particular context embraces the diversity of ways in which trauma manifests. The analysis underscores that traumatic experiences are inherently complex, and their nature is greatly influenced by the traumatized individual or community. Literature becomes a vital component in capturing the complexity and diversity inherent in the experience of trauma, offering a platform for voices to be heard and the profound impact of collective suffering to be acknowledged and understood.

The exploration of literary voices outside the conventional canon of literature holds an important role in this context as it can bring to light unique perspectives on historical events. Here the focus given is on a diverse array of writers whose works may not be considered 'canonical' except Indira Goswami. However, even her recognition is largely confined to Assam, making her not a mainstream voice on a broader scale who in her *Pages Stained in Blood* diverges from her regional roots, and writes about her experiences in Delhi. The same goes for the other writers, the majority of whom have written about their anecdotal, lived experiences. What distinguished these narratives that I have discussed here is the passion and intensity of lived experiences that the authors have brought into their texts making them relevant testimonies to the complex reality of the Anti-Sikh Riots.

These literary works collectively challenge the notion of a singular truth regarding the Anti-Sikh Riots. Contrary to the available official discourses that often construct a dominant, monolithic narrative, the discussed texts offer a multiplicity of perspectives. They unveil the different situations and causes behind the riots, shedding light on economic interests, cultural identity, religion, politics, and immediate personal concerns. The authors in their subjective voices have attempted to contribute to a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the socio-political dynamics that existed behind this tragic event. Other than that, each narrative serves as an attempt by the authors to come to terms with their own traumatic experiences. Writing becomes a literary effort for healing here, a means of coming to terms with the complexities and trauma of the Anti-Sikh Riots. The act of narrating here also becomes a therapeutic process, aiding in the healing process. This transformative power of literature, especially in the context of traumatic events, deserves more academic attention.

The literary works on the Anti-Sikh Riots offer a multidimensional understanding of the history of the incident. They underscore the need to move beyond a singular narrative

and acknowledge the diversity of experiences and motivations that contributed to the tragedy. Non-canonical literary voices have provided a significant contribution to the discourse on the Anti-Sikh Riots. These voices, often marginalized in mainstream discussions, bring forth a diversity of perspectives that challenge and counter the official narratives. The therapeutic potential of literature, as evident in the authors' attempts to come to terms with their traumatic experiences, adds a layer of depth to the understanding of historical events.

In the literary exploration of the grim realities of the 1984 riots, fictional works play a paramount role in weaving the truths of the incident into the fabric of collective memory. Diverse literary pieces and documents, such as affidavits, victim interviews, and historical writings, consistently portray patterns of victimization, survival strategies, explicit details of violence, and references to perpetrators. What is particularly striking is the apparent absence of a dominant narrative, whether written or unwritten, serving as a reference for these writings. Instead, fictional narratives surrounding the incident incorporate testimonial voices, oral histories, and personal experiences, allowing for a more nuanced and diverse representation of the traumatic events. This departure from a singular narrative enhances the authenticity and depth of the storytelling, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved.

It is important to acknowledge that confining the exploration of trauma in literary works solely to the realms of melancholia and the ineffable nature of trauma imposes limitations on the representation as well as interpretation of trauma. A comprehensive understanding and analysis of trauma in literature must extend beyond these confines, incorporating considerations of historical context, testimonies, socio-economic factors, and political dimensions, as already established in the chapters. The main aim in the study was to explore the phenomenon of traumatization during the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots. The attempt here was to look through an inclusive lens that accommodates various channels of traumatic expression, suggestive of collective suffering. The focus was on recognizing that alongside the conventional literary modes of representing trauma, there exists a spectrum of approaches in conveying the traumatic aftermath of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots.

The primary aim of this study is to explore how fictional works depict the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots, with a particular focus on the representation of trauma. This is done

through a detailed analysis of fictional works in chapters Two, Four, and Five. While each chapter approaches the literary texts distinctively, the overall aim is to understand trauma from different angles. Chapter two delves into the examination of various literary works, aiming to establish a historical context and literary backdrop for the situational aspects depicted in fictional writings. The analysis includes texts predominantly authored by individuals with firsthand experiences of the riots. This examination helps in understanding the historical references that serve as focal points in the selected fictional works. By examining these texts, the research aims to reveal the complex relationship between personal narratives and the wider historical and political context, providing insight into how trauma is presented in these stories.

Various aspects of the incident's history have found reflection in these fictional works. These novels and short stories have emerged as crucial commentaries, reshaping the narrative of the incident and fostering discourse by challenging the official data manipulated by the state. The depiction of the actual atrocities during the extended three-day violence is unveiled in these fictional works, emphasizing the trauma inflicted by the incident. In this chapter, much of the focus is placed on examining the various historical and political events that took place prior to the incident that played a significant role in its occurrence. The reflections of these factors are evident in the fictional realm, encompassing the circumstances leading to Operation Blue Star and its subsequent impact on the riots, the partition of India and Pakistan, as well as the historical significance of the victim community in Indian history.

Given that the literary works examined in this study are written by relatively lesser-known authors, it becomes relevant to explore the significance of these works and gain a deeper understanding of their relevance. Hence the first chapter discusses the significance of analysing the body of literature that reflected upon the largest communal riot that happened in Post-independent India. Literature based on the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots is considered to have “less” literary merit and is generally given little academic attention. Trauma narratives employ a variety of approaches to convey traumatic experiences, and these strategies are not confined to the parameters suggested by Western trauma theory. The representation of trauma and the role of literature in documenting the history of violence challenges the conventional definitions and understandings of trauma. In the fiction surrounding the 1984 Riots, the literary strategies

used to depict the trauma experienced by the Sikh community are notable. The selected works, while not highly stylized or experimental in a conventional literary sense, tend to represent trauma through a more direct and accessible language, prioritizing clarity and emotional impact over literary complexity.

The main objectives of the study demand a detailed exploration of the conceptual understandings around trauma and unspeakability. As the primary aim of the study is to critically examine how the fictional writings have countered the problem of unspeakability, the second chapter frames the theoretical understanding of trauma and unspeakability. It needs to be mentioned that the dominant scholarship in the field looks inadequate to interpret the nature of traumatic representation in the selected works of fiction considered for study. In this context, trauma is situated within cultural, political, historical, and sociological dimensions. This positioning makes it challenging to view trauma as a uniform or universal experience, resisting tendencies to generalize it.

This chapter critically examines and seeks to question the prevailing unspeakability paradigm that has dominated the field, particularly about how traumatic experiences are portrayed in fictional works. The representation of trauma is significantly influenced by external factors, and the current context renders Eurocentric and universalizing tendencies irrelevant. The collective and individual experiences of trauma in the literary realm of 1984 riots fiction contradict and challenge concepts primarily centred around the unspeakability paradigm. The chapter emphasizes the importance of recognizing these nuances and underscores the significance of adopting a pluralistic approach to counteract the tendency to homogenize trauma, promoting a more inclusive academic perspective.

The fourth and fifth chapters focus on the last two objectives. These objectives are to establish how literary writers have countered the unspeakability of trauma and to make a case for a non-western paradigm in the field of trauma studies which could help to understand trauma in the Indian context. Both of these objectives are investigated across both chapters as a whole. In the fourth chapter, the focus is on the collective expression of trauma in fictional writings. The multiple external factors that have been fundamental in traumatization as a collective experience is examined here. The fictional writings of the incident followed various literary methods in the communication of trauma and is not limited to the formalist approaches of the dominant trauma paradigm.

These writings demonstrate that, in addition to conventional methods of depicting trauma, there are alternative approaches that effectively convey trauma using powerful literary strategies. The language and portrayal of trauma in these literary contexts are heavily shaped by external factors such as culture, history, and politics. The traumatic memories depicted in these writings exhibit diverse characteristics.

The collective suffering resulting from the incident is directly impacted by various traumatic states, and literature has been successful in effectively capturing these complexities. The various modes of expressing trauma, evident in these writings, extend beyond a literary language centred solely on silence and erasure. This chapter emphasizes the significance of considering diverse factors that influence the expression of trauma when subjecting a text to traumatic analysis alongside the unspeakable. It is argued that incorporating such aspects is crucial for a better understanding of the experience of trauma and the factors contributing to it.

Traumatic experiences are multi-faceted, and their impacts are diverse, influenced by various factors. The fifth chapter of this study involves an analysis of the diverse nature of traumatic experiences, within the literature surrounding the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots. It delves into the individualistic aspects of traumatic experiences, categorizing them based on the roles played by characters, whether as victims, witnesses, or perpetrators. The analysis shows that the nature and representation of these experiences are profoundly influenced by the specific roles characters play in the respective traumatic events. Consequently, the experience of the traumatized is not a singular, easily definable entity. Instead, it exists within an indefinite realm of experiences within the broader category of trauma. Narration or the lack of same emerges as a critical theme in the manifestation of trauma within the literary works. The chapter highlights that the inability to communicate is just one aspect of how trauma is manifested in the writings. When dealing with traumas like that of a witness, narration and representation become unavoidable and necessary. Conversely, when examining the trauma of a perpetrator, linguistic adequacy often involves confession and a tone of apology.

The chapter focuses on the multiplicity of traumatic experiences and explores the various states and possibilities of communicating trauma. Similar to the diverse factors collectively shaping the experience of trauma, there exist multiple forms of trauma and various modes of representation within the selected literary works. In the attempt to

study the experience and representation of trauma in the context of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots, it becomes evident that traumatic experiences do not neatly fit into specific definitions and methods of representation, as suggested by dominant scholarship. The scholarship, as revealed in this exploration, appears limited in its scope, often incorporating culturally situated yet diverse experiences of trauma within various backgrounds. The study, by emphasizing this limitation, contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in portraying and interpreting traumatic experiences.

Examining these literary works through a non-Western trauma paradigm reveals their distinctive ability to amplify and spotlight fragmented voices. This amplification is crucial in acknowledging the diverse range of experiences, perspectives, and emotions associated with the 1984 riots. Through this process, the fictional works contribute to the creation of a cohesive narrative that encapsulates the multifaceted and often silenced dimensions of the traumatic experiences. By doing so, they become not only literary expressions but also powerful agents of historical documentation and social advocacy, ensuring that the varied voices of those affected are not just heard but also form an integral part of the collective memory of the tragic events.

The urgency of truth-telling within the discussed fictional works is visible as a distinctive feature, and are documentative narratives in nature. In these literary creations, the primary objective is not merely to express the ineffable or delve into the silences surrounding traumatic events. Instead, the focus is on a detailed recollection and establishment of the harrowing experiences with precision and clarity. The authors strive to construct a narrative that acts as a testimony, capturing the essence of the events they lived through.

Rather than focusing on voids or gaps, which in general is considered the most efficient language for communicating traumatic experiences, the narratives are driven by the urgency to tell. The authors are led by a compelling need to communicate the realities they witnessed and the trauma they are undergoing. This urgency seems to transcend the limitations of language and articulation. By prioritizing the act of telling over the challenges of expressing the inexpressible, these works become powerful tools for preserving and conveying the truth of the Anti-Sikh Riots by ensuring that the traumatic events are communicated with clarity and purpose.