

CHAPTER 3

Moving Beyond the Unspeakability Trope in Trauma Literature

The impact of a catastrophic event in the past on the present existence of individuals and communities is so profound that explaining current realities without reference to the past is almost impossible. Recent historical incidents, such as the two World Wars, the Holocaust, genocides in Rwanda, Cambodia, Darfur, Bosnia, the Vietnam War, Nanking, and Ukraine, as well as events like the colonial project, slavery, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters, have left indelible marks on the global psyche. These disasters have also subjected subsequent generations as victims of intergenerational trauma. The epistemological possibilities offered by the different disciplines dealing with traumatic memory, both clinical and non-clinical, have been significant in addressing these issues at large. The emergence of the discipline of trauma studies is very recent, though the concept and condition of trauma, as a psychic wound, got attention much earlier.

The early discourses of trauma were limited to the medical field and then to psychoanalysis. The theoretical growth and developments in the field soon led to its affiliations with different other disciplines, leading to the growth of the concept in disciplines like anthropology, law, art and literature. About the growth of literary trauma studies, Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja observe that the subject as a particular branch of work within the area of humanities has its own separate, but at the same time, related and independent genealogy (2020, 3). Literary Trauma Studies have been in the fast growth stage through romantic aesthetics, nineteenth-century psychopathology and twentieth-century psychoanalysis and psychiatry. In recent years, the area has developed through affiliations with Poststructuralism, Holocaust studies, Memory studies, Ecocriticism and Post-colonial studies. They also add that in the present, "it has been also shaped by the challenges posed by such new strands of thought as, posthumanism and medical humanities "(03).

The foundations of literary trauma studies have been laid by the pioneers in the field beginning with Cathy Caruth, (*Unclaimed Experiences*), Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (*Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*) and Dominic LaCapra. One major criticism that has always been raised against trauma studies is that it always tends to confine itself to the analysis of individual trauma (Davis

& Meretoja, 2020, 4). The studies and interpretations have been limited mostly to the psychic imprints left in the individual by violent incidents. Attention to the relevant other aspects like culture, gender, ethnicity, society, and the like has been limited within the field. Literary trauma studies seem to have focused on the unspeakable nature of traumatic suffering as the only significant aspect. The literary explorations of trauma always examined the reflections of traumatic experiences based on the theories of the pioneers in the field. So, it was limited to examining the power of literary language in communicating the otherwise unspeakable, unintelligible, and incomprehensible experiences of traumatic experience, until very recently.

There is an emerging recent demand in the field to interact with other related disciplines to respond to the criticisms against the over emphasis on the unspeakability trope. Attempts have already begun to look at the collective, social or cultural nature of trauma by challenging the existing theories. Scholars have begun questioning the unspeakability of trauma, by pointing out how this can lead to failed attempts to talk about suffering. As Davis and Meretoja write, "By stressing the unspeakability of trauma it may devalue the endeavours of those who have an urgent story to tell" (4). Then there are the post-colonial apprehensions. For example, Craps raises doubts about the growth of trauma studies as a new outgrowth of colonialism, and the expansion and application of Western perspectives universally on other cultures (Craps, 2013). Traumatic experiences have been seen as being alike and having a universal way of expression and representation. The existing scholarships seem to have considered the traumatic experience of the Western world as the only possible way of experiencing and representing it universally. It was seen as homogenous or coherent across different cultural and political contexts (Davis and Meretoja, 5). But there is a necessity to cross-examine the homogenisation of traumatic experiences across the world. This approach can be seen as Eurocentric and different approaches to trauma by giving significance to other aspects like gender, ethnicity, culture etc. can bring in new perspectives, which are relevant in the analysis of the fictional works based on the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots. Such new perspectives can help the field in overcoming the existing limitations and can bring diverse perspectives and approaches to exploring the experience of trauma.

This chapter aims to move beyond the universalising tendencies that are seen within the area of trauma studies that try to consider trauma as a homogenous experience. In this chapter, I will delve into the genealogy of trauma, tracing its origins from the early years when the term was first introduced. The study will emphasize the importance of examining the trauma stemming from the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots through a multi-disciplinary lens, specifically highlighting its social, cultural, and ethnic dimensions.

3.1 The Beginning of Literary Trauma Studies

The American Psychiatric Association's introduction of the word PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) in the 1980 edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders ²¹(DSM) was a turning point for the area of Trauma Studies (Toreman, 2003, 333). PTSD is defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (1980) as "a psychologically distressing event outside the range of usual human experience"....that is accompanied by " intense fear, terror, and helplessness and causes significant distress in most people (DSM-III 236). Because of this, trauma was officially accepted as a psychological condition and finally got the medical approval it needed. This gave way to the emergence of a separate discipline of trauma and its association with several other fields (Sutterlin, 2020, 11). The concept of the psychological wound could throw light on different disciplines even outside the medical field. The term and the concept of trauma were earlier used only to imply a physical wound and had nothing to do with the mind. The slow changes which were happening concerning the wound inflicted upon the mind were accelerated by APA's introduction of the term.

Today this has become a term used as part of everyday life. Trauma today, on individual as well as collective levels is a widely accepted and recognised category. It was the socio-political happenings of the time like the Vietnam War that led to the inclusion of the term in the diagnostic field of medical science. The campaigning of Vietnam War veterans had spread to other parts of the world intending to spread awareness about the after-effects of war. Their continuous efforts have led to research about the psychological impacts of war. Such studies were scientifically successful in establishing a new

²¹ The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is a comprehensive classification system and manual published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) that provides standardized criteria for the classification and diagnosis of mental health disorders.

diagnostic category of PTSD (Whitehead, 2004, 4). Based on these circumstances of the time, the American Psychiatric Association acknowledged how violent events experienced in the past can have lasting traumatic impacts on individuals.

References to the devastating effects brought about by horrifying events are evident in literature dating back to ancient times (Figley, 2012, 454). For instance, scholars in the field have put Homer's *Iliad* under the lens of trauma theory. There have also been attempts to examine Philomela or Philomel, a character in Greek mythology within the terrain of trauma studies (Bennett, 2022). There have always been mentions of suffering caused by severe psychological pain, which today can be considered as trauma, in several mythological works, folktales, legends and the like. However, the development of trauma as a distinct scientific category started very recently (Sutterlin, 2020,12).

Scholars today have talked about the role the Industrial Revolution played in the identification of trauma and its emergence as a condition within medical science. For example, Sutterlin observes that the very first medical exploration of trauma (which wasn't called by that name at that time) started with the identification of a condition which was called "railway spine", which British medical practitioners started to observe after the introduction of railways (2020,12). This condition was observed in people who were victims of railway accidents, and who showed symptoms of physical disorder without having any visible injuries. She says that "as a symbol of technological development and scientific progress in the nineteenth century as well as of the dramatic changes brought about by modern life, the railway is intrinsically linked to trauma" (Sutterlin, 12).

The introduction of the word trauma for the first time to collectively call conditions of the mind similar to "railway spine" was by the Berlin neurologist Hermann Oppenheim (Figley, 2012, 455). Through the coining of the term "traumatic neurosis", Sutterlin writes, " he introduced into psychiatry the Greek word for "wound", " injury", which until then had been exclusive to surgery, thus paving the way for the notion that a shattering life experience can cause neurological and indeed psychological wounds analogous to physical wounds" (12). The acceptance of trauma as a concept of much significance in psychology happened in the last years of the 19th century. The contributions of the Parisian neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot in the psychologization of trauma were noteworthy (Sutterlin, 12). He recognized that traumatic experiences could

lead to symptoms of hysteria and did extensive studies related to it. Charcot's work contributed to the conceptualisation of traumatic neurosis, a term used to describe the psychological consequences of traumatic experiences. He has been successful in using hypnosis as a therapeutic tool in alleviating traumatic suffering (Fletcher, 2013). The discovery and elaborate studies about "dissociation²²", which is a key feature of traumatic state by known figures like Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud led to more studies about trauma. Pierre Janet was among the first to systematically illustrate that dissociation serves as a primary psychological defence mechanism against extremely distressing traumatic events. He highlighted the significant role of dissociative phenomena in various post-traumatic stress responses, which he categorized within the 19th-century diagnosis of hysteria (Van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1989).

A lot of the theoreticians and their contributions to the field of Trauma Studies in the early years of the development of the discipline have later influenced the methods of analysis, vocabulary, approaches, and concepts in literary trauma studies. The main concepts and theories used today were developed a century back by figures like Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Joseph Breuer, and Sigmund Freud (Kurtz, 3). J. Roger Kurtz identifies several intellectual precursors to the area of literary trauma studies including psychoanalysis, modernism, deconstruction, the Holocaust, and the acceptance of PTSD as a medical category (Kurtz, 2018,02). According to him " These intellectual antecedents have shaped and framed the discursive genealogy of trauma within literary studies (2018, 3).

The role of Sigmund Freud in the identification and study of traumatic experiences was very significant. From a context that was seen as hereditary and related to hysteria, Freud came up with the observation that trauma originated in sexual assaults which happen during childhood (Freud, 1953-74, 191). Later in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), he discussed the shell-shocked soldiers who were psychologically affected by the First World War. His deliberations of the condition of "war neurosis"²³ and like repetition

²² Dissociation, as conceptualized by Janet, refers to a mental process where certain mental activities become separated or detached from the mainstream of consciousness.

²³ The term "war neurosis," which is often used to refer to "war neuroses" or "war psychoses," describes a variety of psychological conditions and symptoms that develop as a result of the strains and traumas of war. Drawing on his more comprehensive theories of psychoanalysis, Freud's understanding of war neurosis emphasized the influence of repressed memories and unconscious conflicts on the development of mental illnesses.

and incomprehension of traumatic experience, later became a source of the symptomatology of PTSD, which is considered relevant even today (Sutterlin, 13).

Freud in his early endeavours of dealing with trauma defined it as "an accretion of excitation in the nervous system, which the latter has been unable to dispose of adequately by motor reaction" (quoted in Kurtz, 03). Apart from that, Freud's use of "talking cure" as a significant psychoanalytic approach to cure psychological disorders caused by terrifying experiences, in the subsequent decades of the development of the discipline of trauma studies. The narration of traumatic experiences later became the most important method for healing traumatic wounds of the mind in the area of psychiatry as well as psychoanalysis. Other than that, it also formed the basis for the emergence of the area of literary trauma studies as well, as a literary language was pointed out by many, starting from Caruth, as the most relevant medium through which traumatic experiences could be narrated (Sutterlin, 13).

Freud's psychoanalytic account of Torquato Tasso's epic poem *La Gerusalemme Liberata* (1581) is considered significant within the discourse of Literary Trauma Studies even today. This can be taken as one of the earliest literary analyses of a text within the area of trauma which later happened to influence the later scholars of the discipline. Freud's analysis of the story of Tancred and Clorinda, in the opinion of J. Roger Kurtz, turned into an iconic example "not only for the psychological functioning of trauma but also for the connection between literature and trauma theory" (3). Freud's contributions to trauma were significant to the development of the discipline of trauma studies. It was mainly Freud's concepts and ideas dealing with trauma, which later became foundational for the discipline.

A similar observation was made by other scholars about the origin of the major concepts and ideas of trauma. Roger Luckhurst in his book *The Trauma Question* (2008) discusses the interrelationship of trauma and modernity. The transformations that happened in all major aspects of human life with the advent of the Industrial Revolution and modernity directly gave way to the emergence of serious approaches to trauma. Though the connection drawn between modernity and trauma studies might look rather unlikely, the relevance of the time was significant in the development of the area as a separate discipline and diagnostic category. J Roger Kurtz notes that "these markers of modernity represent a series of shocks or violent assaults on human sensibilities and on individuals'

notions of personal or corporate identity, all of which evoke a traumatic vocabulary" (2018, 4). Among all the other transformations and innovative changes that happened in the areas like urbanization, the rise of capitalist economic relations, and political alignments, what influenced trauma more was the changes in technology.

Similar to the observations made by other scholars who have dealt with the origin of the discipline, Luckhurst has pointed out that, the idea of trauma was linked closely to the growth of railways in the 1960s (2008, 21). The railways led to accidents which were of serious intensity, which until then was unimaginable to the people. As Kurtz writes (4), "The train as an icon of modernity also became an icon of trauma, as doctors began to diagnose what they called 'railway shock or 'railway spine', something experienced by someone who walks out of a train crash seemingly unscathed only to report nervous symptoms that recur months and even years later" (2018, 4).

3.2 The First Wave of Trauma Theory

As stated in the previous paragraphs, the most influential contribution to the area of trauma studies, while the concept was getting acknowledged in psychiatry and psychoanalysis, was made by Sigmund Freud. The observations he made about the nature of trauma are seen as significant even today. It was Freud's writings and concepts which became the base for the development of the discipline in the 1990s. The understanding of traumatic experiences as repetitive, incomprehensible, and experiences of severe intensity which can challenge the limits of language and thus is unspeakable and unrepresentable, which became established in the 1990s, and relied heavily on Freud (Balaev, 2018, 360).

In his *Studies in Hysteria* (1895), the book written in collaboration with Joseph Breuer, it is pointed out that a horrific event becomes traumatic in the process of remembering it (Balaev, 2018, 361). The traumatic event is not understood in its intensity during the time of its occurrence. It is repressed without full coherence of it till, after a period of latency which is intermittent, the memory of it comes back to the individual (Breuer and Freud, 1995,192). This idea proved influential in the writings of Caruth and her contemporaries. Freud in his later studies and observations about war neurosis in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) dealt again with this compulsion to repeat the traumatic memory (1920, 19).

The scholars who are considered pioneers of the First Wave of Trauma Studies include known figures in the field like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman (Balaev, 2018, 363). As stated earlier, their theories were directly influenced by Freud. They drew attention to the unspeakability, repetitive occurrence, the shattering of the psyche, and the unrepresentability of trauma through the normal communicative language. They pointed out that the intensity of the experience of the event shatters the psyche and destroys the mind's ability to comprehend it and linguistically narrate it. Their emphasis on the unspeakable nature of trauma is based on the argument that experiences of severe intensity can fracture both language and psyche (Balaev, 363). The theories which were representative of the first wave, and which are still today the most commonly followed ways of looking at trauma were contributions of Cathy Caruth.

It was Cathy Caruth and her contemporaries who contributed more to the relationship between language and traumatic experience. Caruth established her deviation from Freud in the first section of her *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), titled "Introduction: The Wound and the Voice". In the chapter which discusses Freud's analysis of Tasso's romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata*, she points out that, the example given by Freud for explaining the condition of what he called 'traumatic neurosis' goes beyond an illustration of repetition compulsion and shows the limits of Freud's conceptual theory of trauma (1996, 2). She shifted the attention from the repetition compulsion to focus on the voice of trauma released through the wound in Tancred and Clorinda's story (1996, 3). Through the careful analysis of Tasso's poem Caruth established that the intensity of traumatic experience prevents linguistic representation of the experience.

Trauma is the unassimilated aftereffects of an encounter with a violent event which shatters the psyche of an individual. The traumatic experience lies outside the scope and possibilities of narrative representation. Caruth pointed out that trauma is never fully known, especially in the encounter with the incident that caused it (1996, 17). It is in the belated coming back of the traumatic experience to the psyche of the victim, that the experience becomes partly accessible. As Balaev notes, "the traumatic experience enters the psyche differently than normal experience and creates an abnormal memory that resists narrative representation, the unique process of this remembering results in an approximate recall but never determinate knowledge" (2018, 364). It is in this context

that Caruth identifies the role of literary language in mediating traumatic experiences. Literature, according to her and many others, can communicate the incomprehensible. Literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relationship between knowing and not knowing (1996, 3). The unrepresentability of trauma remains the key concept in Trauma Studies scholarship. Different writers have tried to communicate the pain and experiences of trauma through their literary works.

However, Caruth's framework, emphasizes a singular, universal response to trauma, often neglecting the diverse, culturally specific ways in which trauma is experienced and processed. Moreover, Caruth's view of literature as a vehicle for communicating trauma is constrained, as it limits itself to particular forms of narrative expression. In this context, the Western viewpoint of trauma representation in literature becomes the dominant mode, sidelining alternative forms of narration. Caruth's insistence on documenting trauma through gaps and silences, while significant, cannot be considered universally applicable. There are other forms of traumatic referentiality that can be conveyed through literary language, challenging the exclusive focus on fragmented, modernist styles.

Caruth's anti-narrative stance, which presents trauma as "unspeakable," effectively undermines the potential for narrative engagement and political intervention. By emphasizing the belatedness and incomprehensibility of trauma, this framework limits the scope of addressing and documenting the injustices that occur, thus reducing the capacity to communicate the reality of what has happened. The concept of unspeakability cannot be viewed as the definitive endpoint of trauma; rather, it is essential to recognize that when discussing testimony after a major catastrophe or war, the notion of unspeakability often closes off avenues for articulating facts. Caruth's model, by focusing on the unspeakable and depoliticizing the traumatic event, universalizes the experience of trauma, overlooking the various ways in which trauma manifests across cultures. Furthermore, her event-based approach fails to account for other forms of trauma that are not tied to specific catastrophic events.

3.3 Literature and Trauma

The significance of literature and art in depicting pain has been substantial throughout the various epochs of human history. Starting from Homer to literature of the present

times, traumatic suffering has been a subject of literary interest. What Susana Onega (2020) pointed out about Western literature and art allusions to suffering, is accurate, and applicable to the diverse creative efforts around the globe. Onega's observation about the abundance of allusions to the unspeakable experiences and memories of the horrific incidents of violence that caused trauma in an individual as well as collective level in literature is not typical of just Western literature (Onega, 91). As she has pointed out in the article, "the potential for resilience and working through psychic trauma by means of different literary manifestations and artistic expression has been amply documented throughout centuries" (Onega, 2020, 91).

From its early years of emergence as the concept of a psychic wound, trauma has evolved over the last decades into an influential academic category with diverse interdisciplinary affiliations. Among the areas associated with different disciplines ranging from medical and non-medical fields, the role played by literature, especially fiction, in its relevance as seen today has been very significant. From the problematization of the almost impossible and challenging connections between language and traumatic experience, literary language came to play the role of the most efficient medium of communicating trauma.

In her *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Caruth talked about the nature of the traumatic experience (1995, 4-5). Traumatic experience, according to her, is never experienced at the time of the occurrence of the event which caused trauma. The incident, says Caruth, "is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (1995, 4-5). So, it is in such a belated reappearance of the memory of the experience that trauma makes its existence felt.

Trauma's structure as an incomprehensible experience challenges the possibilities of representation, and the notion of a straightforward textual referentiality (Whitehead, 2004,13). This is where literature, especially fiction, comes into play as a medium for representing trauma, with its non-straightforward textual techniques of referentiality. The approach to narrating history is often straightforward in a documentative language. But in the case of a traumatic event, it becomes impossible to use the narrative methods specific to history, as history itself is inaccessible and is available intermittently and belatedly. In general, the narrative strategy and language of both history and literature are

seen as contradictory or antithetical. But here, the literary medium gives access to history and narrates the experience and event of trauma in a narrative which is not straightforwardly referential (Caruth & Each, 1996, 2). About the fictional accessing of historical truth, which was explained by Caruth, in *Critical Encounters: Reference and Responsibility in Deconstructive Writing* (1995), Whitehead remarks, "referential truth or experience is no longer opposed to fiction but is inextricable from it, providing the reading with radically new problems of interpretation and understanding" (2004, 13).

Traumatic narration demands a more aesthetically rich literary language which hardly resembles the normal medium. Literature, especially fiction has been proven and used as a powerful genre to communicate the otherwise unnarratable features of trauma. Such experiences cannot be directly explained and it also needs an entirely different mode of reality and understanding to it. In Caruth's words, experiences of trauma "can never be asked in a straightforward way, but must, indeed, also be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding" (1996, 5).

Among all literary genres, the contributions of fiction to represent traumatic experiences can be observed as very significant. Fiction is thought to provide a comparatively relevant medium for reflecting the complex experiences which inhabit trauma. But what appears to be complicated in such a context is the contradictory nature of both fields involved. Literature, especially fiction, has been able to match up to a great extent with the conditions for the narration of horrific experiences with its unique literary techniques; symbolization, indirect language, gaps, figurative language and the like. In Laurie Vickroy's observation, "Fiction provides a wealth of thick description²⁴ of the conditions and characteristics of traumatic experience" (2014, 138).

Post-colonial responses to the unspeakability paradigm have highlighted literary efforts by various writers whose works illuminate different methods of representing trauma. In *Season of Anomy* (1973), Wole Soyinka delves into the varied traumatic experiences of African postcolonial subjects. Anne Whitehead, analyzing this specific text through the lens of trauma theory, asserts, "Soyinka forces us to encounter a response to trauma that asserts the relevance of localized modes of belief, ritual, and understanding, thereby

²⁴ Thick description in anthropology and qualitative research refers to offering a complex, interpretive explanation of the observed cultural behaviors, going beyond simple observation.

undermining the centrality of western knowledge and expertise" (2008, 27). Soyinka effectively distances Western discourse from its conventional context by intertwining it with Nigerian cultural and storytelling traditions. Through this approach, he demonstrates that the Western viewpoint is not the sole or primary source of communicating trauma. Similarly, Michael Ondaatje's approach to trauma in *Anil's Ghost* (2000) employs alternative strategies to convey the collective experience of trauma. Victoria Burrows explores this topic in her article, "The Heterotopic Spaces of Postcolonial Trauma in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*" (Burrows, 2008).

The term "trauma fiction," whether considered as a whole or in its individual parts, represents something inherently paradoxical and contradictory. The contradiction that arises here is due to the overwhelming nature of the traumatic experience which denies language and representation in a normal way. Fiction started to become aware of the nature of trauma and started to invent new ways of recounting it after the rise of trauma theory. Anne Whitehead in the famous work *Trauma Fiction* (2004) says, "The rise of trauma theory has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualizing trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered. This raises, in turn, the related issues of politics, ethics, and aesthetics. The desire among various cultural groups to represent or make visible specific historical instances of trauma has given rise to numerous important works of contemporary fiction" (2004, 11).

Fiction was the major genre which attempted to listen to and resonate with the voices of traumatic experiences. From World Wars to the one-off regional horrendous incidents around the world have become subjects and backgrounds of traumatic retellings in fiction. Fiction has experimented with different techniques for conveying the tragedy and horrific nature of the incident and the memories of its characters.

What Gabriele Schwab had written about the transmission of intergenerational trauma²⁵ through the literary narrative addresses literature and trauma's association more interestingly. According to Schwab, traumas manifest in literary texts unseen, but not unnoticed. He says, "Language itself becomes haunted, and haunted language uses a gap

²⁵ The term "transgenerational trauma," which is sometimes used interchangeably with "historical trauma" or "transgenerational trauma," describes the psychological impact of painful experiences being passed down through the generations. According to this theory, trauma can have an effect on generations after the people who experienced the catastrophic events firsthand.

inside speech to point to silenced history. Haunted language refers to what is unspeakable through ellipsis, indirection and detour, or fragmentation and deformation " (2010, 54). What Schwab pointed out, mainly about intergenerational trauma which affects a larger population, resonates well with what Caruth and early trauma theorists have observed about trauma narratives.

Though such techniques of narration as seen in traumatic texts, were not observed as sharing any connection with modernist and postmodernist writing styles which are seen generally as aporetic, fragmented, non-linear, and non-straightforward, scholars like Stef Craps, have dealt with their focus or preoccupation with modernist and postmodernist writings. In his observation, trauma theories have always been preoccupied with what can be called an anti-narrative, which is fragmented and modernist in its structure. This was basically because of the already laid out similarities with the traumatic experience (Craps, 2014, 50). He continues, regarding the large departure from modernist and postmodernist literature, "An experience that exceeds the possibility of narrative knowledge (...) Will best be represented by a failure of narrative. Hence what is called for is the disruption of conventional modes of representation, such as can be found in modernist art" (2014, 50).

There can be cited multiple examples from the long history of literary imagination, which show the possibilities of literature's capability to communicate or represent traumatic realities through the disruption of conventional modes of representation. For example, the novels of Toni Morrison are repeatedly put under the lens of the literary trauma theory for analysis. Her novels like *Beloved* (1987) and *Jazz* (1992) are known to have converted the traumatic memory of the Black American experience into a narrative memory. Her works communicate the incomprehensibility of the traumatic suffering of the community and are marked by the disruptions and discontinuities in the narration (Whitehead, 204,143). In analyzing Morrison's *Jazz* in "Recomposing the Past: Trauma and Improvisation in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and Jackie Kay's *Trumpet*" (2004), Anne Whitehead has argued that her writing style "operates against closure and containment", and the novel provides a "model for a fragmented mode of writing".

J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) has been analyzed through various lenses, including trauma, and is widely regarded as a pivotal work in American literature. Central to the novel is Holden Caulfield's enduring trauma stemming from the loss of his

brother. This trauma is intricately woven into the backdrop of a post-World War II America undergoing significant socio-cultural shifts (Wan Yaha, 2014, 1827). The novel exhibits the author's tormented relation to the war through the setting and characters of the novel.

Similarly, W.G. Sebald's works are often interpreted as deeply influenced by the traumatic legacy of the Holocaust. Sebald discussed his writings about the Holocaust and the resulting trauma, stating, "I don't think you can focus on the Holocaust. It's like the head of the Medusa: you carry it with you in a sack, but if you looked at it you'd be petrified. (. . .) I didn't see it; I only know things indirectly" (quoted in Jaggi, 2001). Whitehead observes, "The Holocaust pervades his writing; it is evoked rather than represented, a literary strategy which, for Sebald, is connected both with the horrific nature of the events themselves and his own indirect relation to them" (2004, 117). His novels, such as *The Emigrants* (1992) and *Austerlitz* (2001), are deeply intertwined with the trauma of the Holocaust. Sebald dedicated his entire literary career to finding harmony between literature and cultural memory, particularly focusing on the traumatic memories of genocide, war, and devastation (Botez, 2013, 149). Sebald's characters are individuals deeply affected by trauma, existing under the looming presence of the Holocaust and facing the uncertainties of exile and displacement. Whitehead, in analyzing Sebald's novels, has noted that Sebald's characters can always be described in terms that replicate Freud's theories on traumatic memory (2004, 119).

The novels of Albert Camus, one of the greatest writers of all time, including *The Plague* (1947) and *The Stranger* (1942) have been read along the lines of concepts from trauma studies several times by multiple literary scholars. *The Plague* (1947) and *The Fall* (1956) are seen as literary texts which testify to the trauma inflicted by World War II, both directly and indirectly (Felman and Laub, 1992, xvii). Felman and Laub have pointed out in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), that both novels can be seen as the "delayed effect and belated thinking" of the trauma of the time which are emblems of "stylistic and philosophical transvaluation" (1992, xvii). About the trauma of witnessing, which their book primarily deals with and Camus, writing, they remark that "the stylistic transformation and philosophical transvaluation taking place in Camus' writing as the indirect expressions of –or the belated testimonies to the radical crisis of witnessing the Holocaust has been, and to the

consequent, ongoing, as the yet unresolved crisis of history, a crisis which in turn is translated into a crisis of literature in so far as literature becomes as a witness, and perhaps the only witness, to the crisis within history which precisely cannot be articulated, witnessed in the given categories of history itself'(xxvii-xviii).

The fictional works addressing the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 adopt a largely straightforward literary style that effectively conveys the trauma resulting from the events. While the authors' approaches aren't particularly ornate, some conventional literary techniques are evident in certain contexts. For example, repetition has been employed in fictional writings to convey trauma. In *The Survivor*, Sarbpreet Singh's fictional representation of the 1984 riots communicates the harsh realities and horrors of the event through various narrative strategies. While it is essential to approach the contributions of these writers through a non-Western trauma paradigm, it is also clear that the representation of trauma, as outlined in canonical literary traditions, cannot be entirely overlooked. A close analysis of the writing reveals that, on occasion, the authors resort to conventional modes of trauma narration. However, these instances are relatively rare in the works analyzed, as they largely adhere to a straightforward narrative style and documentary approach. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge these few instances where traditional literary techniques emerge.

Singh, for instance, employs the repetitive recurrence of traumatic memory to convey the persistence of trauma in *The Survivor*. Lali, a central character, repeatedly revisits the traumatic events he and his family endured during the height of the violence. The narrative begins with the same words each time, with slight modifications in subsequent telling, clearly illustrating the enduring and horrifying memory of the incident. This cyclical narrative structure emphasizes the traumatic nature of Lali's experience, as he attempts to add new elements to his memory each time he recounts it. The character's accounts are described as being "in the language that nightmares are written in" (2020, 188), underscoring the intensity of the atrocity and its lingering effects on the survivors. Lali is caught in a compulsive repetition, haunted by his unresolved past. Singh's use of repetition mirrors Freudian concepts of the compulsion to repeat as a result of trauma. The structure of the story itself is built around this repetition, both thematically and stylistically, as the character struggles to regain agency over his fractured psyche.

Through this technique, Singh reveals the psychic imprints of Lali's trauma, imbuing the story with a literary language that reflects the incessant return of traumatic memory.

Trauma fiction also overlaps with and borrows from postmodern and post-colonial narrative strategies and styles (Whitehead, 2004, 3). This postmodern influence is evident in the writings examined here. A notable example of this is Jaspreet Singh's *Helium*. In his effort to document the truth and trauma resulting from anti-Sikh violence, Singh adopts a primarily postmodern writing style. He uses a range of techniques to convey the indescribable nature of trauma, reflecting its complex and fragmented qualities in the text. Through these postmodern approaches, Singh captures the multifaceted experience of trauma, challenging the conventions of representation and further complicating the portrayal of suffering and memory.

Intertextuality in the novel serves a crucial role in adding depth and significance to the experience of trauma. Here, intertextuality functions as a device to imbue additional meaning and connotations to the otherwise inexpressible trauma. Singh heavily draws upon the short story collection of Italian Holocaust survivor Primo Levi within the novel. Levi's collection *The Periodic Table*, published in 1975, is consistently referenced in the novel, establishing parallels between the traumatic experiences of both narrators. This technique effectively aids in representing the trauma of the 1984 riots. Raj, the narrator in Singh's novel finds himself drawn to Levi and his book. Singh writes,

On the brown shelf I found an object with a familiar smell; it had touched my hands, also his hands in 1984. Levi's cover photo stared at me...Humans capable of such cruelty to other humans. Depression. Suicidal thoughts...The Periodic Table appeared in English for the first time in November, the time of the riots. Random coincidences. Signifying nothing.. and it didn't feel merely random, as if the coincidence carried a ring of inevitability. (2013, 66)

The narrator notes that Primo Levi's book, *The Periodic Table* serves as Levi's reaction to the Holocaust, with each story named after a chemical element. This collection chronicles Levi's experiences as a Jewish-Italian chemist before, during, and after Auschwitz. In Jaspreet Singh's novel, a similar narrative style is adopted. Singh utilizes the chemical element Helium and its unique characteristics to illustrate the trauma endured by his protagonist, Raja.

Another postmodern technique that is visible in Singh's novel is pastiche. In order to represent the trauma left by the violence of 1984, Singh combines multiple genres to create a unique narrative, which assists in comprehending the incident that led to the trauma of the community. He incorporates photographs of the incident, and paintings that portray the horror of what happened, and uses the style of science fiction, ornithology, interviews, and newspaper reports in the text. This multi-generic approach works like a collage and assists in making the incident intelligible.

It can be observed that Singh also adopts the style of metafiction. By exposing the reader to the artificiality of art or the fictional aspects of a story, metafiction generally abandons the need for a "willing suspension of disbelief." It is frequently employed to cast doubt on the author's authority and bring about unanticipated story twists. The novel is presented as the result of Raj's attempt to write a novel about the 1984 riots which led to his trauma. He collects information and raw materials for writing the book, through which the story of what happened is revealed. Raj says in the novel, "These notes are not about tragic industrial disasters. I am assembling material connected to an unspeakable event that took place in Delhi" While trying to explain his troubled past, Raj continues his writing "Troubled once again is the wrong word. The word I would like to use does not exist"(9). Raj's writing also serves a therapeutic function. Raja admits that he writes to relieve his pain and make sense of the horrific incident that led to his trauma. "In my free time, on my colleague's and Clara's request, I have started writing science fiction and slowly I found that my notes a real dimension, it has transformed into Professor Singh's story"(88). He continues, "In my attempt to decipher the past, in my note-taking, I am not a coward. I am trying to achieve more and more clarity"(89).

Singh also uses dispersed or fragmented narrative voice, a style of narration that employs multiple authorial voices/perspectives and nonlinear emplotment which are also postmodern. The novel in most parts follows the first-person narration of Raj. But Nelly also becomes a narrator in multiple contexts. What happened to Nelly and her family is narrated by Nelly herself and she reveals the traumatic impacts the incident had resulted in. The involvement of the state is also made clear in her narrative, which helps to add credibility to what Raj tries to explain in the novel.

3.4 Trauma and the Unspeakable

Unspeakability is a term that has been discussed widely within trauma discourse since the emergence of the discipline in the '90s. A traumatic experience is considered unspeakable or unrepresentable because of its intensity and the victim's failure to understand the incident. Unspeakability is a quality that is ascribed, both in literary and non-literary senses, to something that is beyond the limit of language. In literature, the unspeakable is used generally as a form of literary device to highlight the aesthetic inadequacy of everyday language. The unspeakable has been used by writers as a rhetorical device, which was used to enhance or amplify the depth and intensity of a feeling like romantic love, or likewise, to express the severity of mental or physical pain, or any similar emotional state which is deep and hence is beyond the possibility of imagination and the capabilities of language. In such contexts, the inability to express something or the limitation of the language system is asserted and acknowledged with the single intention of bringing in or creating a desired effect. According to Barry Stampfl, the representative feature of similar rhetorical devices used in literature is the "explicit admission of the inadequacy of language in a given case" (2014,15).

Though the idea of the unspeakable was in use for a long time, it became widely used in trauma theory after the contributions of Caruth and others who were part of the first wave of literary trauma theory. Unspeakability of traumatic experience is closely associated with incomprehensibility as pointed out by Caruth in her *Unclaimed Experiences* (1996). The overwhelming severity of a traumatic event surpasses the mind's capacity to process it, resulting in its indescribability. But when it is attempted to narrate a traumatic experience, such narratives reflect the way it haunts the narrator. According to Caruth, such a traumatic haunting is caused not only by the "reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (1996, 06). The concept of the unspeakable is used in general in trauma discourses, in the sense that language fails to demonstrate the nature and intensity of an incident that has led the narrator or victim to the traumatic state. For example, in a literary text, a character's inability to recollect what happened during the occurrence of a horrific incident that resulted in his or her trauma is expressed by claiming that it is difficult to be explained or narrated. Traumatic memory is hence, confirmed as unspeakable. Caruth writes,

Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness. The repetitions of the traumatic event which remains unavailable to consciousness, but intrude repeatedly on sight- thus suggests a larger relation to the event that extends beyond what can simply be seen or what can be known, and is inextricably tied up with the belatedness and incomprehensibility that remain at the heart of the repetitive seeing. (1996, 92)

It is in this form of belatedness, its unavailability to the consciousness, and the incomprehensibility which continues with the repetitive seeing of the traumatic experience, the unspeakable is tied to. What happens to the reality of the traumatic experience is that it “remains unknown in our very actions and our language” (Caruth, 1996, 4). Traumatic experience for a victim of a horrendous incident is incomprehensible and also inaccessible by the conscious mind and above all unutterable by the laws of the normal communicative language.

However, for a person who has witnessed, or experienced a traumatic event, unspeakability is not necessarily the only impending end. Trauma theorists haven't denied the possibility of a victim not wanting to narrate the experience of trauma. It is possible that someone who was affected deeply by an event can feel the need to not speak about it. As Jakob Lothe points out, “While our memory of a traumatic event may prompt narration, it may also thwart narration” (2020, 152). An experience of a traumatic event turns into unspeakable because of various factors. Firstly, the sheer magnitude of the incident was so shocking to the victim that it defied the ability to make sense of it. As already explained, it is the incomprehensibility of the incident that results in unspeakability. Then, as Lothe has observed, any attempt to talk about the experience can lead to an act of remembering, which intensifies the severity of the experience (2020, 154). So, it can be the intensity of the pain that the victim goes through, the reason for it being unnarratable. Apart from these two possibilities, the victim can remember or understand and still fail to express the experiences using apt language (Lothe, 2020, 154). What happens during an attempt to narrate the traumatic experience is that it helps the victim to make meaning and come to terms with the different aspects of the experience which were scattered and unintelligible (Lothe, 153). But as there are

complexities inherent in the experiencing and remembering of the traumatic incident, it is generally seen as something that resists narrativization.

3.4.1 Trauma and the Lacanian Real

This unnarratable quality of the experience of trauma can best be approached through the psychoanalytic concept of the Real put forth by Jacques Lacan. There have been attempts to understand the incomprehensible and unspeakable nature of the trauma in connection with Lacanian Real. Traumatic experiences are more ‘real’ in Lacanian terms and hence, lie far from normal ways of explaining and understanding. It does not allow the interference of normal language for communication which according to Lacan is the system of symbols (1973, 54-55). Though Lacan has not talked at much length about trauma and its connection with the Real, he has made a few clear observations regarding the affinities between them. Lacan’s all major observations on trauma and the Real appear in his “Tuche and Automaton” part of the seminar collection *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis* (1979). In his Seminar XI Lacan has precisely pointed out that the Real presents itself in the form of trauma. Concerning the relation between both he has said, “Is it not remarkable that, at the origin of the analytic experience, the real should have presented itself in the form of that which is unassimilable in it, in the form of trauma, determining all that follows, and imposing on it an apparently accidental origin?” (Lacan, 1979, 55).

According to him, the encounter with the Real happens in several ways outside the rules of the symbolic order. He has pointed out that while facing accidents, violence, and trauma, an individual is forced to encounter the Real in the form of the unassimilable. About the Real and the Trauma, there can be two possible positions. On the one hand, it is possible to equate the trauma with the Real and establish that both are the same. Secondly, it can be taken differently, and one can say that trauma is not exactly the Real, rather, the Real presents itself also as trauma in its multiple manifestations. Though they seem different, the affinity of Real to trauma is rather significant, especially when it comes to unspeakability.

It can be said that trauma exists outside the rules of the symbolic world of human interaction and cognition. The Real lies outside the rules of the linguistic system and can never be explained in its real form. In Seminar XXIII, Lacan said that it is outside a

structured world. “The truthful Real implies an absence of the law. The Real has no order” (1974-1975, 83). But the Real confronts reality in various ways, like in situations of violence, murder, accidents and trauma. The unrepresentable or unspeakable quality of trauma rests on its nature as similar to that of the Real. Trauma and the Real, which are otherwise unspeakable and beyond the symbolic system of language are best approached through the medium of art and literature. Only such alternate mediums can be observed as possible ways to translate the nature of the Real presented in the form of trauma.

The Real, as far as trauma and literature are concerned, is an inextricable concept. It is best to quote Barthes here, where he has spoken about the unspeakable nature of the Real: “We refuse to come to terms with the absolute lack of parallelism between the real and language, and it is in this refusal, perhaps as old as language itself, that produces – as an endless agitation- Literature”(quoted in Stampfl, 19). The unspeakable that is associated with the Real, here the unspeakability of traumatic experience, is as Stampfl says “a paradoxical necessary condition” as far as literature is concerned. What literature can contribute to filling the void left by trauma is significant.

3.4.2 The Unspeakable and Poststructuralism

It is unavoidable to mention the role poststructuralism played in the growth and emergence of literary trauma theory, especially in emphasizing the concept of unspeakable. The approach of early scholars of literary trauma theory was noted for their poststructuralist approach to problematizing the authority of language. For them, the traumatic experience was an unsolved unconscious issue that highlights the fundamental inconsistencies between experience and language, says Balaev in ‘Literary Trauma Theory Reconsidered’ (2014, 1). According to him, this approach crafted “a concept of trauma as a recurring sense of absence that sunders knowledge of the extreme experiences, thus preventing linguistic value other than a referential expression”(1). Unspeakability or unrepresentability was the key concept put forth by the early scholars, and it in fact, stressed the poststructural concepts like aporia, linguistic indeterminacy, rupture, trace, ambiguous referentiality etc. Unspeakability reestablished the limits of language and placed itself in aporia, or the deadlocks in understanding which made its meaning through the absence or the disruption of the presence and interplay of presence and absence. By giving priority to the unspeakable nature of traumatic suffering, the notions of centrality and autonomy were challenged. It was in fact the post-structural

connections that gave a strong base to the concept of unspeakable, which soon became the key idea and holding principle in the subject. To be precise, “The unspeakable void became the dominant concept in criticism for imagining trauma’s function in literature” (Balaev, 2014,1).

Apart from that, trauma studies are considered also as an ethical turn in poststructuralism. It is observed that this ethical turn was an inextricable move to protect itself from the criticisms against poststructuralism like ethically being irresponsible, undermining the autonomy of the human subject and values, and decentering of the values. As Tom Toremans has noted in ‘Deconstruction: Trauma Inscribed in Language’ (2018), the emergence of trauma theory in the 1990s was an ethical resuscitation of the often criticized textualist, ahistorical, and apolitical theoretical discourse of deconstruction (2018, 51). It can be said that trauma studies with theories that admit the limitations of language, both at cognitive and representational levels, are trying to bring to attention the need for justice and ethics. It had become an urgency during the last years of the twentieth century, to prove that the charges and the accusations against the movement as morally nihilistic and ethically irresponsible were not exactly right, says Colin Davis (2020, 38). The theories and ideas of early poststructuralists including Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, Michel Foucault, Giles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Francois Lyotard and the like were criticized by many as ethically disturbing (Davis, 36). According to Davis, “Their interests in flux, slippages, ambiguities, ambivalence and indeterminacy, and their repudiation of absolute truth claims or immutable values could be portrayed as undermining the very foundations of ethics”(36).

So, the trauma theorists including Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman etc came forth and represented a post-structural turn of trauma theory with an ethical stance. Holocaust was a common theme in their writings, and in doing so, “the question of ethics became a fundamental and urgent one” (Felman, 1992, 121). This urgency of an ethical engagement with the outside world was not, according to a few other scholars, an urgency of only trauma studies and poststructuralism. It was, on the other hand, an urgency that was rising in critical theory altogether, wrote Dominick LaCapra (LaCapra, 1998,199). It was the necessity of time to be socially and ethically relevant. This would enable Trauma Studies to undertake discussions of right and wrong, moral judgment, fairness, decency, and ethical and moral responsibility, justice, at a time when in some

major branches of literary theory- these concepts appeared to be obsolete, ineffectual, and outdated (Davis, 39). So, even when with the contradictions that were evident in the approach and the overall concepts and writings (which celebrated literary aporia, unspeakability, void, and other similar concepts) inside the discipline of literary trauma theory, it tried to emphasize a “new awareness which was ethical as well as clinical” (Hartman, 1995, 541).

However, the study based on the fictional works of the 1984 incident visibly takes a deviation from the post-structuralist base of the discipline of Literary Trauma Studies. Rather than focusing on the aspects related to post-structuralism like rupture, fragments, fissures and the like, the literature analysed shows the possibilities of expressing pain differently. Veena Das’s take on the notions of rupture, fragmentation gaps etc in her essay ‘The Event and the Everyday’ (2007) explains these possibilities better. She points out that what follows after the occurrence of violence that helps in survival is a descent into the ordinary. She does not agree totally with the scope of fragmentation or rupture which is highlighted in post-structuralism. On the contrary, she points out the other ways offered by language and other aspects of everyday ordinary life (2007, 05).

3.5 Fiction, Testimony, History, and Trauma

It is important to examine the interrelationships between fiction, testimony, history, and trauma here. It is on the observation that these aspects are significant in the fictional works of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots. Fictional representation of traumatic experiences is closely related to testimonial writing and historical record of a particular event. Historical record here is mentioned in the sense that the fictional writings use facts and the reality of events which is the cause of trauma. When it comes to fictional writings dealing with history and testimony, the boundary that separates these areas are complex in such contexts. Most fictional works detailing traumatic suffering are testimonial in nature and are reflections of history.

Testimonial literature is a characteristic feature of the twentieth century. Even within fictional narratives, instances of testimonial narration are prevalent, particularly when the content revolves around catastrophic events and their profound impacts on collective and individual identities. Elie Wiesel's assertion that testimonial literature is an invention of the last century proves to be highly accurate (Wiesel, 1977). This observation is

unsurprising considering the twentieth century's historical backdrop, marked by two World Wars, The Holocaust, and numerous other calamities of varying intensity. Given that the genre of testimonial literature lacks strict boundaries and is, therefore, open to interpretation, fictional works featuring testimonial voices are also deemed significant. "The testimonial of fictional characters as documentary has been inserted into a narrative genre of notable relevance since the end of World War II," quotes Borges and Castro, proving the credibility of testimonial fiction as authentic voices of witnessing violent events in history (2019, 114).

Primo Levi stands out as a significant literary figure who made substantial contributions to the body of literature encapsulating the Holocaust. His literary works, which span various genres including fiction, serve as poignant representations of the harrowing realities unfolding in Nazi-occupied Germany and the profound suffering endured by the innocent victims within the confines of concentration camps. What is noteworthy about Levi's writings is their dual nature, seamlessly blending elements of both testimonial and fictional narrative forms. Even in instances where his compositions, such as the notable work *If This Is a Man* (1947), may not be easily confined to the categorization of fiction alone, the style he adopts strategically employs fictional elements to convey the nightmarish nature of the incidents and the excruciating pain inflicted upon those who experienced them.

The dependence on literary techniques and stylistic features while trying to communicate the "essential truth" (Semprun, 1997, 16) of a tragic incident in testimonial writings, even when they cannot be by a genre called fictional, is crucial. As Robert Eaglestone notes in 'Trauma and Fiction', "it is impossible to identify a range of generic characteristics which include the movement of the story backwards and forward through narrative time; the use of dramatic irony; narrative frames (...) textual interruptions; the refusal of closure; the use of epiphanies to the meaning of crucial incidents" (2020, 288). So, even generically, a literary work which is called testimonial writing, can oscillate between the junctures of fiction and history too. It is argued that to express the truth of the atrocities the writer has gone through, with its maximum precision and proximity to truth, the dependence on fictional techniques is unavoidable. To quote Jorge Semprun, to reveal the essential truth of a historical event, "We'll need a Dostoyevsky" (1997, 127).

Establishing a definitive demarcation between the distinct genres of testimony and fiction, particularly when both are testimonial in essence, proves to be challenging. The intricacies of these categories of writing are notably complex, as previously noted, particularly when a common thread of trauma is involved, and it connects them. Both genres, testimonial and fiction, engage in a discourse articulated through the language of trauma, functioning as conduits to document the historical realities prevalent during their respective periods. A compelling illustration of this complexity can be found in the novels and testimonial writings that have emerged in recent decades, shedding light on events such as colonialism, world wars, and the Holocaust. These literary works stand as compelling exemplars, underscoring the intricate interplay between testimonial and fictional elements when recounting historical narratives of profound significance. One such example is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) which is in fact, a canonical work of postcolonial literature. The novel reflects colonial exploitation, racism, and genocides which can be traced back in history and the traumatic impacts of all such events. It is often viewed as a trauma text (written based on the personal experiences of the writer) which explores the traumatic impacts of being a perpetrator. Just like many similar writings of the same nature, the dividing line between fiction and history is very thin, says Eaglestone (2020, 290).

The fictional narratives depicting the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots exhibit a comparable literary character. Authors recounting the Anti-Sikh Riots draw upon their firsthand encounters and narrate the harrowing and violent experiences of individuals within the affected community. A significant portion of these writers directly witnessed the incident, and their literary compositions rely extensively on their personal perspectives of the events. The fictional works are situated in the years leading up to, during, and following the incident, prominently influenced by historical documentation. Each piece of literature appears to intricately weave together historical truths with the individualized experiences of the authors, creating a nuanced and specific portrayal within the context of that particular work.

3.6 Limitations of the Trope of the Unspeakable: A Postcolonial Reality

It is significant to evoke the problem that lies within the writings of scholars who agree solely with the unspeakable, as it was identified by the early scholars. Agreeing to the unspeakable, even when it is a sincere attempt of solidarity to convey the intensity of

suffering of the affected section of people, is questionable. Claiming that the trauma of an event is unspeakable could lead to the suppression and forgetting of the entire incident. The counter positions against the trope of the unspeakable, like that in Naomi Mandel's *Against the Unspeakable* (2006), are therefore politically significant. Any attempt to voice the truth about the incident rather than simply sticking to the unspeakable paradigm plays a significant role. They work as documents reflecting the horror committed and will remain as powerful commentaries upon the atrocities. Any literary or artistic attempt to reflect upon the reality of the Delhi Riots, therefore, has played a significant role in stopping the forgetting and suppression of the incident.

Considering the unspeakable as only a single characteristic of trauma and not as the closure of the discussion about the different expressions of pain, opens various possibilities for exploring the truth about the incidents. What Naomi Mandel has pointed out in her work seems to support such attempts. According to her, those who are supporting the unspeakable trauma paradigm are in fact, taking a moralistically higher stand and are taking the easy way out (quoted in Stampfl, 2014,17). What Barry Stampfl has summarized about these two major observations about unspeakability is relevant here. He has pointed out that “the presence or absence of rhetorical gestures deferentially acknowledging the limits of language becomes the criterion which determines the moral authority, or lack thereof, of commentary upon atrocity” (2014, 18).

Though there are new emerging trends in the field of trauma studies today, the unspeakability/unrepresentability paradigm has been at the centre of the discipline. But it is important to understand the problems inherent in this approach of finding trauma in the silences and voids. Recent scholars in the field have criticized Trauma Studies as Eurocentric, dealing with only Western experiences. It is said that the roots of the discipline were in the medical and legal circumstances and demands of a specific historical period in the industrialised Western world (Davis& Meretoja, 2020, 05). According to Robert Eaglestone, the existing trauma paradigm prioritizes the “modernist, high—culture, Eurocentric – a form of response to trauma, and indeed, prioritizes one form of Western medical-recognized understanding of trauma over non-western and unrecognized others” (2020, 291). The concerns of the discipline, which was primarily ethical, centred on the experiences of the Western world like war neurosis, trauma left by the Holocaust, the industrial revolution and the like. Above all, the medical and

non-medical approaches focused on the trauma of the individual and never the world around him altogether. The credibility of a field of study that emerged in such a socio-political scenario to understand and study the non-European world and experience is therefore questionable.

The major concern here is to focus only on the individual suffering by neglecting the collective experiences of trauma. Even the trauma of the individual has been studied based on some limited theoretical understandings surrounding language, the human psyche and the social world in which s/he lives was completely neglected by the early scholars. For literary trauma studies in the present, the cultural and social dimensions of the individual, as well as collective suffering, have become the trend in the area. It is necessary to give importance to examining the cultural mediation of trauma by drawing a parallel between individual, personal and collective trauma (Davis, Meretoja, 2020, 04). Davis and Meretoja have pointed out that “even individual traumatic experience is always culturally mediated- cultural discourse and its ways of giving meaning to particular forms of violence (...) affect the ways in which individuals experience and deal with their traumatic experiences” (2020, 04). Looking at traumatic experiences through such a broader lens will throw light on the ways of representing and examining trauma beyond the possible ways we are aware of. This will also show the ways trauma is communicated in different ways in different socio-cultural backgrounds outside the Western world. As Peter Leese and others write about moving beyond the Western definitions of traumatic experience, One might encounter subjects who often use broader, culturally richer, and polyvalent registers to express the complexity of their experiences (2021, 04).

One of the key problems in the canonical texts of trauma studies is that they tend to homogenize the different traumatic experiences arising from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds, and nationalities. They tend to forget that different individual, as well as collective traumatic experiences, are embedded in different socio, cultural, economic, and historical backgrounds (Davis & Meretoja, 2020, 05). Each individual that caused trauma and the way it is experienced across cultures varies, and it should not be studied with the limited Eurocentric framework.

The complete reliance on the idea of unspeakability as followed within the Western trauma paradigm is problematic in the Indian context. Seeking traumatic truths in gaps

and silences brings the possibility of suppressing the history of the Anti-Sikh Riots. Relying on the trope of the unspeakable in Indian contexts is a politically and historically regressive act. It is akin to the postcolonial reproval of trauma theory as limited due to its depoliticizing and dehistoricizing tendencies (Visser, 2014, 106). In contexts similar to the violence analysed here, which stems from significant historical, socio-economic, and political concerns, trauma theory centred on the unspeakable fails to address the inevitable. As Roger Luckhurst has observed when considering these requirements of the field, trauma theory “fails to address atrocity, genocide, and war” (2008, 213).

Irene Visser, in an article on the relationship between power and traumatic suffering, problematizes the dominant trauma theory by introducing models that represent various indigenous traditions around the world. She observes that “Indigenous narrative traditions and modes of representing trauma often include an emphasis on rituals and ceremony which fall outside the framework of trauma theory” (2014, 109). Although the context of traumatic representation here does not align precisely with the observation Visser has brought forth, her observation highlights the significance of identifying the differences in how different societies mourn and communicate trauma. Such alternative modes of traumatic expression prove that trauma is not found only in gaps and silences. There is a need to consider alternate approaches to trauma in light of the postcolonial criticisms raised against the field. Trauma criticism lacks historically and culturally specific academic approaches.

Trauma theory's heavy reliance on literary strategies for expressing trauma limits interpretations to only the nature and intensity of suffering. The political and ethical effectiveness of prioritizing postmodern and experimental literary strategies has been questioned by Stef Craps. He emphasizes the need to focus on the “specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received, and be open and attentive to the diverse strategies of representation and resistance which these texts invite or necessitate” (Craps, 2012, 43). Additionally, the persistent adherence to the psychic imprints of trauma as a norm overlooks the various ways societies respond to harrowing experiences. In these contexts, silence and the language of aporias are challenged by measures of resistance and resilience.

Postcolonial critics of trauma emphasize the resistance and resilience of suppressed traumatized communities for survival. For example, Visser discusses how religious and

spiritual practices in non-Western societies are used for resistance and resilience to overcome trauma (2015, 261). She argues that “For a decolonized trauma theory, the intersections between postcolonial theory and dominant trauma theory need to be reconceived to theorize not only melancholia, weakness, and stasis but also the completely opposite dynamics of life-affirming and activist processes” (2015, 254). Thus, the inevitable outcome of trauma need not necessarily be submissiveness and inaction. Rather, active acts of survival and politically rigorous methods of communicating trauma demand academic attention. The academic endeavor to trace traumatic representation in the context of the Anti-Sikh Riots aims to establish the possibility of a new model for expressing and interpreting trauma. This, as Visser remarks, would “enable more differentiated, and more culturally and historically specific notation, and would also provide ways of reading collective trauma” (2014, 108).

Traumatic experiences differ remarkably between Western and Eastern perspectives, both in their forms and modes of articulation. In the Western context, trauma is often understood as an individual experience, primarily viewed through clinical and psychological frameworks. In contrast, trauma in Eastern societies tends to be more collective, intertwined with broader political, historical, religious, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Healing, too, is frequently a collective process, which may or may not involve various religious and cultural practices. While trauma in the West has traditionally been contained within a psychoanalytic framework, in non-Western contexts, it extends beyond the bounds of psychoanalysis to encompass a more multifaceted understanding. As Michelle Balaev observes, "Trauma in the non-West holds a view of trauma as multiple-figured, with diverse representations in literature and far-reaching effects in culture" (10, 2014). This broader perspective incorporates a range of social and historical forces, such as colonization and systemic exploitation, into the understanding of trauma. Rather than being a fixed experience, trauma in these contexts is seen as embedded in various aspects of human life and society.

The American Psychological Association (APA), in its DSM-IV released in 2000, acknowledged the cultural dimensions of trauma by addressing "culture-bound" symptoms and responses (Visser, 127, 208). Visser highlights the importance of recognizing cultural specificity and diversity in trauma, noting that different societies manifest distinct symptoms and coping mechanisms. Cultural traditions often include

indigenous methods of healing trauma, such as processes of integration and connectivity that promote recovery. In some cultures, art forms play a vital role in healing, illustrating the significance of language and narration in recovering from trauma by recounting experiences in a direct, transparent manner.

Trauma, globally, is seen as an aftermath—belated and contingent on various factors. How it is experienced and processed depends on specific cultural, historical, and social contexts, which are crucial for distinguishing between Western and non-Western understandings. Long-term trauma caused by suppression and torture, such as that stemming from colonization, slavery, and similar historical injustices, often demands a public expression of pain. In non-Western contexts, there is a stronger emphasis on resistance and healing, prioritizing recovery over permanent stasis or passivity. This contrasts with the Western focus on individual resolution, illustrating the diverse ways in which trauma is understood and addressed around the world.

3.7 Trauma as Pluralistic

Examining and analyzing the entire fictional narratives dealing with the 1984 Delhi riots through the theoretical frameworks of literary trauma studies demands the inclusion of new approaches. The traumatic analysis needs to be from the perspective of cultural trauma as well. Hence it seems important to assess the significance of the field of cultural trauma by drawing parallels between individual or personal trauma in the context of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots.

The most popular definition of cultural trauma appears in Jeffrey Alexander's 'Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma' (2004). According to Alexander, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (2004,1). What appears noteworthy here is that the trauma of collectivity is not formed normally at its own pace. Rather, cultural trauma is created through various processes that take part after the occurrence of the catastrophic event that affects the members of a collectivity (Smelser, 2004, 37). So, in the observation of the scholars in the field, the cultural trauma of a community is a result of the representation of the incident and the resulting experiences as traumatic (Alexander, 2004, 8).

An incident becomes traumatic for an entire community and reaches a stage to be identified as cultural trauma by passing through the interpretations and articulations of the members of the affected community through “complex, often continuous social processes” (Madigan, 2020, 46). In this long social-psychological process, victims, and perpetrators are identified through a process of narration. Such a process of narration is dominated by various literary and non-literary efforts that communicate the impacts of the incident on different members of the community. In Madigan’s observation, such narratives are communicated through various types of discourses, “including political speeches, news articles, religious sermons, academic works, casual conversations, films, and of course, literature” (Madigan, 2020, 46).

What distinguishes the recognition of the trauma from the 1984 riots as cultural trauma is that it has never been acknowledged as such before. The social process that proceeds the identification of one community as traumatised, except the outsized role of literature, is absent in this particular context. What happened was decades-long silence, which was forced upon the community, and the appearance of literary works and a few films that happened after two to three decades. Trauma in the literary works of 1984 seems to stand above the definitions given above by the scholars of cultural trauma. Other than that, there can be seen literary efforts to give significance to the individual experiences of trauma placed alongside the collective experiences, in these fictional works. So, it is important to examine the cultural mediation of traumatic experiences by drawing a parallel between the individual and culture, in these texts of literature.

It is important to understand the ways trauma is communicated in different socio-cultural worlds outside the Western definitions of trauma. What has been dominating the discourses of cultural trauma were based mainly on the individual and event-based theorizations of early scholars like Caruth (Visser, 2018) and the field has been dominated by Western understandings. The topic of studying the representation of trauma in the writings analysed here demands non-Western perspectives, which have been emerging in recent years, to include a broader and society-based outlook that would incorporate social, economic, political, religious and historical factors.

It is important to mention the newly emerging non-western scholarship of literary trauma and their stand on literariness, unspeakability and trauma, as it is going to be primarily on these grounds the fictional works of the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots will be dealt with in

the coming chapters. The canonical literary and leading historical approaches that constitute the area of Literary Trauma Studies, as per the range of scholars like Stef Craps, Roger Luckhurst and the like, are Eurocentric and reflect only the dominant Western cultures and experiences. The early theoretical formulations and literary approaches of trauma, starting from Caruth, were focused primarily on the event and the individual. When it comes to its reflection in literature, the scholars largely focused on the literary complexities, interruptions, and stylistic obscurities. According to their view, trauma could be represented in "complex, challenging and, even perhaps, modernist or postmodernist forms" (Eaglestone, 2020, 290). However, the newly emerging non-Western trauma paradigm has been shifting the focus areas to be more political, social, historical, economic and cultural factors away from sticking only to the peculiarities and obscurities of the literary language of representation. Such endeavours can challenge the often-upheld claim that traumatic experiences are unspeakable. In a non-Western literary exploration of trauma, the experience can also be accessed through literature's interaction with cultural, historical, and political factors, which were not considered by the dominant theoreticians of the discipline.

The literary language's special ability to communicate the intricacies of specific traumatic suffering through anti-narrative strategies like fragmentation and inclusion of different stylistic features and disruptions altogether gives it the image of high literature. Though traumatic narration demands a deviation from the conventional modes of narration and representation, there is again a re-establishment of the special capabilities of a certain form of writing and literary language. The hidden demand for a literary work which attempts to communicate traumatic impacts and suffering seems to favour a high literary form. The non-Western trends in the field look at the ways of assessing and addressing the intricacies of traumatic experiences other than the literariness of the text. As Eaglestone has pointed out, the dominant scholarship of trauma fiction prioritizes the "modernist, high-culture, Eurocentric form of response to trauma, and indeed, prioritizes one form of Western medical recognized understanding of trauma over non-western and unrecognized others" (2020, 291).

The literary medium's ability to represent and communicate traumatic experiences is not limited if looked at from this perspective. Such reexaminations and criticisms of the first wave of trauma theory seem to give more focus to the cultural experience of trauma. But

what is important to point out here is that literature is still seen as the major medium of accessing and communicating traumatic experiences. The criticisms focused on literature outside the Western definitions of high literature and the literary language and prioritized giving space to non-western and a much broader range of traumatic representations. This demands a focus on cultural, historical, political, and several other factors. In the analysis of literary works which are written based on the 1984 anti-Sikh Riots, this observation will be well established, in the coming chapters. In the works which were carefully examined, there can be found a variety of aspects specific to the community of victims that have played significant roles in communicating the traumatic impacts of the incident.