CHAPTER 5

Diverse Experiences of Trauma in the Anti-Sikh Riot Fiction

Trauma is not singular; it is a complex and multifaceted experience that manifests in various forms and impacts individuals in unique ways. In his paper “Parsing the Unspeakable in the Context of Trauma" (2014), Barry Stampfl points out that, “trauma itself is the name of a realm of experience large and diverse enough to require a pluralistic conception of the unspeakable” (16). Unspeakability is only one of the diverse features of the traumatic experience, which itself is a hypernym that stands for a diverse array of traumatic suffering. Unspeakability is also meant to suggest a broader range of possible ways of approaching traumatic suffering. The trauma inflicted by the Riots of 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots does not appear only in the unspeakable moments or acknowledgements of the writers. In this chapter, I have tried to examine the diverse experiences of trauma represented in the fictional writings of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots. The different ways unspeakability has been channelised through these writings are also studied here. The intention here is not to entirely undermine the unspeakable quality of the traumatic experience. Rather, to focus on other methods of talking about trauma while considering unspeakability as one of the multiple ways of looking at representing trauma. Such diverse approaches are considered here as part of the ‘trauma process’, to borrow the term from Jeffrey C Alexander (2004).

Veena Das, addressing the significance of literary language to communicate pain observes that, “some realities need to be fictionalised before they can be apprehended. She has pointed out that sometimes it is effective to respond to the call of the world in the register of the imaginary (2007, 40). Literature is considered a medium which can effectively reflect and at the same time construct the different facets of traumatic suffering. Literature is not seen only as a medium to reflect the complexity of individual as well as collective traumatic experiences. On the other hand, it is understood also as capable of playing a major role in constructing trauma. In the selected writings analysed here, can be seen the active presence of both the reflective as well as constructive processes of trauma. So, literature here has become the medium for the representation of traumatic memories of the community and at the same time, the narrative process is also involved in making these entire experiences of the respective incidents traumatic. What Jeffrey C Alexander pointed out about this process which he has termed a “trauma

process" (2004, 11) becomes relevant here. The trauma process gives narrative shape and meaning to the catastrophic incident that has deeply harmed the collective identity of a group of people, observes Irene Visser (2014, 110) based on Alexander's concepts. The literature that has dealt with the violence of 1984 is considered here as part of such a socio-cultural process that is involved in the making of trauma. Literature in doing so, has given voice, and meaning to the suffering of the victims and survivors of the incident. In my attempts to analyse the traumatic experiences as visible in the writings of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots as both constructive and reflective, what has come to light is that traumatic experiences appear in diverse ways and don't fit specific definitions.

Socio-cultural backgrounds play a crucial role in shaping individual identities and influencing how trauma affects individuals. The way trauma is experienced and processed varies according to these cultural contexts. As Vickroy (2014) suggests, "The social environment, the severity of the event, and the individual's characteristics and sense of control help to determine how someone copes with trauma. The social environment influences the causes and outcomes of traumatic experiences in a variety of ways" (132).

In *Dried Apricots Smell Like Dead Fish*, Pratyaksha's narrative illustrates how trauma is shaped by socio-cultural roles and differences in experience. Bebe's and Daarji's trauma arises from the loss of their son during the attacks, while Phulo's trauma, although also stemming from the violence, is rooted in the horrific rape she suffered. Despite also witnessing the brutal murder of her husband, Phulo's life is defined by the trauma of the sexual violence she endured. She experiences recurring nightmares and is haunted by her memories: "Phulo would often wake up mumbling, 'Bebe, my skin is burning, my chest is hurting. Bebe, cover me up. I am naked, cover me up Bebe'" (178). For Phulo, the violence inflicted on her body is inextricably linked to the smell of dead fish—a sensory reminder of the attack that never fades. As Pratyaksha describes, "and then days when all thoughts came crawling out of her body, her skin, like maggots. She washes her body constantly; she scrubs her body; she means to erase the stench. But the stench of dead fish doesn't leave her body" (180). Phulo's trauma is deeply connected to the violation of her body, which impacts her sense of self-worth and identity as a woman and wife. This unrelenting trauma compels her into a state of repetition, unable to break free from the

haunting memory until, in the story's conclusion, the act of confronting the guilt and seeking forgiveness from the perpetrator's son offers a pathway to healing.

This notion of healing, however, is thwarted by the social environment. Living with her in-laws, who themselves are victims of the violence, Phulo is denied the necessary space for resolution and reconciliation. The trauma remains unclaimed and unresolved due to the absence of a supportive environment for processing her grief. As Vickroy observes, "The social environment influences the causes and outcomes of traumatic experience in a variety of ways. It not only forms the circumstances out of which trauma is created but can also provide or refuse the needed support for healing" (132).

In contrast, Laurie Vickroy's *Voices of the Survivors in Contemporary Fiction* (2014) emphasizes the significant role that socio-cultural aspects and individual identity play in the healing process. Vickroy argues that the social environment not only influences the emergence of trauma but also the support available for recovery. This is vividly illustrated in Bose's novel, where Kaju's healing process is facilitated by her foster family's support. The care and emotional security provided by Kaju's new family serve as a foundation for her recovery, highlighting the importance of social relationships in overcoming trauma. When Kaju revisits physical spaces linked to her traumatic past, she finds that the support she receives from her foster family helps her cope with the unsettling memories. This emphasis on collective healing and the involvement of family and friends creates a social framework for recovery, where healing is not only an individual process but a communal one.

Kaju's ability to reclaim her past and her identity is central to the healing narrative in Bose's work. In the final scenes, Kaju is able to reconcile with her traumatic experiences, especially those involving the violent deaths of her family members, thanks to the supportive and healing environment provided by her foster family. When Kaju responds to her first name—one that evokes painful memories—it signifies her reclamation of self. Bose writes, "Amu, he said in his quietest tone, saying her first name like an endearment. The sunlight glittered on the steel kara around Kaju's wrist. She looked him full in the face, her gaze settling deeply into his" (136). This simple yet profound act of recognition marks Kaju's healing journey.

The spaces Kaju encounters in the narrative—railway stations, streets, and Gobind's house—serve as physical reminders of her life before the violence, evoking both trauma and healing. The railway station, in particular, becomes a site where Kaju confronts her past, gradually making peace with the painful memories associated with these spaces. Bose's use of space underscores the role of physical environments in shaping the healing process. Kaju's encounter with the past is not merely a mental or emotional experience but is deeply tied to her sensory engagement with these locations. Bose writes, "Kaju and Kanir walked down the railway line into the distance, away from the words of the news report. Gently, almost sleepily, a blue train came chugging down the track beside them. Its rhythm was musical, even comforting. A little boy ran along the train, intently flying his red kite. Kabir asked him if they could borrow it. As the sun set and colours ceased to be distinct, the three of them ran along with the train. Above them, the kite bobbed and soared, almost dancing" (136).

Through these literary examples, Bose underscores the centrality of family, social relationships, and space in the trauma-recovery process. The way in which trauma is experienced and healed is influenced by a complex interplay of personal, social, and cultural factors, all of which are critical to understanding the full scope of trauma and its aftermath. Traumatic experiences are different when considering the status of the traumatised and are influenced by a significant number of external factors. The literary works analysed here deal with the trauma of victims, witnesses and perpetrators, for example, which are different in the way the traumatised is affected and also in representation.

5.1 Victimhood and Trauma

Victimisation can be approached from different angles. This includes the cultural, religious, financial, gendered, physical as well as psychological perspectives. Focus on any one of these perspectives will open ways of understanding the impact of the victimisation related to other aspects. Victimisation of what happened as a result of the 1984 riots is not limited to just a single dimension. In the case of most victims of the incident, they were affected at various levels. Fictional works have tried to represent trauma by focusing on multiple angles. The trauma resulting from the victimization of religious, cultural, financial, gender-based, and physical torture becomes a major focus in

these writings. The focus here will be to examine such different treatments of the traumatic impacts of victimisation which are part of the trauma process.

The language of the trauma of the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots literature is mainly that of victimhood and the traumatic impacts resulting from it. The writings have also focused on other experiences, but what is dominant in the discourse of the riots is the suffering of the collectivity as a victim community. The disbelief of being treated as victims in one's own country, and the experience of being attacked and targeted, tortured physically and emotionally are dealt with in these writings.

First and foremost, there is an assertion of victimhood through literary narratives. This is intricately tied to the literary attempts that have strongly criticised the attempts to call incidents of 1984 violence as communal riots between two warring communities. Though in the beginning, there were efforts to call it random clashes and violence between communities, the role of literature in proving this as fabricated and fake was significant.

Such an assertion of victimisation, and hence the lack of involvement of the community became part of the trauma process of making sense of the incident. The problematization of naming the incident was part of asserting their victimhood. Writers like Jyoti Grewal pointed out that clarifying the situation as 'riots' is essential to analysing its intent and meaning (Grewal, 2007, 11). It is pointed out that the situation of the Sikh-Hindu violence does not fit into the established paradigm of communalism of any sort (11). It is claimed that it was not a riot. In a riot, two parties feel aggrieved, and they clash. But in the context of the 1984 incidents of violence, it was a one-sided attack rather than a clash, writes Suri (2015, 156). Most writers then went forward to name the incident as a pogrom, mayhem or genocide (Grewal, 13).

The total helplessness the community of Sikhs went through was established to assert these observations. Suri wrote that the victim community did not have the time, capacity or mind to retaliate. Their properties were looted, and set aflame. They were killed, insulted, and burned alive while the other group were not sufferers to any degree (2015, 156). Such claims were not limited just to a few writings. On the other hand, the collective voices addressed this issue contributing to the trauma process of the incident.

Victimhood and the resulting trauma are established similarly in the various fictional works. The suffering forcefully imposed on the members of the victim community in various ways becomes the major concern of the writers. These writings emphasise the literary image of helplessness, lack of agency and lack of involvement of the affected members of the collectivity, in the implications of trauma. This can be observed as the process that is simultaneously involved in reflecting and also contributing to the making of the traumatic experience. What follows in this section will be a careful analysis of the selected literary works to understand the trauma of victims of the incident. The traumatised characters analysed from these texts include anyone who is portrayed as harmed, injured both mentally as well as physically during the incident, and who properly fit into a general understanding of a victim. In this context, as trauma is also analysed from a collective level, this will include any character who was not directly attacked but is still traumatised as a member of the victim community.

Sarbpreet Singh's focus in the story 'The Survivor' (2020) is on the trauma of Lali, the protagonist. The 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots completely shattered the life Lali was leading and wounded him for a lifetime. Lali is presented as a victim who survived the brutal killings of Sikhs in Tinsukia Mail. He and every other Sikh male in the train were killed by the rioters. Rani, who later becomes his wife, finds him in the New Delhi Railway Station amidst terrified children and women who could save their lives from the incident. Lali sobs in front of Rani, "They are all dead. They killed them all: my brothers, my bhabhis, the children, Biji. Why didn't they kill me too" (186). Singh clearly shows Lali's trauma as a victim. Though Lali is presented as a survivor in the later part of the story, he is nowhere shown as recovering from the traumatic effects resulting from his experiences. His nights are filled with anguished nightmares. In his dreams, Rani observes that he "howls like an animal in agony" (2020, 187). Lali's repeated narration of his story recounts the incidents in a mechanical way, beginning with the same sentences. Lali finds it hard to remember and narrate what happened to him and his family. But his story of victimhood emerged slowly, writes Singh, "Like a grotesquely deformed baby that a mother knows is hers but does not want to acknowledge" (186).

It is stated in the story that making sense of what happened that led to the traumatic existence is a difficult process. Crystal L. Park has dealt with the disruptions that a traumatic experience can cause on the consciousness and existence of an individual

(2022). The traumatic existence of an individual is often followed by a meaning-making process which tries to establish the overall truth of what happened which restores his or her link with the outside world. Lali's repeated retellings, which are like a byhearted story, are part of his attempts to make sense of his trauma and the experiences he had to undergo. Lali's narration covers the details of violence and how Sikhs were targeted and killed during the incident. It also establishes his role as a victim along with others who were attacked. Though in the beginning, his attempts to remember and talk about what happened ended in the "intense howl of agony in the language that nightmares are written in" (2020, 188), with time the story gains a structure.

Lali's story attempts to point out how happy his entire family was before the incidents happened. His father's contributions to the Indian Army as a respected officer and the family's love for India as their nation is mentioned. There are also descriptions of how everyone loved and admired Indira Gandhi. These details in the story narrated by Lali highlight the sense of shock of the victim community and criticise the injustice that they had to face. It is shown that Lali and his family along with other passengers were killed and attacked even though they were in no way responsible for the assassination. There is also mention of the organised nature of violence, where political parties were involved in unleashing violence against one community (199).

The trauma of women who lost their husbands, children and other family members, and who were victims of sexual violence that happened during the violence is not a much-discussed topic in the discourse of the incident. The reasons behind the lack of information and discussion about women's victimisation and trauma have been dealt with in earlier chapters. Fictional works, contrary to such existing observations, have attempted to give voice to the tribulations of women and the double-sided trauma that resulted (the trauma of being raped by multiple perpetrators, and witnessing the brutal killing of their family members including husbands and children). The short story titled 'Dried Apricots Smell Like Dead Fish'(2016) written by Pratyaksha is one such fictional work that portrays the trauma of a victim of the 1984 riots. Phulo was gang-raped and physically assaulted after being made to witness her husband burnt alive by the rioters.

Even after thirty years, Phulo is trapped between the present and the horrific memories of what happened during the incidents of violence. Though she had saved her life from the perpetrators by pretending to be dead, she finds her later hard, "worse than death, worse

than living. The torture courses through her body every day, every moment" (2016, 173). Her memories of violence remain alive and vivid without fading away, as it happened yesterday, writes the author. The writer has explained the incidents that led to Phulo's trauma in detail. Phulo's life and existence are shown as driven by her past. Her existence is presented in the story as numb and lifeless because of the burden of her memories. Phulo's traumatic memories are not narrated in a literary language that the trauma theorists have prescribed as ideal for the representation of trauma. Whitehead pointed out that trauma requires a literary language that is different and departs from the conventional linear sequence (Whitehead, 2004, 6). Rather, Phulo's trauma is narrated in the story in a language and form that is straightforwardly referential and non-linear. The narration of scenes of violence including her husband's killing and her rape follows direct descriptions filled with various details and clarity. It is different from the often-followed literary language to depict trauma which is indirect, experimental and marked by different literary techniques. For example, the killing of Baljit, Phulo's husband' along with a few other Sikh neighbours and relatives is represented from the perspective of Phulo who had witnessed it. The narration follows a straightforward style and attempts to bring clarity to the incident, attempting to expose the horror of the incident. The perpetrators attacked all Sikh men in the neighbourhood and put tyres on their necks to burn them alive. Pratyaksha writes,

> And then somebody brought tyres. There was a flash; the crowd had begun to scream (...) And then the crowd moved back. A clearing sprang up in the centre and you could see the dance of fire, the dance of death, gruesome, macabre, brutal (...) they wore their garlands bravely. Their hair falling loose was aflame. A golden halo. Their faces were a grotesque scream from hell itself as their skin melted and their torsos burst apart. They ran a naked run engulfed in orange and the crowd finally made way. Till they fell one by one, in the middle of the road, in front of their homes, in the neighbourhood where they had gone for food and fun. It was here, amidst their very own, that they died, murdered in the most terrifying death that one can conceive, burnt alive by their own people who they loved and who had loved them once upon a time (2016, 117).

The focus here is on the barbarity and the details of the scene. The writer attempts to specify the horridness of the experience, which is behind Phulo's trauma, instead of

indirectly representing it in a language which is typical to the narration of trauma. The unrepresentable here is represented in a language that is visibly marked by the vivid descriptions of the scene. The incidents that have led to Phulo's trauma, including witnessing her husband's death and her rape are written in the same style. The helplessness of the victims is brought into focus here.

In the night they had barged in. They had pulled her out into the patch beneath the neem tree. They had torn away her salwar, they had clamped her mouth shut with their calloused palms, they had bitten her everywhere, they had burnt her body with their cigarette stubs, they had laughed uproariously when she whimpered with pain. They had taken drunken turns to violate her brutally. They had hit her with sticks, then sodomised her; they had slapped her fiercely and pulled away clumps of hair. She had sunk into the soft earth. Every thrust pushed her deeper into pain unconsciousness (178).

What becomes evident in both scenes is the literary attempt to emphasise the cruelty that the perpetrators exhibited and the complete helplessness of the victims, primarily Phulo. The writer brings to light how the victims were subjected to the utmost heinous crime. The story follows a non-straightforward narration, similar to the disconnected episodes of Phulo's memory. But her memory of each incident that was behind her trauma is direct and vividly expressed. The narrator here implies the different ways of approaching trauma, than one that is dependent heavily on silences and interruptions.

Similarly, in Jyoti Verma's 'Eyes Don't Lie,' Noor and her mother become victims of the violence that broke out in 1984 that completely transformed their lives. Noor's mother personally witnesses the brutal killing of her husband at the hands of the perpetrators. The mob, with policemen as onlookers, burn him alive. Reflecting on the traumatic experience, she says, "Their eyes did not flinch once, nor did their hands falter. Their faces were monstrous. They hated us," she says with immense pain in her reddening eyes. "They burned him alive. I can still recall the ghastly look in his eyes. His body was snatched from my arms. They didn't even let me mourn him. Heaps of bodies were loaded onto a truck and taken away" (169).

Noor, as a child, lived with the anguish of losing her father and witnessing her brother's killing in the complex aftermath of the riots. Her brother is shot dead under suspicion of being a terrorist. Verma highlights that the repercussions of the riots lasted for another

decade, affecting the youth in Punjab. The Sikh boys who were religious were seen as terrorists. Verma poignantly describes the experience of her character Vir, who was being treated in this manner and killed in front of his younger sister. The narrative unfolds the stories of two women whose lives are haunted by the traumatic aftermath of the riots. Noor's mother shares her trauma in her own words, providing a detailed account of the violence, including the perpetrators' patterns and the inactivity of the police. The emotional scars and continuing impact of the riots is visibly brought out in the narrative, revealing the deep pain and injustice inflicted upon these women.

The psychological effects of being a victim as given in 'Victims' Response to Trauma and Implications of Interventions: A Selected Review and Synthesis of the Literature' (Hill, 2021) include fear, anger, loss, rejection, physical symptoms, depression, anxiety, hostility, avoidance, and alienation. The narrator of the novel *Helium* depicts the character Nelly as a typical example of the victim of the 1984 Riots, who is controlled by her past. Singh portrays Nelly as someone who has PTSD and shows her exhibiting all major symptoms of her traumatic condition.

The story in *Helium* is narrated in the first-person voice of Raj. But Nelly's trauma in the novel is, on the other hand, explained in her own voice. The twenty-page-long narration attempts to communicate what happened to her family during the riots and her traumatic life following that. The sudden shift in the narrative voice can be seen as part of a literary effort to provide more authenticity and credibility to Nelly's experiences. Nelly's traumatic condition is also expressed here in her voice. Nelly lost her husband and her children during the riots. After a long gap that marked her inability to make sense of what happened, she began to document the truths of the incident. Nelly's attempt aims to archive the atrocities and reveal the role of the state government in it.

Nelly's passion for ornithology and her engagement with children's literature serve as mechanisms for healing, providing her with a way to cope with her trauma. As the narrator observes, Nelly is immersed in "the ballistic little miracle of birds. A breathing space, I felt. Birds for her were like tiny healing devices; they were her prayers" (2013, 97). Her fascination with birds functions as a form of escape, allowing her to manage the trauma, stress, and anxiety she experiences. This connection to nature serves as a survival strategy, a way to handle the emotional and psychological weight of her past.

Singh presents Nelly and Raj as characters from different social backgrounds, each bearing the weight of trauma in distinct ways, despite their shared experience of a traumatic event. Although both are linked to the same incident—marked by the loss of a loved one—they cope with the aftermath in different manners. Nelly, like Raj, is burdened by guilt and personal loss, but her response to trauma manifests in isolation and withdrawal. While Raj channels his emotions into writing, Nelly finds solace in ornithology. Singh uses their contrasting coping mechanisms to explore the complexity of trauma responses. Nelly's trauma symptoms remain unhealed, and her lifestyle—marked by seclusion and emotional shutdown—prevents any meaningful recovery. The environment Singh places her in further exacerbates her trauma, as it lacks the social and emotional support needed for healing. In such circumstances, trauma remains unresolved, and the individual's attempt at survival often comes at the cost of emotional stasis.

Nelly's character is a clear representation of what Root (1992) describes as "survival characteristics" that develop in response to prolonged trauma. These traits include "egocentrism, quickness to anger, social and emotional withdrawal, rumination, or shutting down" (248). In Nelly's case, these features are evident as she tries to survive the trauma in isolation, but without the support needed for recovery. Singh's narrative raises important questions about the differential impact of trauma: "Why do people respond differently to traumatic events? How do we remember the past? Why, when meaning collapses in our lives, do some of us seem to locate a new meaning?" (99). Nelly's struggle to reconcile with the past highlights the complexities of trauma, showing that even when individuals employ various coping strategies, recovery is not always guaranteed. Instead of facilitating healing, her life in Shimla intensifies the trauma, as it forces her to remember more than she is capable of processing. Singh emphasizes the dynamic nature of trauma, demonstrating that people respond to it based on their personality, environment, and social bonds.

One of the key manifestations of Nelly's trauma is her loss of linguistic control. Singh illustrates how trauma affects her ability to recall even the most basic words in her native language. When her friend Maribel asks her for the Punjabi equivalent of the word "denial," Nelly realizes that she has forgotten her own language. This linguistic impairment is not merely a narrative device but speaks to the deeper psychological

effects of trauma. Research on the relationship between language and trauma supports this connection, indicating that traumatic experiences can lead to significant language disorders. According to Rae Myerss and Telford Rose (2022), individuals who have experienced trauma often suffer impairments in cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and linguistic processing. They argue that trauma can hinder a person's ability to learn new languages or retain their native language, ultimately affecting communication. This cognitive and emotional disruption is evident in Nelly's character as she grapples with the loss of her language.

A similar linguistic impairment due to trauma is seen in Goswami's *The Sikh Baba*. In Goswami's narrative, the Sikh Baba is rendered mute after the horrors he witnesses during and after Partition. The violent experiences he endures, including the killing of family members, the forced migration, and the rape of his daughter, all contribute to his inability to speak. His trauma shuts him off from the world, not just emotionally, but also linguistically. The physical and psychological violence he suffers leads to a complete breakdown of communication, underscoring how profound trauma can impede not only one's emotional recovery but also their ability to interact with the world through language.

Both Nelly and the Sikh Baba serve as poignant examples of how trauma can disrupt the most fundamental aspects of human experience—language, memory, and emotional connection—and demonstrate the ways in which individuals cope with these disruptions. Singh and Goswami use their characters to explore how traumatic events leave lasting scars, not just on the psyche, but on the very ways individuals relate to themselves and the world around them.

The traumatic impacts experienced by a victim after going through the catastrophic incidents of the 1984 Riots are approached directly in the novel *Amu* by Shonali Bose. The representation of Amu's trauma follows a different approach compared to the trauma of characters in other works like that of Nelly, or Phulo. Amu is on a constant journey to find her roots and find the causes behind her trauma. Her present existence is not a constant struggle for survival and maintaining sanity from the clutches of trauma. On the other hand, she goes in search of her past and the truths behind it.

The novels of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots are based on the realities and facts which were available to the writer in various restricted forms like oral histories, investigation reports, interviews, and the like. *Amu* (2004) is an attempt to historically investigate the truths about the incident. The novel is about a young Indian who is settled in America, coming back to find her roots. Kaju/Amu in the beginning of the novel itself expresses an inexplicable need to connect with the past emanating inside her. Kaju's visit to Delhi, which was once her home, brings back her memories which were traumatic and unsettling. The past begins to visit her as vague hallucinations and nightmares till the truths are finally revealed when she learns to come to terms with her traumatic past. The feeling of restlessness and moments of strange sensations when she sees the gurdwara, the place of worship for the Sikhs. and while looking at the picture of a Sikh saint hanged on the wall of Gobind's home, a man he befriends from Delhi University, becomes stronger upon seeing a stairway in the ghetto where Gobind lives. Later, the vague and fleeting image of a woman on the other side of the railway tracks as the train passes by, gives her a feeling of de javu. Slowly, she realises that she is actually Amu, a Sikh girl who lost her family in the riots.

Amu's role here as a victim is on the grounds that she was victimised psychologically and economically. Unlike most victims as portrayed in the literary works, Amu was not physically assaulted. But she was a direct witness to the murder of her brother and father, and she lost everything she owned when the rioters burned their home. She becomes an orphan torn apart by the horrors when her mother commits suicide unable to bear the pain. The uprooting from India to America severs the links with memories of her violent and traumatic past. But her visits to the ghettos to meet Gobind and his family, the ambience and the noise in the ghettos, the nearest railway station, narrow lanes, and Gobind's three-year-old daughter who resembled her past bring back haunting memories to her conscious world. The novel develops and reveals itself through the psychological dilemma of Amu and the people around her while attempting to understand the past.

Kaju's trauma is presented in the novel as unreachable and incomprehensible. However, what sets this apart from conventional trauma narratives is its focus on her journey toward acceptance and reconciliation with the past horrors, rather than remaining defined by them. The past trauma revisits her repeatedly when she finds herself in places similar to that from her past like the ghettos, Gobind's home and the railway

station. But the past remained unreachable and unintelligible till she finally discovered everything that happened. Kaju dreams at night about Bublee, Gobind's daughter, as a result of her frequent visits to the ghetto. In Kaju's dreams, she sees Bublee as representing her childhood, entering a long, black, never-ending tunnel. By passing through the tunnel, she reaches a gigantic wasteland at the end of the slum. Then she sees a figure in black, digging a hole relentlessly, whose face resembles her own. The scene in the dream metaphorically stands for Kaju's efforts in digging into her past. The inexplicable nature of trauma which lies beyond the possibilities of language can be well established in this dream narration (2004, 44). The complex nature of traumatic memory appears in the form of scattered thoughts and vague visuals. Though her memories as a victim are presented in the story as unreachable, the writer shows that the traumatic past is not always beyond narration. Kaju's real past and the truth behind the incidents are revealed in the story later.

The truths about her victimhood are revealed along with the organised nature of the incident. Kaju's investigation to discover the truth which had been denied to her from childhood, metaphorically seems to represent the whole society's attempts to uncover the realities after being silenced for decades. Bringing the reality of what happened in 1984 and establishing the truth of the issue is the main authorial intention. The novel tries to point out that discovering the truth is in fact one way to manage one's trauma. The information about the traumatic event must not be repressed, as the affected community deserves to know what happened. *Amu* was adapted into a Bollywood movie under the writer's direction in the year 2005. Bose later wrote about it, "Such history cannot be buried and forgotten. Young people cannot make their future or understand their present without knowing the past" (quoted in DNA, 2013) in reply to a question asked by the Censor Board of India that why the young people of India should know about a history that was better buried and forgotten.

What has become clear in the novel is the writer's denial and fight against the forced forgetting or burial of history, and establishing of the trauma of victims. This is reflected through the protagonist and her continuous struggles to make meaning out of the episodes of traumatic memories. Parvinder Mehta writes, "Any silence, voluntary or involuntary, about violence resultant trauma only creates a gap and emptiness created by the initial struggles with the silence "(2015, 11). Such efforts, even though were less,

came from the side of fictional writers later on. *Amu* was one of the earliest literary works to explore the incident through its narrative of trauma

Antonius C G M Robben and Marcel M. Suarez- Orozco (2000) analyse the impact of violence on a victim population. They have discussed the relationship between a violence-stricken society in which the victim population lives and the massive cultural trauma they have to undergo. According to them, "violence continues to shape the inner, interpersonal and socio-cultural worlds of victims and their children" (2000, 5). In the context of the novel *Amu* and other works discussed so far in this section, the effects of violence rule the psyche of the characters. These works show different angles of victims' sufferings. The characters, being still haunted by the past, are in a constant struggle to live in peace with the present world. But Kaju faces her trauma differently unlike the other characters. The realisation of the violence she and her family had to undergo leaves Kaju less disturbed, complacent and relieved to an extent. She finds herself at peace after learning everything about her past and the stories behind her trauma.

The literary depictions of victimization and the characters we have examined thus far reveal a spectrum of approaches in dealing with their respective traumas. The manner in which trauma is portrayed differs significantly, emphasizing the diverse factors that have contributed to the psychological states of these characters in the present. It is evident that the influences shaping their emotional well-being are multifaceted and these affect them in varied ways. Consequently, the very nature of trauma for each victim emerges as a fluid and non-fixed category, highlighting the nuanced and individualized experiences that contribute to the complexity of their psychological narratives.

5.2 The Trauma of Witnessing

Trauma studies is widely recognized for its commitment to "listening across disciplines" (Caruth, 2014, ix), emphasizing an ethical responsibility to listen and bear witness to the trauma of others, particularly to events that inflict harm on society. Responding to traumatic events in ways that contribute to the communication of their reality is central to the discipline, especially in literature, which serves as an ethical medium for addressing such events and facilitating healing and recovery.

Colin Davis underscores the pivotal role of trauma studies within critical theory, particularly its capacity to reintroduce moral discourse into intellectual conversations. As Davis observes, “One of the significant achievements of trauma studies has been to make it possible to talk once again about right and wrong, moral judgments, justice, decency, and responsibility, after a period when such terms seemed to be outmoded, inappropriate, ineffective, or simply meaningless” (39). This ethical dimension of trauma studies highlights the importance of testimony in achieving justice, with an ethical imperative to give voice to the traumatized being fundamental to the discipline. The act of expressing and healing trauma necessitates listening to the experiences of others, with the trauma of the other taking precedence over the self of the listener (Felman, 2002, 173).

When considering the ethical aspects of literary trauma, the focus shifts to the writer’s intention to represent the wounds of others and the implied reader’s role in engaging with these narratives. There is an inherent ethical act in both the narration and the theorization of trauma narratives. This is particularly evident in testimonial literature, where the imperative to share the trauma is a key theme. As Davis notes, “witnesses follow an imperative to tell their stories, and witnesses to the witnesses are also subject to an imperative to re-tell the story” (41). Through this process, the listener becomes an active participant, and their engagement is ethically significant, contributing to the broader healing and justice narrative.

The witnesses of acts of violence or extreme events have not been given importance as a subject of study within the area of trauma studies until very recently. The witness is in general considered as someone who has witnessed a violent incident or crime and who does or does not testify to it. Unlike the perpetrator, who is also associated with the same violent incident, the witness is seen as a moral figure. The cause for this moral image originates from the Bible according to Carolyn J. Dean (2020, 111). Later, according to Dean, this moral role and authority associated with a witness was attributed again after the Holocaust and the World Wars. According to Dean, “Witnessing is a moral practice and it establishes knowledge about an event or events" (111).

As witnesses of violence were seen as the primary source of truth, they were rarely associated with the trauma. Witnesses were seen only as spectators who were shocked by the horrific nature of the violence and were either unaffected or shattered by its impact. The distinctions made between a victim and a witness of the same incident were

established, leaving only a victim capable of suffering the traumatic impacts. The focus was only on the testimony of the witness which made the suffering of the victim a credible experience. The shift from focus on the testimony of witnesses as relevant to the experience of witnessing started after the First World War (Dean, 2020, 112). The ineffability of the violence they witnessed soon came to be considered within the framework of trauma theory, though not with the same academic seriousness that the victim's experiences received.

One of the incidents that happened in history that later found reflection in the discourse of trauma regarding the possibility of how the traumatic shock of a witness can be similar to that of a victim's experience happened during the trial of Colonel Adolf Eichmann, writes Dean (2020, 112). Adolf Eichmann had played a huge role in the Holocaust and his trial focused extensively on the testimonies of survivors. One of the most discussed testimonies against Eichmann was given by Yehiel De-Nur, a writer who wrote under the pseudonym, K-Zetnik. The failure of language to testify to the incidents faced by the witness K-Zetnik and his subsequent collapse in the courtroom, while trying to explain the experiences in the concentration camp constituted a starting point in the discussion of the trauma of witnesses. Dean writes, "K-Zetnik's psychic and physical collapse expressed a dissonance between survivor's will to testify and the vocabulary available to describe their experiences" (2020, 112). It can be observed that the collapse of K-Zettnik and the difficulty he faced in expressing what he witnessed, by facing a form of speechlessness, is similar to the experience of someone who is troubled by trauma.

The dissonance between the will to testify and the limitations of the vocabulary available to describe the ghastliness of the experience, pointed out by Dean (113), is nothing but the unspeakability of traumatic experience within the trauma paradigm. Though the witness has always been seen as an important figure in the process of finding the truths about an event, the role of the witness as being burdened by the endurance of pain from surviving and witnessing the incident became a point of traumatic inquiry soon. It is pointed out that "bearing witness expresses a 'truth' that remains beyond the witness's comprehension and is only knowable as its unsettling effects on the victim's grasp of reality" (Dean, 2020, 116). What Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) in their foundational book about the witness trauma observed was also similar. All the major

studies within the field of trauma were focused on the Holocaust and it appears to be the same when it is about the trauma of the witness and it was associated with moral obligations.

The witness plays a very significant role in the literature about the Anti-Sikh Riots. An incident which has been repeatedly under the threat of being erased from the pages of history refused to be forgotten because of the voices of the witnesses and survivors. Literature turned out to be the major medium for them to express their trauma thereby transferring the memory to link the past and the present. The writings about the incident show how, even after more than forty years, the reality of the incident refuses to slide into the past and stays hidden. The testimonies of witnesses seem to play significant roles in stopping the truths about the incident from being forgotten. The accounts of the witnesses cover a major part of the literature on the incident. Most writers had witnessed the horror before their eyes. The books include testimonial voices of witnesses and survivors and are anecdotal in nature. These works of literature try to communicate the trauma of witnessing in various voices. When it comes to the whole section of literature with authentic voices behind it, which serve roles rather than carrying out a moral obligation, these works serve major roles in the trauma process of the victim community. The voices provide credibility and authenticity to the collective experience of trauma and try to establish the truth behind the incident.

Sanjay Suri, the writer of the book *1984: The Anti-Sikh Violence and After* (2015) had witnessed the incidents and was among the few journalists who experienced the full horror of it. The book combines recollections of the incident along with a reporting of the incidents in the register of a journalist. Apart from the book which is partly in the language of testimony, he had testified before several commissions for inquiry. The pages in which Suri has attempted to talk about his personal experience reveal the truth of the atrocity and the trauma that resulted from it. Similarly, Jarnail Singh, the author of *I Accuse: The Anti-Sikh Violence of 1984* (2009) was a witness as well as a survivor of the violence. As a concluding note for the seventeen-page narration of the traumatizing experience of witnessing the violence, he wrote, “When I was younger I thought I would forget. I know now that things will never be the same again “(2019). The book combines the real story of several survivors and witnesses of the violence mostly in their own words and also in the words of the writer.

Books like *Black November: Writings on the Sikh Massacres of 1984 and the Aftermath* (2019) by Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry and *1984: In Memory and Imagination* (2018) by Vikram Kapur compile the interviews, personal narratives, affidavits, short stories, and poems of victims, survivors and witnesses who are still traumatised. The multiple voices and experiences contribute towards drawing an overall picture of the trauma they have been undergoing. Apart from the historical and non-fictional voices of witnessing, the fictional writings also deal with the trauma of witnessing. For example, the narrator of Indira Goswami's novel *Pages Stained with Blood (2002)* struggles to deal with the traumatic memories of witnessing violence and bloodshed during the incident. The protagonist of the novel *Saffron Salvation* (1999) by Simarjit Kaur is permanently wounded by the killings she witnessed before and during the riots. The trauma resulting from witnessing the killing of the narrator's professor by a gang of perpetrators is the theme of Jaspreet Singh's *Helium* and his short story 'The Perished and the Saved' (2016).

So the trauma of witnessing is indeed an important aspect of focus as far as the literature on the 1984 riots is concerned. Literature seems to play a major role in transcribing the trauma of the witness along with various other traumas like the trauma of perpetrators and victims. It can be said that the role of witness voices both in fictional and nonfictional literary works has been significant in creating the memory of the violent past, in creating an authentic and alternative discourse about it, and most importantly in expressing the trauma of the past and giving credibility to the sufferings of those who were affected. In the paper titled 'Bearing Witness: Trauma, Testimony, Scriptotherapy' (2017), Martina Horakova observes, "The act of bearing witness provides a link between the notion of re-writing history and inscribing traumatic experience" (2017, 156). What is pointed out by Horakova about witnessing and its traumatic impact is applicable in the writings about the 1984 riots. The voices of the witnesses have made the writings and rewritings of history possible, and the trauma of witnesses represented and heard.

Pages Stained with Blood is written based on the real-life experience of the writer during her stay in the capital city, New Delhi. The incidents of violence and killing which the narrator witnessed during the three days of violence becomes the subject of narration only in the last chapters of the novel. But the first-person voice, beginning from the introductory pages, articulates the traumatic effects the incident created on her psyche.

The novel follows the style of an epistolary novel and deals with the experiences the narrator had during her stay in the city. She witnesses violence, bloodshed, death and killing, which puts indelible marks of fear and trauma on her mind. Goswami writes, "I leave for Guwahati on 20 November 1984, my desire to write the book on Delhi, painting in broad swaths of colour, the days and lives of the Mughals and the British Raj, remaining unfulfilled. I was a witness to certain fearful events in Delhi some twenty years ago, when the fountains on Roshanara's grave were yet to be discovered" (2002, 8). The novel is written from the perspective of the narrator who represents the writer herself, who acknowledges the trauma of witnessing the incidents she narrates in the novel.

During the days of violence, she gave shelter to a few wounded victims of the violence when their lives were under threat. The protagonist's room fills with blood from the wounds of the victims she had given shelter, while the perpetrators were raising threatening slogans outside her house. This scary incident started to bother her even after the situation in Delhi went back to normal. Her book falls on the floor filled with blood and it remains stained with the blood of the wounded victims, which later becomes an object representing haunting memories and lingering trauma.

The narrator whose intention was to write a book about the history of Delhi turns into a documentation of the events that proceeded the Anti-Sikh Riots including Operation Blue Star. It turns into a record of the suffering of the people of Delhi whose lives were traumatised by various incidents which ended with the Riots from the viewpoint of the narrator who takes the role of a witness. The novel, in this way, is a documentation of what she witnessed and how it affected her. 'The pages stained with blood' in the title stand as a metaphor for the wounded psyche of the protagonist haunted by the memories of the riots. Even after the wounded were taken to the hospital and the blood on the floor was wiped out, fear and numbness caused by the incident did not leave the writer. The narrator says, "I came home and scrub the blood stains on my floor. In fact there are no stains; I keep seeing them all the time. And all the time, I feel I am standing on a chunk of burnt flesh" (2002, 146).

The protagonist never gets over the experience of witnessing violence and bloodshed. Her home in Delhi changes from a place of comfort and safety into a space of stains and the smell of blood. She finds inside her room "the stench of blood and stale sweat

spreads in the air" (146). Her experience of Delhi, which stands for her home here, fails to go back to normal because of the haunting effects of her trauma. So she leaves for her native state, being unable to bear the trauma.

There is a constant attempt to make sense of the horrific violence that had befallen the city. The narrator embarks on short trips through the crowded, noisy streets of the city in search of her friends Santokh Singh and Balbir Singh, who were later killed in the riots. The description of her walks in search of them through the streets includes images of violence and bloodshed. While visiting Sheeshganj Gurudwara, the narrator slides into the violence that has happened there in the past. She says, "The scaffolds floated before my eyes (...) like crosses in a graveyard" (93). The narrator's search for Santok Singh and Balbir brings her face-to-face with many such experiences. She never gives up hope of coming across them alive and wanders in the city for days till she finally finds Santokh Singh's corpse on the roadside, outside her flat. She listens to what people say, "There is a dead body. At the gol chakkar.. It is a horrible sight. It's been cut into pieces with a sword." (155). Another man tells her, "Madam, You can't bear the sight. It's worse than a butcher's job". After seeing what happened there, she becomes traumatised. She sees only "Lumps of flesh, hewn by swords hang before my eyes. No beard, no hair, only bloody lumps of human flesh…" (156). From the narration of the impact these incidents created on her mind, the ghastliness of the violent events is established by the writer. Trying to express the effect the incident put on her mind, the narrator says "I could not open, anymore, the door of the balcony facing the gol chakkar" (158). It was there that she saw the dismembered corpse of Santokh Singh. After these incidents during the days of violence, Delhi becomes a distressing place where she finds it exhausting to survive.

The focus of the writers on traumatic impacts after witnessing the incidents shows that even those who were not part of the victim community were affected. Trauma is not limited to the direct victims of the incident. Rather, those who were not targeted and those who were outside the whole chaos were also haunted by trauma in the years that followed. It is important to note that the trauma felt by witnesses follows the representation of characters who are outside the Sikh community. By these attempts to point out the traumatic impacts outside the community on other religions, the immensity of the incident is established by these writers.

. In Goswami's writing, her trauma stems from witnessing the violence and bloodshed during the riots. The trauma, in this context, is generated by the act of observing violence rather than being its direct target. One common aspect of trauma in literary accounts of witnessing, such as Goswami's, is the pervasive sense of guilt and helplessness. Guilt emerges as a key element of trauma, particularly the guilt of not being able to intervene or prevent the violence. Characters in these narratives are often tormented by their inability to save lives or assist the victims, a sentiment that profoundly shapes their experience. Another recurring theme is the expression of solidarity with the victimized community. For witnesses, trauma is often linked to the emotional burden of witnessing violence without being able to act, thus creating a strong desire to stand in defense of the affected. Writing becomes an act of truth-telling, an assertion of justice, and a form of agency in the face of societal suffering. In contrast, the trauma experienced by victims is more deeply rooted in personal anguish—characterized by anger, agony, disbelief, feelings of betrayal, powerlessness, and a profound loss of safety. The victim's trauma is typically marked by direct violation, such as assault, betrayal, or humiliation. In comparison, the trauma of the witness, while deeply affecting, does not usually involve such personal violations; instead, it is defined by the psychological impact of observing violence and the overwhelming sense of helplessness that accompanies it.

Guilt over failing to assist the victims and the haunting memory of witnessing the deaths of innocents are recurring themes in the fictional works centered on the 1984 riots. Characters who, though not directly targeted because they do not belong to the victimized community, are nonetheless scarred by their exposure to violence, appear frequently. Notable examples include Jaswanth (*The Assassinations*), Raj (*Helium*), and the protagonist of *The Survivor* (Sarbpreet Singh), among others. These narratives portray characters struggling to resume normal lives after the riots, burdened by the weight of traumatic memories. As Kapur writes, "Tonight he should have been able to sleep. For the first time since the assassination… But he still found it impossible to sleep. The moment he closed his eyes, he ran into the woman beseeching him to save her son" (2017, 124). Jaswanth's trauma stems not only from witnessing the violence but also from his overwhelming guilt for not intervening to help the victim. He is tormented by the ethical imperative to save a fellow human being, unable to escape the moral weight of his failure to prevent the tragic death.

Rachel Bari's ‘It Doesn't Matter Either’ (2019), part of the collection *Black November,* centres on the trauma resulting from witnessing the aftermath of the gang rape of Jasleen and the other victims killed by the rioters. The narrative, divided into three sections, delves into the perspectives of victims, witnesses, and perpetrators, aiming to present a comprehensive view of the same incident. The specific focus is on the trauma experienced by those who bore witness to the horrific events, spotlighting a journalist tasked with reporting on the rape and murder of Jasleen, an eighteen-year-old Sikh girl. The story carefully explores the journalist's internal struggle as he grapples with the conflicting forces of political pressure and his own ethical principles as a journalist. Emphasis is placed on the challenges he faces in recounting the brutal reality of what he witnessed, adding a significant layer to the narrative's exploration of the impact of trauma on those who bear witness to such harrowing events.

Mohammad in Vikram Kapur’s short story ‘Trilokpuri’ (2016) is similarly a traumatised witness of the incident. Mohammad witnessed the attack against his friend, Jeet by a group of rioters. Though he tries his level best to save his friend’s life by taking him to a doctor secretly, he dies. Mohammad’s trauma here becomes a medium to communicate the political involvement in the incident. The narration includes details of political leaders and police involvement. The methods of perpetration also are noted in the story. Kapur writes, “He hadn’t gone far before he was confronted by a middle-aged man in a white Kurta-Pyjama. He recognised him as a local Congress neta. The neta had several men with him, including a police constable in full uniform. The men were carrying machetes, lathis, hockey sticks and cans of kerosene oil” (2016, 163). Here Mohammad’s trauma becomes a medium for unveiling the involvement of local political leaders. Mohammad remembers that he too was questioned and cross-examined by the political leader and those who were accompanying him. He was forced to prove the religion he belonged to in order to escape from their attack. The perpetrators who lead the violence were not affected in any way. Kapur shows in the story how they were never questioned or arrested just like the ‘neta’, the local congress leader in the story. Witnesses not coming forward to testify against them because of fear is exemplified through Mohammad’s character. Mohammed had witnessed Jeet’s killing and was aware of the neta's involvement, yet he chose not to testify against him (169).

Mohammad's trauma as a witness is made clear at the very beginning of the story. He wakes up with anxiety and fear, the reason for which he fails to identify. The feeling was like an uneasiness that had planted itself in his gut, after receiving a letter from Jeet's father turned into a surge of painful memories from the past. Kapur talks about the fear of many survivors and witnesses of the incident who could not come forward to testify against the perpetrators out of fear. He also tries to point out the need to talk about the truth even though it might be frightening and painful. Mohammad's friend says about the political leader who was involved, "The whole world knows he massacred Sikhs in '84. Yet no one is coming forward to testify against him (...) but if it was me the question would be do I want my son to live in a world where a monster like that walks scot-free? And there I would have to say no" (2016, 169).

Mohammad's trauma caused by the incident affects his day-to-day affairs. He is tormented both by the trauma and also by the guilt of not testifying against Jeet's murderers. He is constantly troubled by the memories of what he had witnessed and at the same time for not doing justice for his friend. He displays the symptoms of a traumatised individual. He hallucinates Jeet sitting next to him with his bloody face and unruly mane of hair. His eyes, shadowed by blue-black bruises, give a sad and reproachful look at Mohammad. Jeet's eyes "were brimming with pain; a pain that went beyond skin, beyond bone. He was staring at a soul that had been torn away from its body to be left twisting and contorting" (171). These hallucinations remind Mohammad of what happened and leave him guilty.

What seems relevant to note here is the fact that the unspeakability of the traumatic experience does not appear in these writings as a distinctive attribute of the trauma of the 1984 Riots. But the inability of language in communicating the trauma of victimisation and at the same time witnessing is explained in Jaspeet Singh's *Helium*. Singh uses different literary strategies for the efficient representation of traumatic experiences, which are caused primarily by witnessing the death of his professor by a group of perpetrators. Singh incorporates official data, newspaper reports, photographs of the incident and multiple intertextual references in the novel for the narration of the intensity of the incident as well as the trauma that resulted from it. Singh calls the incident as unspeakable, and his character turns to writing as a therapeutic process to make sense of his pain. The narrator is constantly haunted by the memories of the incident. But

postmodern techniques are used by the writer to communicate the enormity of the incident and the facts about it.

Singh's narrator is the prime example of a witness whose entire life is torn apart because of the horror of the incident. Though there is a difference in approach and narration in Singh's novel, he offers a bold exposure of the reality of the incident. As Harveen Sachdeva Mann has observed, Singh constructs a multi-generic 'archive' of the crime of 1984 in *Helium*, which articulates the lingering trauma of the Sikhs through a hybrid fictional approach. Because, according to him, the horror of the incident fails to be recounted through straightforward narration or a single medium and needs a hybrid approach which brings in various genres (2018, 26).

Singh writes from his memories. Singh lived through the catastrophic incidents of 1984 in New Delhi, before migrating to Canada. In his essay '8T4', Singh has written about his escape from the group of perpetrators, along with other family members. He later remembered the incident and wrote about the inexpressibility of trauma caused by it. Singh writes (2012,160) about how they hid in the neighbour's house, "The size of those minutes is enormous in my mind (...)To this day I have not been able to articulate properly those few hours or the burned remains of buildings I saw later, the tiny ash particles floating in. (...)No matter how hard I try to forget those hours, they stand in my way. To this day I continue to 'suffer from an event I have not even experienced' in its most extreme form". Singh's first-hand experiences of the incident and his familiarity with the trauma of those around him finds a reflection in his novel. As Harveen Sachdeva Mann writes, *Helium* is Singh's response to the injustice done against the community. The novel is an attempt to record the real history of violence to bring some justice to the dead and surviving people of the atrocity (31).

Another key aspect of Singh's portrayal of trauma is the survivor's guilt experienced by the narrator, which plays a significant role in shaping Raja's suffering. Raja's trauma stems not only from his direct exposure to the violence but also from his inability to intervene during Professor Singh's burning alive, his association with the perpetrators' community, and his guilt over having an affair with Nelly. Survivor's guilt is a central element of Raja's emotional turmoil, as he grapples with the notion that he survived when others did not, and his failure to act in the face of atrocities. Survivor's guilt according to Bistas and Grewal (2023) is a psychological phenomenon that can "emerge

in individuals who have encountered or witnessed death and managed to survive the experience. This could result in emotional turmoil and guilt". t is considered a significant symptom of PTSD. Raja's inability to resume a normal life after the riots, his strained relationships, and his psychological turmoil underscore the presence of PTSD symptoms, with survivor's guilt being a crucial factor in his ongoing trauma.

A similar experience of guilt and trauma is explored in Vikram Kapur's *The Assassinations*, where characters such as Jaswant and Deepa also wrestle with the emotional aftermath of witnessing violence. Jaswant, in particular, is haunted by the memory of a Sikh woman crying out for help, a moment he was unable to act upon. Kapur vividly depicts Jaswant's ongoing distress, showing how his guilt from this failure to help disturbs his peace of mind and disrupts his ability to sleep. Kapur writes, "The moment he closed his eyes, he ran into the woman beseeching him to save her son," illustrating how the memory of the traumatic event relentlessly returns, keeping Jaswant in a state of emotional turmoil. Despite his efforts to calm himself, the guilt continues to haunt him, leading to an ongoing cycle of trauma.

In its entirety, the exploration of the continuing repercussions of witnessing violence emerges as a crucial theme within the realm of fictional narratives surrounding the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots. The profound impact of witness trauma plays a significant role in shaping the literary discourse surrounding this tragic incident, extending its influence across both fictional and non-fictional genres. The examination of witness trauma not only provides a lens through which to understand the psychological aftermath of the violence but also underscores its profound contribution to the literature that attempts to capture the complexities of the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots.

5.3 The Trauma of the Perpetrator

Literary trauma Studies since its emergence has been considering victims of violence as the only carriers of trauma and hence left aside and neglected the trauma of the perpetrators. The representation of the trauma of the perpetrator in the literary works, though such representations were few, was also given little attention by pioneers and early theorists of Literary Trauma Studies. In the words of Kjell Anderson, "There is little research or academic literature on genocide perpetrator trauma. The act of perpetration is itself morally repugnant, and thus it seemed dissonant to consider trauma

suffered by perpetrators as worthy of concern" (2018, 226). The earlier trends largely influence this tendency seen in Literary Trauma Studies in the medical fields of Psychology and psychiatry. Psychological and psychiatric trauma research till the present has been preoccupied with the victims as the sole representative figure of trauma (Morag, 2021, 360). Morag has pointed out that treatment-oriented and ideology-motivated research which concentrated on the major catastrophes around the world was committed to the study of the traumatised victim alone (361). This was repeated in Literary Trauma Studies and other humanities-based trauma research.

Suffering and empathising with the suffering of others have not been seen associated with the perpetrators. Only victims of violent events have been regarded as deserving the empathetic approach of society and only their suffering has been seen as significant enough for critical study. As Leake has pointed out, "We empathise with those who are seen as most deserving of our empathy" (2014, 175). The reasons behind this can be the moral side of the traumatic experience. Moral and ethical dimensions have been central to the process of understanding the carriers of trauma and the intensity of their suffering. This moral and ethical lens through which pain was observed, hindered the scholars of trauma in all those mentioned above academic and medical fields, from expanding their area of study. According to Saira Mohammed, "Trauma has shifted from a neutral category that identifies an experience that is universal to a label that validates, even extols, the suffering of those whose experiences warrant recognition. Trauma is not merely a psychological disorder, it is a moral category that identifies its subjects as a person who merits empathy and deserves to be heard" (2015, 115).

For Freud, Caruth and other early scholars, the trauma of the perpetrators was not a relevant or distinct category at all. Until the beginning of the new century, when diverse ways of studying trauma evolved outside the scope of the early trauma paradigm, the perpetrator remained irrelevant. Perpetrators were seen outside the moral and ethical domain as the sole agents of violence and suffering, and hence undeserving of being considered as the bearers of pain. It was this moral and ethical dimension of the traumatic experience that led to its dissociation from the medical arena to a social dimension (McGlothlin, 2020, 100). It was such a base that existed behind perpetrators' experiences, something outside its scope until recently, which threatened its roots. Even the recent limited scholarly attempts to look into this specific case of trauma seem to be

miscellaneous because of the heterogeneity of the perpetrator trauma following the diversity in the acts of perpetration, like sexual assault, domestic violence, terrorism, communal violence, wars etc. (McGlothlin, 101). The same observation about the perpetrator trauma had been made by Raya Morag about its heterogeneity (2021, 361).

Heterogeneity is not ascribable only to the trauma of the perpetrator. But traumatic experiences of the other type like the trauma of witness (secondary witness, vicarious witnessing etc.) and victim (victim by proxy, secondary victim) are also heterogeneous in nature as recent scholarship suggests. For the consideration and acceptance of the perpetrator's trauma, what is needed is to consider traumatic experiences as diverse and to displace the ethical and moral dimensions with the psychological register which is focused more on guilt (Morag, 2021, 362). It is not only those who were involved in the act of perpetration, these fictional writings give voice to the trauma of those who were behind organising the violence, those who were indirectly connected to causing pain of someone else. Diverse experiences of the trauma of perpetration find reflection in the writings establishing the heterogeneity of perpetrator trauma.

If we go by the historical and legal writings on the riots, they indicate that the act of perpetration in the context of the Anti- Sikh Riots was to a great extent state-sponsored and the act of perpetration was fully influenced by the political intentions of the ruling government. This point has been already made clear in the previous chapters based on the texts available in the area. For example, Ashish Nandy wrote in *Outlook* reviewing *When a Tree Shook Delhi: The 1984 Carnage and Its Aftermath* (2007) co-authored by Manoj Mitta and H S Phoolka that “the book exposes how a regime can use not only the state machinery but also the judicial process to subvert justice. It is almost a handy guide on how to organise a communal riot and then escape the consequences"(2007). So, as made clear, the state itself is held responsible and is playing the role of perpetrator. In that case, analysing the fictional and non-fictional works to understand the trauma of the perpetrator is meaningless. Apart from that, these books have incorporated testimonial voices of only the victims and survivors. The non-fictional narratives are investigative and critical in nature and hence offer no space for mentioning the trauma of the perpetrator. Undoubtedly moral and ethical issues are also involved. The repressive methods followed to silence the incident can also be considered one reason behind it.

In light of the recent attempts to examine perpetrator trauma, McGlothlin has tried to give a definition of the same in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma* (2020). In his observation, "For perpetrators of mass atrocities such as the Holocaust, the unprocessable and the unintegratable experience is the act of actively terminating another person's life. In this, they differ radically from the victims of the violence, whose trauma derives from their experiences of mortal danger" (2020, 105). Thus, engaging in an act of violence and killing leaves the perpetrator with a "moment of no return" after which the person finds himself "on the other side of the existential divide, an experience that breaks one's moral code" (MacNair, (2002, 131).

The treatment of perpetrators in the fictional accounts of the 1984 riots reflects the definitions and observations of recent scholars like McGlothlin and others. The trauma of perpetration or the experience of perpetration can be seen reflected in these writings. The fictional works analysed here have tried to explore different traumatic experiences. These literary attempts are not limited to communicating only the trauma of the victim. For example, the character named Gobind in Shonali Bose's novel leads a life of guilt and trauma after being involved in violence. His involvement, though it was unintentional and forced, makes him go through 'a moment of no return' and leads to living a life of suffering and guilt. Gobind tries to avoid conversations about the riot, the reasons behind it being his guilt and fear of facing the truth about his past. He tries to stop his uncle from talking about the incident and any mention of it makes him face trauma. Even when his uncle encourages him to talk about past events, he tries to leave the place by showing his disagreement. Gobind questions his uncle's interest in talking about 1984. Bose pays attention to show that Gobind was guilt-ridden about what he was forced to do in the past. Though he did not kill anyone directly, he feels responsible for the killing because of the role he played behind it.

He displays anger and discomfort whenever his uncle forces him to talk about the incident leading to the astonishment of others around him (95). When his uncle narrates the killing of his friend Balbir during the incident, Gobind finally encounters his guilt and trauma. Bose writes, "Tears began to roll down Gobind's broad face. 'He didn't kill Balbir, Chachaji; It was me. Then speaking became impossible. He was wracked with sobs. The uncle put his arms around the nephew and held him close and, in their silence, Kaju and Kabir mourned along with them" (2004, 97). Gobind, when he meets Kishan

Kumar, the person who was behind the incident he was involved in, is again carried away by the memory of the killing and the trauma resulting from it. Shaking with fury, looking like an enraged bull, Gobind jumped out of his chair and grabbed Kishan Kumar by his collar and shook him hard. Gobind is represented as overwhelmed with guilt and anger against the one who led him to that situation.

Kishan Kumar is also tormented by his memories of perpetration. He becomes an alcoholic and leads a difficult life. He, unlike Gobind who acknowledges his role in the incident, points at the organisers behind it as real culprits and responsible for what happened. Through the narration of Kishan Kumar's trauma, the involvement of the political party in the incidents is revealed. When he was questioned about his involvement, he defended his side by exposing those who were behind it. When asked about it he says, "Why don't you go after the big guys in their big mansions? They got us to do their dirty work and then just left us in the gutter (...) Why attack me? Yes, I killed sardars but did I start the riots? Did I ask to burn them? Why don't you confront those other bastards and shake them around ones who gave us the kerosene, who identified Sikh houses from the electoral rolls?" (109-110).

Arun, in the same novel, spends his days in the present repenting the role he played in the riots years ago. He opens up about his guilt and shame for getting involved in the incident with his son in the final chapter of the novel. When he talks about the complexities of the incident, his words are "fuelled by years of disappointment and shame" (2004, 135). His guilt and trauma in the novel are expressed through the anger and discomfort he displays while encountering questions about his role (77). What is visible as dominant in the trauma of these characters is guilt.

The experience of the perpetrator is different from the other traumatic experiences in these writings because it is driven by guilt. The perpetrator's trauma is expressed with an acknowledgement of guilt as the most basic feeling. It is also presented as different from the trauma of victims and witnesses. The difference lies also with the narrativity of the traumatic event. Unspeakability or incomprehensibility of the traumatic experience is an expected trait of the victim. On the contrary, the perpetrator is expected to be communicative about his involvement and actions for his trauma to be accepted and understood. A similar observation is made by Raya Morag in her article. She points out how a victim's testimony is marked by the absence of the traumatic event because of the

failure to register the event, and on the contrary, “the perpetrator’s confessions are successful because they are inherently self-incriminating” (2021, 364).

Confessions of the perpetrator are relevant for their trauma to be understood and heard. So it seems that the narrativity required in the communication of a perpetrator’s trauma questions the trauma paradigm that is rooted in the unrepresentability of the traumatic experience. In Bose’s *Amu,* the trauma of Gobind and Kishan Kumar for instance, is represented through their confessions about their roles in the incident. Their confessions are followed with the understanding of their trauma by other characters, which in fact shows the efficiency in the expression of guilt and the hidden demand for forgiveness.

Similarly, the relevance of confession appears in ‘Dried Apricots Smell like Dead Fish’(2016). Laljit and his family’s lives are overturned in the years following the riots because of his active involvement as a perpetrator. Because of the crime he had committed during the incident, primarily against Phulo and her family, he later ends up as traumatised and haunted by his deeds. It was Laljit who was behind the killing of Baljit, Phulo’s husband. He later rapes Phulo along with the other rioters in his group. Though he justified his actions at first, later he sinks into guilt and trauma without going back. Pratyaksha writes, “Towards the end, he would scream in terror, “The fire, does it burn your body into ash? He became obsessed with fire. He would cover in his bed and cry like a child. Don't burn my body. His voice would wail in a whimpering cry” (183-183). His trauma leads to a state where he experiences hallucinations and delusions about his body burning down in the fire. These delusions are directly linked to his active participation during the violence to set aflame the Sikh men in his locality alive, including Baljit. The intensity of Laljit’s perpetration is made evident by the intimate bond both their families had shared before the incident. This realisation, later on, worsens Laljit’s traumatic condition.

One more character in the same story is traumatised by memories of the past. It is Laljit’s daughter-in-law Satti, whom Phulo considered as a sister. Satti, even after years following the incident, leads a life of guilt and trauma. Satti’s trauma is caused by her family’s involvement in the violence as a perpetrator. Satti’s trauma is also caused by the apathy and indifference she showed to the condition of Phulo’s family when they were attacked and killed. Though their families shared a close bond till the day of the riots, Satti shuts the door upon Phulo when the rioters surrounded her family, without

providing her with help or shelter. Satti is disturbed by her impassivity and not stopping the perpetrators. When her son visits Phulo after years he tells her that Satti led a life of endless pain. He says, “Why did my mother suffer so much? She loved you always and she lives a life of guilt and suffering. She has suffered no less than you. Our family was finished after the incident” (2016, 184).

Here, the trauma of the perpetrator is represented as similar to that of the victim. Anand tells Phulo that his mother and his grandfather went through pain of the same intensity to specify the depth of their guilt. Satti acknowledges her guilt and confesses to Phulo for seeking her forgiveness through Anand. Suffering in the story is expressed through trauma of different types. When Phulo is a victim of violent events tormented by the memories, Satti and Laljit bear the trauma as perpetrators. Similarities are drawn between the trauma of both parties.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the 1984 Anti- Sikh Riots was not a communal violence between two communities. The incident was organised and the identity of the perpetrator itself in this context is complicated. The involvement of people in the organised act of perpetration was motivated by various factors and violence was not based on simply religious reasons. Perpetration was also a result of political influences and was motivated by several other factors. A few fictional writings have dealt with this type of perpetration and the psychological turmoils that these people were thrown into. Hari and his fellow rioters, for example, were made to take up the role of perpetrators though they were not personally triggered to attack the community of Indira Gandhi's assassins.

Hari is least affected by the socio-political happenings around him including Indira Gandhi’s assassination. As a poor scavenger who struggles to find a job to feed himself, he is forced to take up the task of killing Sikhs on offers of food and money. Radhika Oberoi writes, “He had killed for his meal, and he was prepared to die, but only on a full stomach” (2018, 54). The rioters in his group were given weapons and kerosene to attack the victim community. But he is disturbed by the memories of taking food offered by the Sikhs in the past. He tries to get rid of the feeling of guilt so that he can earn more money by obeying the orders of the political leaders who had given him the difficult task of killing the people who had fed him multiple times. Oberoi describes the scene of perpetration in detail and the organised nature of the incident. Kishan Kumar’s trauma is

similar. The role of the political party leaders as real perpetrators is emphasised in the novel.