

# Linguistics and Literature Review (LLR)

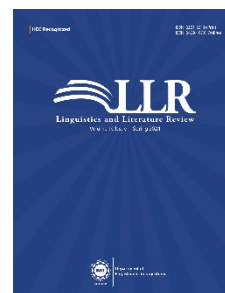
Volume 10 Issue 2, Fall 2024


ISSN(P): 2221-6510, ISSN(E): 2409-109X

Homepage: <http://journals.umt.edu.pk/llr/Home.aspx>



Article QR



- Title:** Writing Trauma: Poetics of Cultural Trauma and Memory in Anglophonic Kashmiri Literature
- Author (s):** Rabia Ashraf and Rizwan Akhtar
- Affiliation (s):** University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan
- DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/llr.102.02>
- History:** Received: June 10, 2024, Revised: August 08, 2024, Accepted: August 12, 2024, Published: September 30, 2024
- Citation:** Ashraf, R., & Akhtar, R. (2024). Writing trauma: Poetics of cultural trauma and memory in anglophonic Kashmiri literature. *Linguistics and Literature Review*, 10(2), 27–46. <https://doi.org/10.32350/llr.102.02>
- Copyright:** © The Authors
- Licensing:**  This article is open access and is distributed under the terms of [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
- Conflict of Interest:** Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



UMT

A publication of

Department of English and Literary Studies, School of Liberal Arts,  
University of Management and Technology Lahore, Pakistan

# Writing Trauma: Poetics of Cultural Trauma and Memory in Anglophonic Kashmiri Literature

Rabia Ashraf\* and Rizwan Akhtar

Institute of English Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

## Abstract

This study concentrates on the Anglophonic literature produced in the region of Jammu and Kashmir. It explores its narratives through the lens of trauma theory, pertaining to the region's history of forced conflict. After the Second World War, the relevance of trauma in literary studies has increased and texts have been characterized by an archeology of traumatic consciousness. Also, the narratives act as vehicles for transmitting stories of suppressed and wounded consciousness. This research focuses upon Mirza Waheed's (2011) novel *The Collaborator* and Basharat Peer's (2010) memoir *Curfewed Night* as the primary texts and investigates the art of writing trauma by exploring the narrative structures deployed by the authors. The objective is to find out how the very act of writing trauma is shaped by traumatic memories of a past rooted in the partition conflict, war, and prolonged violence. Furthermore, the study probes into how the fictional characters embody and express pain and anguish as part of their memories. The key focus remains on how both the works portray the (un)speakability of grief and the (in)comprehensibility of trauma drawing on some of the seminal contemporary theories of cultural trauma and memory studies. Using qualitative methodology and trauma theory as the theoretical framework, it is concluded that apart from presenting reality as horrific, gloomy, and grim, Kashmiri texts discuss how causalities create memories riddled with unspoken fears by bringing forth the intricacies of speechless terror and trauma. Thus, the study captures the narration's struggle to represent evasive and suppressed memories and the challenges of trauma writing.

**Keywords:** consciousness, cultural trauma, memory, terror, trauma writing

---

\*Corresponding Author: [rabiaashrafbhatti90@gmail.com](mailto:rabiaashrafbhatti90@gmail.com)

## Introduction

This study concentrates on the narrative techniques employed by the Anglophonic Kashmiri authors, including Mirza Waheed and Basharat Peer to represent, transfigure, and transcribe cultural memory and trauma of the Kashmiri people as represented in the literary texts from Kashmir. The study deals with the corroboration of trauma and literature and develops a unique aesthetic trajectory for literary analysis. In trauma studies and the literary texts focusing on trauma, understanding the various narrative techniques to unveil trauma analysis lends a chance to a unique kind of literary analysis. It resultantly yields valuable insights into the field of literary trauma and memory studies. In Mirza Waheed's (2011) debut novel, *The Collaborator* and Basharat Peer's (2010) well-acclaimed memoir, *Curfewed Night*, historical events play a remarkable role in creating traumatic narration. Amnesia, repetition, speech and silence, haunting, dissociation, and focalization are some of the narrative techniques utilized by these two authors while writing about trauma. The study also posits the problem of apt, adequate, and justified expression of individual and collective grief and loss. Akin to the experiences of trauma, writing about it is also equally complex.

As far as the definition of trauma is concerned, from psychoanalytic perspective, trauma is a blow to the psyche caused by an external stimuli or deep and massive nature (Alexander et al., 2004). This perspective is Freudian in nature. Cathy Caruth, a post-structuralist, presents the concept of complications associated with the writing of trauma. She substantiates on the issues of silences, absences, and language's attempt to transcribe and share the experience of trauma (Caruth, 1995). Presently, trauma theory has taken on a cultural perspective. For cultural trauma theorists, trauma is a reaction that is experienced at collective or communal level. Moreover, memory has a crucial role to play in remembering the traumatic events of past. Therefore, trauma and memory studies corroborate to each other for the better writing and understanding of traumatic experiences.

Since the World War II, trauma studies have evolved considerably. Trauma theory and trauma fiction delineate the recent journey of trauma theory from scientific domains to literary niche. Derived from explicit trauma theories in literary studies, Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman, focused upon a post-structuralist philosophy. Felman and Caruth, following the studies of Paul de Man at Yale University, projected that their idiom

manifests an explorative and deconstructive approach towards reading trauma in literary texts (Felman & Laub, [1992](#)). Felman in ‘Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History’ (Felman & Laub, [1992](#)) and Caruth ([1996](#)) in ‘Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History’ presented an extensive discussion on Paul de Man’s philosophy of language and poststructuralist philosophy.

Furthermore, Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience*, stresses on the performative dimension of linguistic apparatus that how it “does more than it knows” (Caruth, [1996](#), p. 64) and the ways in which a horrendous incident can function as “a deathlike break” (p. 64) disrupting the language of its subsequent representation. This horrendous event is unable to be fully comprehended but only felt by the individuals (Caruth, [1996](#)). For both Caruth and Felman, due to its inherent latency, trauma is not felt at the time of its occurrence, however, it haunts the victim of experience through “repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviors stemming from the event” (Caruth, [1996](#), p. 65). In short, a post-structuralist standpoint of understanding trauma entitles that meaning is not absolute but differs at phenomenological and representable levels, adding a further complexity to the writing of it. Moreover, as per poststructuralist philosophy, the experience of trauma is fundamentally un-representable, unspeakable, and unsayable (Caruth, [1996](#)). Trauma also eludes language, knowledge, and narrative as systematized ways of representation (Faheem et al., [2023](#)). This is precisely how the texts dealing with trauma present a preoccupation with the dynamics of memory.

From the 1990’s onwards, memory studies have also branched out into concepts like traumatic memory, holocaust testimonies, and collective and cultural memory. To dissect the problem of linkage between memory and trauma, it is pertinent to envision the background of individual and collective memory. Bergson ([1896/1911](#)), in his book ‘Matter and Memory’, discussed the demarcation between habit memory and pure memory, while carrying out research on individual memory. Habit memory, for Bergson, consists of automatic behavior achieved through repetition whereas pure memory refers to the manner in which the memories of a personal nature are stored in the unconscious of the subjects (Caruth, [1995](#)). Since, trauma is envisioned as a response stored in the unconscious, its corroboration with pure memory is increasingly relevant. Therefore, for post-modern critics of cultural memory and trauma studies, characters

undergoing heinous experiences that become part of pure memory are of central importance.

When authors attempt to write about the traumatic sufferings, it creates evasive and ungraspable narrative structures in literary fiction. As a result, these structures reveal the role of individual memory and insights into the patterns of thinking in a post-trauma phase. According to Whitehead (2004), the author of 'Trauma Fiction' and 'Memory: New Critical Idiom' (Whitehead, 2009), the consequence of trauma can only best be represented by imitating the symptoms and forms it is constituted of (Whitehead, 2004). At textual level, horrendous or deathlike events in the backdrop create unreliability of narration, narrative evasiveness, and meaningful silences implanted by the writers (Alexander et al., 2004). As stated earlier regarding the post-structurality of trauma experience, the unreliability of narration leads to the unreliability of truth and reality, wherein truth is perceived as subjective and evasive projecting reality as highly ungraspable and incomprehensible. As Whitehead (2004) opines:

Trauma carries the force of a literality which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities. Insufficiently grasped at the time of its occurrence, trauma does not lie in the possession of the individual, to be recounted at will, but rather acts as a haunting or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition. (p. 5)

Whitehead also adds that as far as the expression of traumatic episodes is concerned, it does not obey any linear boundaries (Whitehead, 2004). Also, trauma is not based on a certain individuality. It is graspable in the repetitions, silences, and also in the elegiac forms of narrative expression. Words could mourn, convey misery, and evoke suppressed emotions and feelings at individual and collective scales. Piatek (2014), also adds to the concept of 'haunting' that the subject experiencing trauma is haunted and the memory of the event can neither be forgotten nor recalled at will.

This research endeavors to seek answers of the following research questions.

1. How does a writer of trauma write about the experiences of trauma?
2. What narrative techniques and strategies does a writer deploy while talking about trauma of a region like Jammu and Kashmir?

3. How are individual and collective trauma experiences/narratives formed and what kind of relationship do they have with each other?
4. How can a narration of trauma fully grasp the dynamics of memory and re-membling?

### **Theoretical Framework**

The current research, qualitatively deals with how personal and collective traumas are communicated in the texts under study. The study deploys trauma theory and memory studies as the theoretical framework. This qualitative study uses critical tools from trauma theory and memory studies that consist of exploring the modes through which people perceive, remember, forget, and reinterpret their past and contemplate the anxieties and fears pertaining to the future. Silence and repetition are perceived and explored at both individual and collective levels. Memory is viewed as an ambivalent element making narration highly unreliable. As a result, the reliability and objectivity of memory is called into question. It is also ascertained as to how traumatic memories of events and people in the texts create the un-grasability and in-comprehensibility of narration.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### **Trauma as Experienced in Kashmiri Fiction and Memoir**

In post-war, post-holocaust, and post-partition literary and cultural studies, memory and trauma are the recurring motifs. With an increasing interest in history and memory arises the topic of trauma, which originally emerged in the U.S. during the Vietnam War in 1980s. Whitehead argues that in fiction, trauma cannot be disconnected from three varied yet related contexts of post-war, post-modernism, and colonialism/post-colonialism (Piatek, [2014](#)). Such contexts are massive with far-reaching impacts on generations, human consciousness, and range of human experiences.

Jammu and Kashmir, a region from the subcontinent, has a political history that has been tarnished by perpetual unrest and territorial conflict. At the time of partition of the sub-continent in 1947, Kashmir's future was left undecided by the departing British Government. Kashmir was and is a Muslim majority and wanted to be assimilated into a Muslim state, however, both India and Pakistan fought wars for the possession of the land. Ali ([2015](#)), in 'Kashmir: A Century Struggle' (1846-1948) states that the dispute of Kashmir is "entangled in the definitions of sovereignty and the

right to self-determination” (p. 39). He further says that India considers Kashmir as its part:

Kashmir as its crown and integral part, while Pakistan opines that Kashmir is a jugular vein for them. In a nutshell, Kashmir is one of the most militarized zones of the world with a significant aspect that the conflict exists in a weaponized environment. (Ali, [2015](#), p. 39)

The conflict zone of Jammu and Kashmir has undergone heinous experiences of forced militarization, violence, and resultant grief and sorrow and this is depicted in the literature of Kashmir. In Britain, during the 1960s, E.P. Thompson advocated the concept of history based on giving voice to the voiceless. To understand the repercussions of a particular event, it has to be viewed from the eyes of marginal or peripheral communities present in any group and at any particular time period. Thus, it is of key importance to probe into the literary texts from Jammu and Kashmir to navigate through the representation of the experience of trauma. Both Mirza Waheed and Basharat Peer, refer to the need for freedom in a perpetually militarized region. They have experimented with the expression and representation of various narrative techniques and structures to navigate through the ‘writing of trauma’. Moreover, they brilliantly explore as to how the region of Kashmir, because of a series of traumatic happenings, is undergoing the formation of a collective memory of trauma as recorded by Hanif and Ullah ([2018](#)) in their work. They state that since 1947, the issue of Kashmir has remained “unresolved” and “disputed” (Hanif & Ullah, [2018](#), p. 1). The issue has been complicated to a large extent “in establishing the victims and the perpetrators, in defining the role of media, state bureaucracy, and in attributing responsibility...” (Hanif & Ullah, [2018](#), p. 9).

Mirza Waheed’s ([2011](#)) *The Collaborator* is a story set in an imaginary village of Srinagar, called Nowgam. The novel presents the aftermath of mass killings and brutal butchery of young Kashmiri freedom fighters thrown in the valley of Nowgam. The protagonist is a teenage Kashmiri boy, son of the *Sarpanch* (village head) of Nowgam, who is unable to leave the valley because of his family rank and is forced to be an ally of Captain Kadian (the Indian army’s high-ranked personae). Kadian and the boy are on a special mission to calculate, count, and investigate the dead bodies of Kashmiri fighters, collect the ID cards or weapons, and dispose off the bodies to rot in a pit. This young boy, as per his duty, goes down the valley

whenever new bodies are thrown down as garbage and observes them to collect statistical information for the Indian army. The task assigned to him is gruesome and the boy's plight is pitiable. Waheed (2011) says:

I look at the first few corpses and I am immediately horrified at the prospects of what my new job entails . . . ugly grins, unbelievable, almost inhuman, postures and a grotesque intermingling of broken limbs make me dig my teeth deep and hard, into my clenched fists. (p. 8)

Deep thoughts cross his mind every day as he seeks forgiveness from his dead Kashmiri friends. The lonesome Kashmiri boy is psychologically in limbo and numb to reality as depicted through his words. Therefore, Waheed's narration is introspective and phenomenological at the same time.

Basharat Peer's *Curfewed Night* consists of fragments or shards of memory from Peer's personal life, composed in the form of a memoir. The memoir chronicles the political happenings of the 1980s and 1990s occupied Kashmir and reveals the impact of political and social unrest on the lives of ordinary Kashmiris. Peer showcases as to how humans correspond to historical events. His perpetual remembrance of his memorable and nostalgic childhood symbolizes Kashmir's pre-partition times. Peer deals with the issue of fissured consciousness resulting from events of historical magnitude playing a notable role in the creation of a memory that is submerged in trauma. The memoir depicts the life of young Peer and his childhood memories of the horrific times of curfews, lawlessness, mass killings, and riots in the city. Young Peer's life is depicted to be subtly affected by war to such a great degree that most of his important life choices are governed by the lawlessness canvassing his birthplace. For instance, Peer shares the story of exiting Srinagar for higher education, unwillingly leaving his family behind and terming this scenario as self-exile. As the memoir has the horrific memory of war in its backdrop, therefore grief, loss, and mourning are interconnected. *Curfewed Night* also manifests as a document of mourning the atrocities that the region is undergoing. In short, the memoir posits the aftermath of traumatic incidents in the course of daily lives of Kashmiris.

### **Narrative Structures of Trauma and the Act of Writing Trauma**

As far as the writing of trauma is concerned, both *The Collaborator* and *Curfewed Night* are placed in the poetics of speech and silence and have



evident political implications. Given the fact that twentieth-century literature is informed by events, such as colonization, holocaust, and two world wars, narratives of trauma battle with the challenges of speaking the unspeakable accompanied by voicing the un-voicable. Similarly, post-partition and post-colonial literature also possess undertones of an over-occupation with the past, the memory of it, and the resultant trauma. In *A Book of Gold Leaves*, Waheed (2011) depicts the reality of political atrocities through the character of a madman who uses a cassette player to record the voices of the torture inflicted upon Kashmiri youth detained in the basement of a school. The insane man is not questioned, arrested, or punished by the higher authorities on account of his madness.

In his work, Cioffi (1997) labels ‘silence’ as the new kind of behavior that literature of trauma has selected for its appropriate representation. According to him, silence is a new trope that governs the writing of Western cultures during the 1960s and 70s. For Waheed and Peer, silence becomes the metaphor for non-communication and failure of communication just as it is for postmodernists and absurdists like Beckett, Nabokov, Barthelme, and Borges. In *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein (1961) states that some niches are not meant to be expressed using words. He adds on to stating that what we cannot state using language, we must pass over in silence. Peer, in his memoir, also opines that no one from the higher strata of society took the responsibility of presenting the case of Kashmir to the world. Arundhati Roy in ‘Kashmir: The Case for Freedom’ opines that it is Azadi that Kashmiris want and yet no one wants to talk about it (Roy et al., 2011).

In the discourses of self and others, silence is also a salient tool of self-preservation and self-protection. Derrida (1979) calls the “demand for narrative, a violent putting-to-the-question, an instrument of torture working to wring the narrative out of one as if it were a terrible secret” (p. 97). Hence, the discourses contain a hint of secrecy in terms of sharing the macro events that they are contextualized around. At a point in *Curfewed Night*, when Peer returns from school crying and feeling intimidated and overwhelmed by the bombings outside, Derrida (1979) writes:

Mother looked at me and said nothing...I had nothing to say and stared at the carpet. I imagined myself lying dead on a wooden board on our lawn... My mother had fainted, and someone was throwing water on her face. Father was holding the board, his head was buried in his arms, and his shoulders were shaking. (p. 29)

This incident takes place when Peer's family is misinformed that he has been killed by the army in his school bus. However, the reality was that he had escaped the interrogation and reached home safely. His mother is dumbfounded, speechless, and unconscious. He imagines his dead body lying on the wooden block on the lawn and discerns his father in a devastated state. Peer shares multiple such snippets from his life in occupied Kashmir where the family is devoid of words to express their feelings of vulnerability and feebleness. All that the Kashmiris could speak was 'nothing'. Therefore, an urge to explore what these characters say, at what time they say it, and to whom they speak is of utmost importance. Also, it is significant to note as to what is concealed, denied, negated, or kept as a secret. Therefore, silence and speech are niches of seminal significance in literature of trauma.

Memory, remembrance, forgetting, and the very act of recalling are crucial to the act of writing trauma and traumatic experiences both at individual and collective levels. Morrison ([1984](#)) writes in 'Memory, Creation, and Writing', that the memory of any event is a part of willed creation and an act of research. She adds that although the act shared takes place in the past, the memory of it makes it fresh and new. Both Waheed and Peer rely heavily upon 'past' to narrate the experiences of pain, anguish, and violence. In *The Collaborator*, mass killings are a perpetual reality of the past, present, and future. Moreover, these memories have the potential to alter the identity of the sufferers. Randal Stevenson identifies a growing interest in what he calls "the mechanics of memory ... and the powers of trauma within personal identity" with a widespread symptom of "uneasiness about the past" (Piatek, [2014](#), p. 12). As seen, it is the protagonist's helplessness posited against the might of militia, army, and powerful proxies. As the young boy is forced to be an ally of the Indian army in *The Collaborator*, such narrative and plot choices by writers, such as Waheed complicate the process of understanding, interpretation, and re-membling as the boy presents a maturing Kashmiri perspective on the happenings in the valley. The protagonist's helplessness, anxiety, and anguish allow an introspection into the representation of trauma-generating events in the novel.

With the growing interest in the mechanics of past, the plot of *The Collaborator* is chronological and sectioned into past, present, and future. By doing so, Waheed depicts his concern with the mechanics of time.

Peer's memoir, on the other hand, is nonlinear and reflective of the order in which memories exist. Both these works, however, focus largely upon the nostalgia of the beautiful days of past. The narration of past days is filled with remorse and melancholy about what Peer's childhood was like in pre-partition Srinagar (Peer, [2010](#)). In a way, Peer attempts to navigate his life in Kashmir and regain a Kashmiri consciousness by letting go of the chronologically temporal constraints. Similarly, Waheed attempts to gain consciousness from the unconscious state of mind with time and by experimenting with the feelings of 'forgetting' and 'letting go'. Reality and time are envisioned as a fluid memory by Peer, while Waheed compartmentalizes events into specific periods. At the narratological level, a preoccupation with 'past tense' is observed in both texts and a perpetual comparison of good old days is contrasted with the horrendous events of present. The narration is also able to create a feeling of anxiety and an impending dread about the future. In short, the texts convey a dynamic sense of attachment with 'telling the tale of the past' in the form of a narrative intertwined with feelings of reminiscence and sentimentality.

The mechanics of time also influenced the protagonist of Waheed. Waheed's collaborator boy oscillates between past and present in his memory and appears to have lost his senses towards the end of the story. Balaev ([2014](#)) writes, "Trauma causes a disruption and reorientation of consciousness, but the values attached to this experience are influenced by a variety of individual and cultural factors that change over time" (p. 168). Since the boy's task at the start of the novel is to aid the Indian army, his only way out of his trauma-ridden life is to create a newer and different version of himself and his life so that he can escape the blame that life seems to charge him with. Oftentimes, he labels himself with titles like traitor of the Kashmiri brothers and facilitator of the enemy. He loses his friends and acquaintances when he gets engaged in the freedom struggle. Kaul ([2011](#)) opines in his work:

Most militants were young Kashmiri men, who crossed the border to join one or the other of the many groups that formed, splintered, and reformed in the 1990s and they—as well as civilians caught in the cross-fire—bore the brunt of the casualties in their battles against Indian forces. (p. 174)

Similarly, at the collective scale most of the Kashmiri families immigrate, flee away, or choose exile. This impacts the boy gruesomely as

he grows increasingly conscious of his dishonesty. Caruth writes, “The story of trauma, then, as the narrative of a belated experience, far from telling of an escape from reality—the escape from a death, or its referential force—rather attests to its endless impact on a life” (Caruth, [1996](#), p. 7). The boy is in deep agony and wishes to kill Kadian. He stands at the top of the valley to pray silently for the deceased aiming to offer them a decent funeral that those killed Kashmiris were deprived of. He repeats this act and is perpetually caught in the whirlpool of remorse and regret. Freud ([1920](#)) in his essay, ‘Beyond the Pleasure Principle’, propounds that there is a compulsion in the mind of the victimized subject to repeat the experience of trauma, with multiple people, in the wake of different circumstances or through repeating the story trauma, to conclude and decipher meaning or combat the consequences of a traumatic event. In coda, for the thirteen-year-old boy, who is brutally traumatized by what he sees during operations and mass killings, his psychic imbalance exponentially resonates in his narrative and monologues. He converses with the ghosts of the killed that haunt him every time he visits the valley.

Waheed also builds on inference and implication as narrative techniques to convey implied and suggestive elucidation of grisly reality. He presents the political details of the proxy war in a highly subtle manner. By placing the young protagonist in a scenario wherein the readers are able to comprehend the implied meaning by production of the feelings of empathy and sensitization for the maturing boy. His disgust for Kadian and his tears when visiting the valley of the dead towards the end of the story highlights the amount of brutal, torturous, and traumatic experiences this young boy had undergone in all those years that he worked for the army. Focusing on lay theory, Alexander ([2016](#)) remarks that traumas are “naturally occurring events” and comprises of “an individual or collective actor’s sense of well-being” (p. 7) in a state of trauma. In other words, “the shock is believed to arise as a result of the terrible events” (p. 7). As soon as the victim is disturbed as a result of a frightful incident, it disrupts the personality. The inferred nature of information prevalent in the novel allows subjective interpretation of reality. The reader can comprehend the hatred, disgust, and loathsomeness that the boy feels towards the higher-ups. The conflict has, indeed, an omnipresence in the memory of the characters and is the part and participle of an unchanged history of Jammu and Kashmir. Using journalistic style of writing, Peer is also able to present the case of Kashmir in the most thoughtful and intuitive manner.

As part of their narrative gusto, Waheed and Peer also experiment with narrative evasiveness, repetitions, and focalization. In *The Collaborator*, the first-person narrator is traumatized by the memory of bloodshed and mutilated Kashmiri dead bodies. However, at times, the narration evades and fails to be associated with a young boy's dialogues and acts. Although Waheed pursues young-adult fiction as his literary narrative choice, the narration oscillates between the voice of the writer and that of a young boy. The boy's predicament is a result of his realistic historical circumstances, placed in by the author purposefully. He is constantly reminded of the dying Kashmiri men and every time he talks about them, he does that differently. Peer is indulged in the subjective and selective portrayal of reality and succumbs to repetitive memory. Moreover, a repetition in tropes, narrative, sounds, even typography are worth the exploration in order to evaluate trauma in a literary work. Nandi (2016) further argues that "...contemporary trauma theory identifies what cannot be fully remembered, the illegible, the unspeakable, with something repeated, be it an image, a phrase, a metaphor, even a syllable or sound" (p. 5). Lexical repetitions are mostly related to certain phrases for example 'freedom' is repeated multiple times and in different situations in both *Curfewed Night* and *The Collaborator*. Moreover, words like 'dead bodies', 'fear', 'nostalgia', and 'terror' are also repeated multiple times. Caruth (1991) in her article entitled *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History* argues that "...trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic event, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations..." (p. 181). Episodes of hallucination are replete in *The Collaborator* and are mostly part of the scenes infused instantly after protagonist's interaction and monologues with the rotten dead bodies.

In the same vein, the techniques of focalization and disassociation are also incorporated in the texts. Focalization has been experimented in *The Collaborator* when the protagonist takes notes or collects statistics from the bodies in a robotic manner to present before Kadian when a sufferer undergoes focalization, he or she would detach himself from the event and pose only as a witness or a detached observer. This also corroborates to a feeling of detachment and desensitization. As per Kacandes (2001), novels that concern traumatic experiences are the witness narratives. Waheed (2011), however, creates an ironic situation where the boy is torn between his whirlpool of emotions and focalized acts. Similarly, Peer's real-life

people as ‘characters’ in his memoir are eyewitnesses of poignant events. As for a victim or a witness, a troubled mind renders troubled stories.

The unstable identity of the collaborator, by the time he plans to kill Kadian, is the psychological manifestation of a common symptom of trauma called disassociation. Dissociation is a possible response to a prolonged exposure to trauma. It affects the mind and memory and compromises with one’s sense of navigating through loss and benefit. The un-named collaborator plans to kill Kadian regardless of brooding upon its consequences. Similarly, Peer presents his ‘struggling’ characters who have lost their sense of identity and well-being due to disassociation. Caruth explains her view of the ‘actual moment’ of the experience of trauma and how it is perceived by an individual. She states that at the moment of its impact, trauma goes unregistered and the human mind goes blank. This is labeled as the process of dissociation where victims feel as if they are just witnesses and do not completely experience trauma at the particular moment. This is precisely why a sense of detachment is perceived by the subjects of trauma. Moreover, the traumatic experience puts the brain in a state of numbness and memory is available later as recollection. For Caruth, the manner in which memory of an event is structured makes its reliability questionable (Caruth, [1995](#)).

Amnesia is employed through the usage of ellipses that are substantiated as gaps. The gaps are present at various places and meant for a reader of trauma fiction to fill in, such as horrors of war, Peer’s departure from Kashmir, and the collaborator’s helplessness in not being able to leave Kashmir or quit his job as a traitor. Both the writers add a tinge of subtle details for the readers to apprehend. The boy is not ready to believe that Kashmir will fade away as he sees new dead bodies every day thrown mercilessly in the valley to mock and mourn the loss.

The novels under study are also replete with symbols of trauma, such as nightmares, daydreaming, and hallucinations manifested through repetition depicted at lexical level, as well as in the plot. As per Freud, the very term ‘traumatic neurosis’ means a necessary compulsory act to repeat (Freud, [1920](#)). This repetition is associated with the memory of horrendous event with a wish to combat and master the “unpleasant feelings” (Freud, [1920](#), p. 19) that it accompanies. Dreams of a traumatized person are also significant in this regard as they also carry repetition of the experiences as a way to master the external stimulus retrospectively, “by creating the

anxiety whose ignorance was the reason of traumatic neurosis” (Freud, [1920](#), p. 37). Also, according to Freud, if a sufferer cannot remember the entire “repressed feeling” (p. 18), or a basic component of it, the subject is forced to repeat the “repressed” (p. 19), event in present and not as a memory of past. This also adds to the questionability of time and the perception of it. The manner in which an event is narrated is also crucial to the recovery of it. Further, as per Freud, dreams are of so much importance that “self” (p. 19) only remembers the “reproduction” (p. 19) of the actual event in dream and not the actual event as it is or as it was.

### **Formation of Cultural Trauma and Memory**

In any literary work, representing cultural trauma, its formation, or the aftermath of it is a challenging task. In ‘Talk Fiction’, Kacandes ([2001](#)) uses a term ‘talk fiction’ while describing the novels of twentieth-century narrative literature that build on a sense of exchange and relationship in readers that is normally associated with an interaction conducted at face-to-face level. This type of fiction gives importance to events and people experiencing it on a phenomenological level.

Piatek ([2014](#)), expands upon a vital concept of trauma theory which entails the problematization of the issues of representation. Since trauma is considered to be an experience of extreme kind felt by an individual or a group, experienced at a psychological level, and has a phenomenological interpretation, it resides beyond the thoughtful re-presentation of the worldview of the victim. This is resultant of giving birth to a feeling of shock and a sheer difficulty of assimilation. Also, an impossibility of translating the experience into a holistically coherent story also forms. It is observed that the problem of translating the experience of trauma into reality and words in turn complicates the process of interpretation and meaning-making. Waheed’s choice of remaining silent, brooding upon the plight of Kashmiris, and aiming to kill the enemy is central to the comprehensibility of trauma.

Alexander ([2016](#)) observes, “When bad things happen to good people, they become shocked, outraged, and indignant” (p. 8). Caruth ([1995](#)) also provides a model for understanding the connections between collective and individual historical experiences, such as the holocaust, war, and genocide, and thinks that events occur at a macro level but do have repercussions at a micro level. A traumatic experience is so humongous that the characters are



seen resorting to gapped, fragmented, and self-contradictory confessions concerning the events of the past. This essentially problematizes the notion of the expression and comprehensibility of trauma.

*Curfewed Night* and *The Collaborator* posit individual and collective traumas. The protagonist of *The Collaborator* and his fellow citizens, humiliated by the capitulation, wish to discard the imperialist tradition. As a result, they are forced to migrate or adopt the ironically democratic system imposed by the imperialist and the proxy forces. Alexander (2016) argues in this regard that trauma interacts with the provision and the negligence of human needs. Due to a sudden challenge to such human needs, people get traumatized. Similarly, a target group is formed when people are unsure about the provision of their basic needs and rights. In the same vein, Kaul (2012) talks about the experiences of 1990s Kashmir wherein collective as well as individual suffering enjoyed the peak of times. For instance, accounts of countless tortured people as well as bodies killed and mutilated in interrogation centers, formation of mushroomed graveyards coupled with every day's humiliation at the hands of the army by the innocent individuals were the rule of the day.

Many young men simply disappeared, and stories of unidentified bodies buried in mass graves circulated: these graves have only recently been confirmed... Fear limited (and still limits) civic options, but determined groups, such as, for example, the families of the disappeared, kept up their vigils and demanded investigations. (Kaul, 2012, p. 77)

The horrendous event of filling the beautiful valley of Kashmir with the pungent smell of dead bodies of Kashmiri freedom fighters or local citizens contributes to a particular socio-political scenario, wherein a target group is formed and trauma resides in the psychic landscape of the sufferer. Moreover, the memory of trauma becomes as painful as the trauma itself.

As Peer's story is a fragment of the past, his memory reinforces the 'collective memory' of the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Halbwachs, a French philosopher and sociologist who is known for developing the concept of collective memory claims that there is no individual memory at all since all memories are only meaningful within the collective social memory of the groups to which an individual belongs (Llobera, 1995). The



young boy advocates that his friends who turned into freedom fighters had no choice otherwise. Expanding on his childhood stories, Peer (2010) says:

This is the place, this place that you have turned into a ghostly graveyard, it glowed with the warmth of my friends around the valley our childhood. . . Where I now stand surrounded by men departed long ago and recent: fathers, brothers, husbands, lovers, sons, cousins, and uncles and friends and mates, all dispersed rubbish-like in your playground. (p. 299)

He specifically targets the politics of 1980s Kashmir when Kashmiris were deprived of their political and democratic rights.

Similarly, in *The Collaborator*, the dead bodies are secondary characters as the young boy discusses the bodies, tells about the smell that emanates from them, and describes how they look as he encounters them. Thus, the dead bodies are ever present and repeatedly referred to over and over again. This draws attention to them and produces a sense of unease among the readers.

Closely akin to traumatic memory, post-modern writing is the notion of death and dying. Mass killings provide the necessary thrust and structure to the narration in both the texts. Living characters are observed in a state of loss in memory of the characters that are dead. The novels posit the question that, is there a connection between the dead bodies and the fate of Kashmir? Perhaps there is. *The Collaborator* continues to grapple with his plight and the collective trauma of the people of Kashmir.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, the study presents insights pertaining to the writing of trauma fiction. The two texts under study, *The Collaborator* and *Curfewed Night* enunciate the usage of a variety of narrative techniques employed by Mirza Waheed and Basharat Peer respectively. These techniques include focalization, repetition, dissociation, and amnesia. The key findings of this research are that trauma narration is highly complicated and an act that problematizes an individual's grief and loss both at individual and collective levels. Moreover, there is indeed, theoretical and historical background between history, memory, and trauma, while the research probes into the dynamics of the 'act of writing trauma'. Also, literary fiction from Kashmir, is quite a well-suited medium for the exploration of trauma and its repercussions. Both texts have focused on the understanding of human

conditions and predicaments in the wake of war by exploring human cognition involved in the process of remembering and re-membering.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

### **Funding Details**

No funding has been received for this research.

### **References**

- Alexander J. C., Eyerman R., Giesen B., Smelser N. J., & Sztompka P. (2004). *Cultural trauma and collective identity*. University of California Press.
- Alexander, J. C. (2016). Culture trauma, morality and solidarity: The social construction of 'Holocaust' and other mass murders. *Thesis Eleven*, 132(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513615625239>
- Ali, R. F. (2015). *Kashmir: A century struggle (1846-1948)*. Institute of Public Policy Research and Development. <https://independent.academia.edu/RaoFarmanAli>
- Balaev, M. (2014). *Contemporary approaches in literary trauma theory*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bergson, H. (1911). *Matière d mémoire [Matter and memory]* (N. M. Paul & W. S. Palmer, Trans.). George Allen & Unwin. (Original work published 1896)
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative and history*. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Caruth, C. (1991). Unclaimed experience: Trauma and the possibility of history. *Yale French Studies*, 79, 181–192. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930251>
- Caruth, C. (1995). Trauma and experience. In C. Caruth (Ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in memory* (pp. 3–12). The John Hopkins University Press.

- Cioffi, F. L. (1999). Postmodernism, Etc.: An interview with Ihab Hassan. *Style*, 33(3), 357–371.
- Derrida, J. (1979). Living on (J. Hulbert, Trans.). In H. Bloom, P. de Man, J. Derrida, G. H. Hartman & J. H. Miller (Eds.), *Deconstruction and criticism* (pp. 75–176). Continuum.
- Faheem, M. A., Asif, M., & Ahmed, S. (2023). Islamophobia and (Wes) toxification: A Hermeneutical and phenomenological reading of John Updike's *TERRORIST*. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 7(2), 448-454. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023\(7-II\)39](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023(7-II)39)
- Felman, S., & Laub, D. (1992) *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. Routledge.
- Freud, S. (1920). *Beyond the pleasure principle*. The Hogarth Press.
- Hanif, S., & Ullah, I. (2018). War trauma, collective memory, and cultural productions in conflict zones: Kashmir in focus. *Sage Open*, 8(3), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018800912>
- Kacandes, I. (2001). *Talk fiction. Literature and the talk explosion*. University of Nebraska Press.
- Kaul, S. (2011). "An 'You will fight, till the death of it...': Past and present in the challenge of Kashmir. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, 78(1), 173–202. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sor.2011.0011>
- Kaul, S. (2012). A time without soldiers: Writing about Kashmir today. *Historical Reflections*, 38(2), 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.3167/hrrh.2012.380206>
- Llobera, J. R. (1995). Halbwachs, Nora and" history" versus" collective memory": A research note. *Durkheimian Studies*, 1, 35–44.
- Morrison, T. (1984). Memory, creation, and writing. *Thought*, 59(235), 385–390.
- Nandi, S. (2016). Trauma and its traces in the poetry of Paul Celan. *Spring Magazine on English Literature*, 2(1), 50–57.
- Peer, B. (2010). *Curfewed night: A frontline memoir of life, love and war in Kashmir*. Harper Press.

- Piatek, B. (2014). *History, memory and trauma in contemporary British and Irish fiction*. Jagiellonian University Press.
- Roy, A., Mishra, P., Bhatt, H., Chatterji, A. P., & Ali, T. (2011). *Kashmir: The case for freedom*. Verso Books.
- Waheed, M. (2011). *The collaborator*. Penguin Book Publishers.
- Whitehead, A. (2004). *Trauma fiction*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Whitehead, A. (2009). *Memory: The new critical idiom*. Routledge
- Wittgenstein, L. (1961). *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*. Routledge.