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Unclaimed Wounds: Gendered Memory, Silence, and the Poetics of Trauma in Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age*

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Abstract: This article offers a trauma-theoretical reading of Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age*, examining how memory, silence, and gendered subjectivity are negotiated in the aftermath of the Bangladesh Liberation War. Drawing on the trauma theories of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, the study analyses literary representations of trauma through fragmentation, latency, and affective excess. It explores how women in the novel experience and witness violence, showing that feminine subjectivity emerges through both personal and collective acts of witnessing.

The article further examines experiences of violence, loss, and displacement, focusing on the limits of articulating trauma in language. Traumatic memories reappear through bodily sensations, fragmented consciousness, and recurring recollections, revealing trauma as an oscillation between immediate terror and delayed understanding. Attention is given to women survivors of war and their negotiations with fear, resistance, and survival within social structures that often silence such experiences. Moving beyond a purely psychoanalytic approach, the study also foregrounds the body and physical space as crucial sites where trauma, memory, survival, and witnessing are embodied and narrated.

Keywords: *A Golden Age, Trauma Theory, Gendered Trauma, Memory and Silence, Bangladesh Liberation War, Narrative Fragmentation*

Introduction: War, Memory, and the Afterlives of Trauma in Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age*

War, throughout history, has been one of the most violent forms of human conflict, with far-reaching effects on both the physical environment and on psychological issues. It is not only the event itself that results in material loss, but a range of powerful psychological consequences that seem resistant to healing. It is not simply the graphic and devastating moments themselves that cause trauma, but the way in which the memories, temporalities, identities, and experiences of those who come through them are necessarily affected. Trauma exists not only in the instant of the event, but continues through memory, silence, or mood- each time the body is affected by the war. Literature provides a forum for the articulation of many of those fractured moments. However, there need not be female bodies on the frontlines to make a war traumatic. Rehana, the central female subject, presents the possibility for trauma in those who do not necessarily participate directly in its enactment. Because her life is affected critically by the chaos of war surrounding her, she experiences trauma even without fighting.

The Bangladesh Liberation War was a significant event in the history of the world and it proved to be one of the most gruesome events that created collective trauma. It was more than just a struggle of political independence, it witnessed the emergence of large-scale violence, community disintegration, economy dislocation and a systemic level of human destruction. Scholars have identified the phenomenon known as postwar disorder as the central issue faced by those who lived through wars and have experienced the downfall of their communities.

A Golden Age is a novel by Tahmima Anam, published in 2007, that offers insight into the lives affected by the Bangladesh Liberation War by using it as the novel's setting. The main character Rehana, and other characters in the novel face trauma due to the violent events that happened during the war. The article highlights how the concept of trauma is interpreted differently by the characters of *A Golden Age* who witness it. Although women do not have traditional roles within the battlefield, they are witnesses to intense forms of violence within their homes and communities. The narrative of the novel suggests that the trauma that exists in the lives of the women cannot be defined solely by the level of active involvement that they had with respect to the conflict. Rather, their experiences illustrate that the trauma associated with war is more than just what is remembered from previous battles; it is also how the trauma continues to structure women's everyday functioning and experience.

This article examines *A Golden Age* through the lens of trauma theory, drawing on the works of Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman. Within trauma theory, trauma is defined as being more than just an event but also as a structural experience in which there is a delay in comprehending the event, the repetition of the event, and fragmentation of the experience itself. According to Cathy Caruth, latency

suggests that trauma is not able to be fully comprehended immediately following an experience; therefore, when trauma is revisited within an individual's life it returns in indirect and disruptive ways (Caruth 17). According to Herman, trauma occurs in such a way that it usually exceeds the individual's ability to cope with the experience, thus generating feelings of vulnerability, fear, and disconnection (Herman 24). The use of both of these theoretical frameworks allows this article to explore the representation of trauma in *A Golden Age* as something that cannot be reduced to a single, isolated occurrence, but rather as an ongoing and evolving process, one that unfolds over time and becomes visible through its continued influence on memory, identity, and the sense of self, shaping how individuals perceive, interpret, and respond to their experiences in the aftermath of violence.

The article also focuses on the representation of the gendered dimension of trauma, since women's experiences of violence, both witnessed and internalized, generate combinations of individual and collective subjectivity. Moreover, beyond a psychoanalytical reading, it explores the links between body and space when trauma is expressed. Trauma is imprinted on the body, homes and living spaces and are staged as survival and witnessing sites, places where the inhumanity created by humans is played out relentlessly and where traces remain on the land and in daily spaces, and its memory and survival, persist. In this way, *A Golden Age* represents trauma as partly unrecognisable and unresolved. It appears in the silences within the novel, in the incoherent memories, the spaces between the story and the life that inspired it. This article seeks to examine how they form part of the novel's poetics of trauma, which acknowledges the limitations of language while seeking to voice trauma.

Trauma Theory and Its Engagement with Memory and Language, Theoretical Considerations

Trauma, now widely used across disciplines, has a complex history. The term's literal meaning is wound and originally applied to physical injury. However, it now refers to psychological injuries - wounds that, while invisible, remain in the mind long after the physical event has ended. This extension from the physical to the psychological is a pivotal moment in the study of violence's long-term consequences. The development of trauma theory in the late 20th century is indebted to psychoanalytic theory, especially Sigmund Freud. Freud's work on hysteria and shock provided early insights into trauma as an event that interferes with typical thought and emotion. In his later writings, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud proposes that trauma is not fully digested at the time of the event. Rather, it manifests in reiterative forms like dreams, flashbacks and compulsions (Freud 23).

Building upon this idea, Cathy Caruth sees trauma as an experience that is characterized by a delay. According to her, trauma is not merely an immediate reaction to a violent event; it is also the way in which that event remains unknown, or only partially-known, at the time of its happening. It is only through repetition that the trauma slowly discloses itself. She explains that the force of trauma is

in its "inherent forgetting" through which it is initially experienced (Caruth 17). This paradox raises the problem of representing a traumatic event in language, as the event is beyond our present comprehension. As opposed to this, Judith Herman introduces a pragmatic way of looking at trauma. In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, she states that a traumatic event can deprive an individual of her frame of reference, producing a sense of loss of control and safety, leading to the event producing symptoms of hyperarousal, intrusion and constriction, which can be translated into anxiety, flashbacks and numbness respectively. Herman is sensitive to the social contexts of trauma, such as violence against women, making her work particularly relevant to readers. One of the central contributions that trauma theory has brought to the forefront is the way traumatic experiences challenge language. Individuals often attempt to express their painful experiences directly but, in a way, this is not possible. This may be because these experiences violently test the boundaries of language, and they may, in fact, cause a total breakdown in meaning, as trauma studies suggest.

Shoshana Felman further probes into the relation between trauma and narration and argues that witnessing involves more than telling, witnessing involves acknowledging the unspeakable (Felman and Laub 41). Hence trauma narration is both incoherent and inconsistent; it is constitutive of breaks, hiatuses which signal the broken nature of memory. In addition to these psychoanalytic paradigms, the post-traumatic trauma theories have expanded into interdisciplinary contexts. Feminist theory, for example, draws our attention to the fact that trauma operates upon the gendered body in distinctive ways. Women's experiences of violence in war are mostly marginalized or silent in hegemonic historical narrations. Emphasizing women's trauma experience, a feminist trauma theory examines the ways in which power, gender and violence are related.

Along the same lines, postcolonial trauma theories draw attention to the communal aspects of pain and suffering. In the context of the Bangladesh Liberation War, trauma goes beyond personal experience and affects the whole society. As Kai Erikson states, collective trauma "damages the bonds attaching people together " (Erikson 19), essentially tearing the social fabric. These theoretical ideas offer a platform to interpret *A Golden Age*. They help to realize how the novel illustrates trauma by means of memory, silence, and narrative fragmentation. Placing the book in this wider discussion, this article looks at how Anam's writing touches on the challenges of depicting violence and its consequences.

Gendered Trauma and the Intimacy of Witnessing in *A Golden Age*

In *A Golden Age*, trauma is not only showed as occurring from direct physical violence but also from witnessing the violent acts, expecting them, or being emotionally near to the danger. This becomes evident in the instance where Rehana witnesses the corpse of a young girl killed during the war.

Rehana seems unable to look for longer. She felt a heightened empathy and terror and hallucination.

Rehana became aware of the growing crowd on the street; the rickshaw-wallah strained to get them through the uneven road and the people that were laced around them. Now there were bricks and bits of plaster and layers of dust that had settled on the road and turned it grey-white. They were in front of Curzon Hall. The wet ribbon had followed them all the way, and now it poured into a gutter, which was also red, and on the side of the gutter was a pair of hands, the fingers clasped together in prayer or begging, and next to the hands was a face. The mouth was tiny, only a pale pink smudge, like the introduction of a bruise. It was a little girl. Her hair swallowed the top half of her face. Beneath the clumped-together strands Rehana could see an eye squeezed shut. She wrenched herself away from it; she looked for only a minute, but it felt like so much longer, felt so close she thought she could smell the girl's breath escaping from her nostrils and from those too-small lips (Anam 7).

Rehana's hallucination, wherein she sees the girl's breath permeating her nostrils, can be attributed with the overwhelming trauma she experiences. It shows the intensity of Rehana's empathetic connection to the suffering of the girl.

The female characters of the novel live in a world where the distinction between being a witness and being a victim disappears. Terrific events like the mass killing of women and children happened during the war is written in the novel, "from Mrs Chowdhury's roof, Sohail and Lieutenant Sabeer watched the fires of the lit-up city. Suddenly they heard everything: the killing of small children, the slow movement of clouds, the death of women, the sigh of fleeing birds, the rush of blood on the pavements" (65). Their trauma is not always the result of immediate physical harm but of constant exposure to fear, uncertainty and loss. This creates a situation where womanhood is placed within a complicated web of private and public violence. Rehana personifies this multidimensional experience of trauma. Being a mother of two, her identity is influenced not just by what she witnesses but also by what she fears. The conflict makes its way into her family the most when it comes through her children, and especially through Sohail, her son, whose activism against the war introduces significant changes to Rehana's daily life turning it into one filled with worry and fear. For her, trauma is not just about what has happened but the pain of potential loss. According to Judith Herman, traumatized people are continually hypervigilant, anxious, and agitated. They have a chronic apprehension of imminent doom, of something terrible always about to happen (62). This can be seen in Rehana's behaviour and her thoughts, "A man for his country. He would die, if he had to. Rehana wondered if she should begin to prepare herself, imagine a life without her son, carve out a hole where he used to be,

familiarize herself with the shock of his absence” (116). Emotional intensity of Rehana's situation is directly proportional to her lack of power to do something. When Rehana's son Sohail expresses his decision to indulge in the fight for the freedom of Bangladesh, Rehana tries to stop him, but she finds her resistance hopeless and becomes unable to stand firm and feels incapable. She finds it unable to sleep and cries most of the time. "Rehana couldn't sleep. Shortly after dawn she'd said goodbye to Sohail and his friends and counted, over and over like the long, repeated summer days, all the things that could possibly go wrong” (129). As Judith Herman describes, “Chronically traumatized people no longer have any baseline state of physical calm or comfort. Over time, they perceive their bodies as having turned against them. They begin to complain, not only of insomnia and agitation, but also of numerous types of somatic symptoms” (Herman 52). Therefore, Rehana's character is developed through her inability to act which shows how a maternal role can be the kind of place where trauma is not only generated but also deep-rooted internally.

Women, who are cast in the roles of nurturers and spectators are so emotionally overwhelmed by the violence that is going on. Most of the time, the traumatic experiences of women are kept inside and the only channels of expression are silence, or the body showing signs of pain rather than a direct response to the violence. This is in line with Geoffrey Hartman's point in the book *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* that trauma research should not overlook ordinary violence, such as the daily suffering of women. Maya is Rehana's daughter who represents a different version of gendered trauma. Even though Rehana was not politically active, Maya was extremely active in the field. Her trauma came out not in words but in silence. When her friend Sharmeen was taken, she could not find words for her sorrow. Her silence speaks volumes. It is, in fact, a very eloquent silence that goes against the very nature of language. According to Herman, these may be the very incidents that are too terrible to utter aloud which is why people tend to suppress or avoid them. Though she does not say anything, Maya has emotions. Her silence is a form of speech that shows the ineffectiveness of words when it comes to trauma. It implies that even what cannot be expressed by words resides in the body and mind. Being physically present but mentally absent, like a cloud of dust, her character shows how trauma is both imperceptible and omnipresent. It is there, but cannot be fully understood. In the same way, characters such as Mrs. Akram and Silvi, the neighbours of Rehana show their various susceptibilities to trauma, thereby exposing the multifaceted nature of trauma. Mrs Akram in her frenzied state of mind following the explosions is the evidence that she undergoes psychological breakdown. Her rambling about the end of the world and inability to remember her own name describes her dissociation from her reality - a way of shielding the mind by splitting off from an intense unpleasant reality. “Mrs Akram had spent that night with the shutters closed and her hands over her ears. Later her husband would say she'd been hysterical, screaming about Kayamat, the end of the

world. They'd had totie her to the bed- posts and press their hands over her mouth. She remembered none of it" (80). This is in line with Herman's description of dissociative behaviour whereby the individual blocks out particular traumatic incidents in order to cope. Silvi whose husband was a soldier in the army of Pakistan shows her emotional numbness by always praying without any interest in other activities. "In her room. Praying, probably. All she does these days." (95) According to Judith Herman, while some survivors may engage in hyperarousal, others may withdraw into numbing and avoidance (31).

This way of dealing with things is in line with trauma theory's acceptance of the fact that people who have been through very bad experiences might switch between being very alert and being very constrained. Some get very vigilant, whereas others quietly disappear into silence and passivity. Such different reactions emphasize that trauma is a very complicated psychological and emotional problem. There is absolutely no single way of undergoing or showing it. Rather, trauma shows up quite differently in different people as a result of their situations, contacts, and the social framework they belong to. And, the story places these personal experiences in a wider communal background. The Bangladesh Liberation War is the setting that brings these very different experiences together as a common history of pain. Kai Erikson mentions that what can be seen as the disenfranchisement of social relationships as a result of collective trauma is not only the upheaval of individuals but it can also cause members of the community to feel removed and estranged from one another (154). Therefore, in *A Golden Age*, fear and anxiety engulf the whole community so that even the uninvolved learn to live with pain. The gendered aspect of this collective trauma becomes entirely visible in the example of female victims forced to confront displacement and loss. Loneliness is part of the 'price' child victims of war are made to pay and as these women end up having to cope with the after effects of war mostly at the home front, providing for others while suffering themselves, loneliness makes them especially vulnerable to trauma; for it is through them that other people's pain is registered and expressed in the most acute way while feeling often remains hidden.

The novel, through such characterizations, unpacks the genesis of female subjectivity from trauma. *A Golden Age* stands against portraying trauma as an individual experience that can be wiped away completely from the mind of a person rather it is portrayed as something that is imprinted and intensely entrenched in social and collective contexts.

The Fragmented Nature of Memory and Silence in Narrative

A Golden Age presents the theme of silence as a narrative and psychological phenomenon. Trauma often cannot be directly articulated. It is disruptive and breaks the linear flow of narrative, creating gaps, interruptions, and fragmented memories. Within *A Golden Age*, silence becomes a key mode through which trauma is experienced and represented.

Silence is presented in multiple layers. In several instances, *A Golden Age* displays silence not only through characters' inability to describe their experiences, but also through the omissions of the narrative and between events. These are not empty gaps but rather these are omissions filled with meaning of what cannot be expressed. This is evident in Maya's refusal to speak about the disappearance of her friend who worked for the liberation of Bangladesh, as well as in Mrs. Sengupta's, a neighbour of Rehana who is forced to flee during war with her family, response to the death of her son. She is unable to express her sorrow of leaving her son while running away for her life from the Pakistani army so she turns to writing that is fragmented and repetitive.

The next morning, when Rehana went back, Mrs Sengupta held up the notebook. She had written a few lines. I went into the reeds, it said. In the pond. She pulled the bamboo pipe from under her pillow and put it to her mouth. I left him, she wrote. 'I don't know what you mean, Mrs Sengupta,' Rehana said. An image came, unbidden, of Mrs Sengupta sinking into a grey brown silt. Mrs Sengupta's hand moved slowly over the page. She finished a sentence, crossed it out, then wrote again. After what felt like a long time, she handed the notebook back to Rehana. I left him and ran into the pond. It couldn't be right. It couldn't have happened that way. 'You got separated?' Again, she began her slow scrawl, her fingers knotting together. I didn't think about him, I just ran. 'Mr Sengupta?' Rehana asked. She had already written something down and was pointing to it now. They shot him. She couldn't bear to see any more. 'Supriya, get some rest now, I'll be back with some lunch.' Mrs Sengupta gripped her notebook. True, she wrote, true true true. She closed her eyes. Rehana left her that way, black-lipped and shaking her head back and forth (268).

Cathy Caruth has described the phenomenon of repetition which occurs in trauma in her book, *Unclaimed Experience*. She argues how trauma returns repeatedly to the individual, not in a remembered form, but as recurring intrusion, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature - the way it was precisely not known in the first instance - returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). In *A Golden Age*, the war is not relegated to one moment in time. Instead, throughout the novel, the

thoughts, emotions, images and experiences of the characters are repeatedly depicted. This can be seen when Rehana is facing heightened trauma whenever her son leaves her home to the war zone.

All day she ignored the cold fear at her back. Sohail left in the afternoon, his face unmoved as she kissed his forehead and said Aytul Kursi and blew the blessing on his eyes. The fear breathed on her neck and sent the hair upright, electric. It caught her in the double-beat of her heart, the pulse she could feel at her temple, the tremor of her hand as she fried the Iftar food (290).

The main character Rehana is constantly afraid for the safety of her children, even in calm moments, as she anticipates loss as a result of her trauma. She can never seemingly escape the thought of potential death. As with all narratives of trauma, Rehana's past experiences of violence are not remembered in a linear or completed fashion; they are repeatedly relived.

Aside from the themes of the recovery of emotion and the depiction of physical violence, the novel also addresses the fragmentation of trauma. A significant feature of the text is its fragmented nature that shifts in narrative voice and abrupt transitions. The embodiment of memory through the inclusion of sensory details such as sounds and smells to recreate and describe memory, is an important aspect of how memory is represented in the novel. Memory of traumatic experiences is often physically stored within the human body and surfaces through bodily connections in response to triggers. As a result of the heightened hearing of Rehana, the protagonist and her fear of enclosed and dark spaces, her physical reactions, racing heart and sleeplessness, trigger the physical memories of her experiences. Two of the dominant features of the post-disaster world are silence and memory. Silence is not a lack of sound in the work but in fact there is a pervasive sense of presence everywhere which is tangible but to speak it would be extremely difficult. Memory in the work is not an unaltered voice of history but in the work, it is shattered and recurs over and over again sometimes with difference. *A Golden Age* departs from conventional linear narrative structures and reflects three fundamental features of trauma representation in contemporary narrative fiction, inaccessibility, dissonance and fragmentation. In this book, there is a poetics of trauma - an accounting for both its possibilities and impossibilities.

The Body and Space: Locating Trauma Beyond the Psyche

Early trauma theories often privileged psychological interpretations of trauma over embodied or spatial dimensions. *A Golden Age* presents trauma and suffering as embodied and spatial. In the novel, trauma is depicted as not only Therefore, trauma is presented as not only distressing the psyche of the female

characters, but also as inscribed and imprinted in the bodies and spaces around them. The novel ventures to exceed the conventional ways of representing trauma.

In the novel, bodies function as living repositories of memories; the characters are unable to disengage themselves from past experiences because their bodies are always revealing expressions of what happened to them. In Rehana's case, her physical condition becomes a clear indicator of the intensity of her emotional torture. Her body shows signs of increased anxiety and palpable fear, which is demonstrated through her racing heart and shaking hands. Trauma, according to psychologist Judith Herman, results in disruption in bodily homeostasis; individuals suffering from trauma exist in a hyperarousal state and appear on edge at all times (Herman 69). "She spent the nights with the kerosene lamp on. Every sound incited a fierce hammering in her heart. She thought she heard footsteps, soft knocks on the door; she thought she felt someone tugging at her feet as she slept" (150). Rehana's inability to sleep without lights on and her feelings evidently show her trauma.

The embodied aspect of Rehana's experience is evident through the repetitive nature of the activities she performs. After Sohail leaves for the war zone, Rehana starts counting and continues listing all the possible dangers Sohail is likely to encounter. This attempt to grapple with the uncontrollable nature of Sohail's situation results in being trapped by trauma into repetitive actions. The body becomes the means through which this mental fixation is expressed.

Another character in the novel who loses his life because of trauma and torture is Sabeer, a Pakistani soldier. Sabeer's tortured body becomes a visible inscription of state violence, demonstrating how trauma continues to inhabit the body even after physical rescue. After witnessing and being forced to do cruel acts, he turns against the army and works for the people who led the Bangladesh Liberation War. This results in his cruel torture by the Pakistani army. Sabeer's body is one of the most striking representations of how trauma affects the human body. Even after Rehana rescues him, Sabeer remains psychologically trapped within the experience of torture.

Rehana held on, trying to soothe him, stroking the softness of his fingers. 'Beta, cholo, let's go, I'll take you home.' But Sabeer kept screaming and twisting away from her. The sleeve of his shirt peeled away, and she saw that the hand she was holding was dark at the tips. Someone had painted his fingers. Sabeer grunted his animal grunt and said, 'No, please, I didn't do it!' His voice was thick and gummy. Finally, Rehana released him, and he sank to his knees and began to sob. 'No, no, no,' he whispered, holding his hands against his chest, 'please.' Rehana bent down and looked closer. The nails were soft and pulpy. Closer. Not nails, just red-tipped fingers. There were no nails. No nails; only red-tipped fingers (231).

Not only is his body visibly and externally scarred from the extreme torture he underwent but his movements and speech also change, evident in his manner of movement and speech. The way he speaks in illogical fragments and his voice reveal a trauma that seems to have left a permanent mark on his psyche. His inability to remember Rehana's face is also a further indicator of this fragmentation. His body is thus portrayed as disrupting the essential distinction between body and the mind.

Judith Herman, in her work *Trauma and Recovery*, established the idea that traumatized individuals do not merely recall their experiences in memory. Rather, the traumatic moment repeatedly reappears in the person's body guiding their actions so that full recovery is often impossible (28). Sabeer's frenzied actions are an apt illustration of Herman's insight. He acts as if he is still under the assault and agonizing torture of Amal. His actions demonstrate that he is not completely recovered from the trauma and atrocities that he faced. It affects his normal activities and identity. His body still carries the trauma.

In a similar way, the body of other characters also registers the shattering effects of trauma. In Mrs. Akram's case, hysteria besets her; Silvi becomes remote and passive; Rehana suffers acute physical discomfort. Their experiences indicate how trauma shatters the psyche's relationship with the body and defy an easy categorization or containment of its effects.

While the body is often referred to as the primary locus of traumatic injury, the novel also frequently attributes a role to space as an active agent in the creation and recreation of traumatic experiences. Trauma makes frequent reference to two primary categories of space: the domestic and the public. The home, by its nature intended as a secure locus of comfort and belonging, is instead depicted as a locus of anxious expectation: its inhabitants are perpetually waiting for correspondence, for news of missing loved ones, and for some manifestation of political change. In Rehana's case, her home becomes a site of political activism as well as the locus of her greatest fears for her son's safety.

Whereas intimate spaces are subject to subtle and hidden forms of violence, public or external sites are invaded by overt forms of warfare. Bombing and bloodshed in Dhaka city render the city a battlefield in a state of extreme chaos. Rehana's sense of safe public space is threatened when she witnesses the lifeless bodies of the citizens of Bangladesh. Extreme violence in the domestic and public spheres of people creates terror in people's minds.

The novel demonstrates the expression of trauma spatialized through refugee camps. Confined spaces, lack of facilities, and the sight of people in great misery make the refugees not only experience but also share trauma. The way Rehana responds to the refugees, when she sees them in Lake Refugee

Camp, is out of fear, that they, in turn, will draw her into their condition, is a sign of how trauma can indeed be personal as well as collective.

Everywhere she looked she saw the haunted faces of the refugees. They held out their hands, and she thought they might grab her, drag her into the muck. She had an image of them forcing her into one of their 221 pipes, making her weave those jute strings all day. You're one of us, they would say, you're one of us. (256)

Very often, the room itself, rather than simply being the background, mirrors the characters' pain: It stands for the loss and displacement caused by the war. What connects the body and space is a point similarly made by contemporary trauma studies, where a great emphasis is given to the role of physical settings in the diagnosis of a traumatized person. It is therefore obvious that trauma is not an individual's experience alone; it is the result of the environment that an individual lives in, and subsequently, the environment also shapes one's remembering and expressing the trauma. Through a concentration on the body and space, *A Golden Age* does not simply depict different faces of trauma in the way of memory or storytelling, rather it shows that trauma plunges into the physical conditions of ordinary life. By linking bodily suffering with spatial dislocation, *A Golden Age* redefines trauma as a lived material condition rather than a purely psychological experience.

Representation of Gendered Survival and Collective Trauma in *A Golden Age*

A Golden Age, while focusing mainly on portraying individual trauma, also attempts to explore collective trauma in considerable depth. The Bangladesh Liberation War is not just a setting in the story; it is a catastrophic disaster that affects the whole community and therefore serves as the source of trauma. The collective aspect of trauma is, in fact, a key point in the article, as through it, one can understand how a person's suffering is never completely separate from the community's social and political conditions.

Kai Erikson's concept of collective trauma helps illuminate the situation. He defines it as a process that breaks down the social ties that bind community members together, resulting in the loss of social cohesion (19). The disruption is a feature of the story as the fear, mistrust, and a sense of being uprooted are so pervasive. Community ties are broken down; families get separated and the feeling of security that one could always rely on is taken away because of the military attempts to subjugate the liberation fight of people. The most direct and apparent link the refugees have with the trauma in the novel is that they have been displaced from their ordinary lives and have been thrown into unstable living conditions where they lack the necessities of life. The refugees from Bangladesh were forced to huddle together in pipes for their survival during the military attack against the fight for liberation.

Rehana observes the devastating conditions of the refugees when she visits the Lake Refugee Camp, “The pipes, each just wide enough for a grown man’s stretched arms, had people huddled inside them. Lungis hung across some for privacy. Saris lay drying on top. Inside, their backs bent against the curve of the pipes, men and women pitched against the sloping walls.” (253).

The gendered facet of this collective trauma cannot be overlooked. Women, in many cases, continue to be the pillars of home and community in the absence of men, most of whom are indulged in fighting. Apart from the difficulties they have to face in the life, they also have to deal with their personal sufferings. Rehana also observes, “The pipes were no bigger at close range. Children dangled from their edges, while women hung back inside, their faces covered with the limp ends of their saris” (254). This double duty results in an even greater vulnerability to trauma; thus, women's experiences are both individual and communal. Mrs. Sengupta's story is a perfect example. The death of her husband and young son pushes her into a depressing emotional state. This can be seen through Rehana’s sights, “Rehana pulled off the katha. Mrs. Sengupta’s sari was bunched around her knees. Her calves were grey and papery. Rehana dragged the sari down and covered her legs. She looked like a felled tree” (265). Mrs. Sengupta was completely changed. She lost her charm and ability to function normally like a healthy person because of her trauma. Her experience is not unique but a symbol of the unfortunate life of countless others who are engulfed by war. Her inability to put her suffering into words and silence demonstrates the inadequacy of language in expressing collective trauma. As cited by Pederson, Van der Kolk argues that trauma patients have trouble producing spoken descriptions of the traumatic events that so relentlessly return as night terrors or flashbacks (Pederson 350)

On the other hand, Rehana's story portrays the situation that the community collectively sets one's ability to bounce back. Her actions, such as giving refuge, helping the resistance and taking care of people are but her attempts of survival that fundamentally rely on the community. However, this resilience does not erase her pain, it always exists within her. She cries and earns for her past while still sharing the suffering of the collective. The idea of trauma as a double telling is conceptualized by Cathy Caruth. Caruth argues that trauma is essentially “a life-threatening event and also the life of having endured it” (7). This double telling of trauma is reflected in the narrative of the characters as their lives are caught between the terror of the past and its continuation. The novel therefore, constructs trauma as at once a personal and a collective experience, in order to underline the relationship between individual and social suffering. It rejects the notion of trauma being unravelled through single experiences and stresses the need for social reading.

Conclusion: Toward a Poetics of the Unspeakable

The article undertakes an investigation into the nature of trauma experienced by the characters in the novel *A Golden Age*. Through an exploration of memory, silence and gendered subjectivity, the article studies how trauma cannot be reduced to a single narrative of an event but rather controls the lives of the characters.

This article explores representations of trauma within *A Golden Age* according to some of the chief principles of trauma theory, primarily those advocated by Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman. These principles are relevant in the exploration of how different kinds of trauma are revealed in the behaviour and actions of the central characters of the novel such as Rehana, Maya, Sabeer and Mrs. Sengupta.

Even though the primary focus of the article is on the effects of trauma in the minds and speech of the characters, it also considers the body and space in understanding how human beings experience and overcome trauma. The article analyses how trauma is portrayed as affecting not only the minds of the characters but also their speech, physical well-being,

Connecting the lives of the characters who show symptoms of individual and collective trauma, this article explores the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War and examines how historical trauma continues to be experienced through generations and communities, and influences social processes and cultural psyche.

The novel weaves a poetics of trauma. It confronts the inherent difficulties of expressing traumatic memory and explores the ways in which narratives of displacement and victimization can be constructed within given linguistic and poetic constraints. In doing so, *A Golden Age* uncovers the category of the “unclaimed” in trauma studies: the area between memory and narrative, experience and expression, where the traumatized individual most acutely feels the deficiency of language. However, the novel also explores the possibilities inherent in this very deficit, tracing the limits of representation in order to propose their transgression.

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