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Mapping Perpetrator's Trauma and National Allegory in Moni Mohsin's *The End of Innocence*

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Abstract

The unstable political rift between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh is a crucial point of discussion in many of the literary expressions in South Asian Anglophone Writings. The periodic disasters such as forced expulsion, migration, refugee crises, and trauma of the partition build up the South Asian history frequently. One such humanitarian crisis is the 1971 partition event, that led to the formation of Bangladesh. These events become the site of traumatization for the subjects of its country. The fiction of Bangladesh deals vehemently with their occupation as victimhood. The long-surviving silence in the anglophone writing of Pakistan writers in the 1971 partition is opened up by writers like Kamila Shamsie, Moni Mohsin, and Sorraya Khan. The trauma of the perpetrator and bystander is often neglected due to the contentious scholarship that can become an exculpation and distort the bifurcation between victimhood and perpetrator. This study expounds on the trauma of perpetrator in Moni Mohsin's The End of Innocence (2006), explores the complexities in the psychological scarring and its belated outcome as well as throws insights upon the nuanced use of allegories by the author upon the theme of 1971 partition.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Liberation War of Bangladesh is the outcome of the economic disparities displayed against the then East Pakistan by West Pakistan, these outrageous partialities fuelled the need for liberation and a transversal role of the Indian military that brought down the war and eventually the formation of Bangladesh. The history often reads the liberation war as the Indo-Pak war and the1971 partition, which gives a peripheral idea of pervasive paranoia between India and Pakistan. Literary Trauma Studies is expanding its boundaries to include the trauma of the perpetrator to maintain its ethical standards from the critical post-structural theory. The act of perpetration is seen as acting out and exposing the trauma of the perpetrator. The research paper attempts to decipher the trauma of the perpetrator and bring out the commission of crime itself is the outcome of previous psychological injury and scarring. This study expounds the trauma of perpetrator in Moni Mohsin's *The End of Innocence* (2006), and explores the complexities in the psychological scarring and its belated outcome. Ranabir Samaddar in his article titled Interpretations of the Bangladesh War says that the history of Pakistan is quite indefinite because of the deep silence around the event 1971 (Samaddar 1997, 1). The lack of the 1971 description in the history, narrates the distress of Raheen in Kamila Shamsie's

Kartography as follows "Is it shame at losing war, or guilt about what we did try to win that mutes us?" (Shamsie 2004, 270) Writers like Sorraya Khan in Noor, Kamila Shamsie in *Kartography* and Salman Rushdie in The Midnight Children talks about the transgression that history hesitates to perpetuate.

Focusing on the present study, Mohsin's *The End of Innocence* gives an insight in the everyday life of Pakistanis in cities and rural background set in 1971. Mohsin clearly shows the parallel situation of both wings of the same country, East Pakistan while facing more of an ethnic cleansing and genocide. On the other side, there is an ongoing peaceful life in villages of West Pakistan like Sabzbagh, near by the borders of India fearing attacks from Indian military at any time soon. Mohsin through her nuanced narrative clearly shares the heterogeneity of postcolonial experience in her novel, she illuminates the internal oppressive system and also the broader sociopolitical predicaments involved in the country's political ambitions. Through her characterization, she allegorizes the nations in her narrative which is illustrative of Jameson's criticism on "national allegory" in "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" claims, "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third world culture and society" (Jameson, p.69) Mohsin has rightly set out the narrative to expose the pervasive paranoia exhibited between India and Pakistan through the innocence of Laila and other characters like Mashooq, notably the perpetrator responsible for the murder of a liberal and free-will-loving young girl Rani. Through these plot movements, Mohsin beautifully crafts the allegories of nations caught in paranoia of the 1971 partition.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Mashal Mumtaz., et al., (2024) in their textual analysis on *The End of Innocence* explores the Festinger's idea of cognitive dissonance and experience of psychological discomfort through the forced friendship of Laila and Rani. This study highlights the intersection of varying social and cultural background makes cognitive dissonance a part of daily life discourse. The visible difference of lifestyle of rich and poor dramatized through their characters brings the subject of hierarchy and social order in household and between human relationships.

2.2. Afzal., et al., (2023) discuss about the feministic literary perspective of *The End of Innocence* and enable a theoretical criticism supported by Gayatri Spivak's Can the Subaltern Speak centered upon the oppressive system portrayed in the novel.

2.3. Hiya Chitrajee (2019) focus on the comparative mode of gender studies that allows to bring in female friendships in Chitra Divakaruni novel Sister of My Heart and Moni Mohsin's *The End of Innocence* in reference to South Asian feminist ideologies. These reviews prove the gap in literature to discuss about the key feature of the perpetrator trauma existent in the novel.

III. IDENTIFYING MASHOOQ THE PERPETRATOR WITH PREVIOUS PSYCHOLOGICAL INJURY AND ITS BELATED OUTCOME

Saira Mohamed opens up a genuine discourse to fill the gap on understanding and situating the trauma of the perpetrators and their reasons behind initiating a crime, traces the evolution of the crime, and appropriating the cause of the terrible event itself. Erin McGlothin in Perpetrator Trauma explains the simplicity of the term in relation to its diversity of experience covered by the concept of perpetration. (Mc Glothin 2020, 108) The act of perpetration includes both collective and the commission of violence against the individual like domestic violence, abuse, threats and bullying (Personal terrorism). Clearing up the difference between over usage and totality of the term 'trauma' where suffering consequently caused by the perpetrator gives the position as victim and creates a difference between a victim of illness and natural disasters. So, the field of perpetrator trauma studies captures the engagement between victim and perpetrator. The relative relationship between the perpetrator and the commission of violence depends upon the age, gender, profession, nationality and ethnicity. In Mohsin's *The End of Innocence*, Rani a young girl becomes pregnant and involved in an illegal love affair, and Mashooq, Rani's stepfather murders her for this sinful act. Rani being the granddaughter of

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the servant, who works in the conservative household of the village feud yearns for an independent lifestyle and wishes to escape the rigid conformities of the village. The plot discusses diverse subjects of partialities in the lives of people living in villages and cities enhancing the visibility of power and marginalization.

Raya Morag in her critical work titled Waltzing with Bashir: Perpetrator Trauma and Cinema in analyzing the narrative of the traumatic events of Ari Folman used for the process of filmmaking finds the active complicities from his uncanny childhood and missing memories originate the site of traumatization and not from shooting flares. In Folman's imagination, as the quest reveals, the earlier trauma has appropriated the later one. (Morag 2013, 133) The idea of Folman's trauma implies the involvement of the memory to reconstruct the subsequent experience. The participation of the past traumatic memory influence and distort the social behavior of the traumatized subject towards the present events. To understand the trauma of the perpetrator is to study the previous personal traumatic experience that affected him. The personal suffering of the perpetrator's trauma can be found in the narrative by understanding the event that overshadows and influences his ability in the present. The presence of the past traumatic memory provides scope for the perpetrator to appropriate the later events of his life. To recognize the perpetrator's conflict in his past memory is to understand the trauma of the perpetrator. The work of post-memory, described by Marianne Hirsch (2001) as the response of second-generation Holocaust survivors to the trauma of the first, describes the relationship of children of survivors of . . . collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they "remember" only as the narratives and images with which they grew up (Hirsch 2001, 9) These individuals have a connection to their parents' experiences primarily through the narratives and images they were exposed to while growing up is one of the key elements in acknowledging the personal conflict of the perpetrator. These inherited memories are substantial enough to be considered as their memories though they do not have any personal or first-hand experience of the event. Post-memory is a potent form of remembering because it is not based on direct recollection but on representation, projection, and creation. Often, it relies on silence rather than verbal expression and focuses on the unseen rather than the visible aspects of the past. To reveal the trauma of the perpetrator, a careful reading of the information on the perpetrator's past with the significant element of attention to the silent but resilient feature of his ordinary self is a necessity.

Having placed Mashooq as the perpetrator on the commission of Rani's murder, delving into the plot movement of The End Innocence one can reflect upon the deep-seated trauma. When Mashooq was questioned about his transgression, he refuted by claiming "Hang? For protecting the honor of a sinful girl? For saving her bastard child from a miserable life? For removing the stain of dishonor?" (Mohsin 2006, 328). His account of justification of his act reveals the hint of previous psychological injury incurred upon him, "I know I did my duty. My conscience is clear." (Mohsin 2006, 328) he deems this murder as loyal duty and finds no guilty or shame about it, which contrast him from many other perpetrators who are haunted by their own misdeeds later in their life. Looking back into the childhood of Mashooq, with reference to Ari Folman's statement on his origination of trauma from his uncanny childhood to later initiating a crime without guilt. A brief encounter of Mashooq's past revealed that his mother nicknamed as 'Boli' because she was born deaf and mute, she was sexually assaulted when she went into the field one night to relieve herself. She duly gave birth to a boy with shriveled foot named Mashooq. But the villagers called him 'Harami', the bastard, and branded him. He was shunned and ridiculed by everyone in the village, where the children refused to play with him and grown-ups wouldn't let him into their houses. This revelation of uncanny childhood experience against Mashooq's motivation to murder Rani does not justify and redeem him from his misconduct. Still, it initiates an understanding of Mashooq's world of unhealed grief. His mother's miserable subaltern state easily allows the offender to escape without any consequences, the post-memory of his mother's conflict inherits his memory.

Mashooq's perspective of saving Rani's dishonor and freeing an unborn child of an illicit affair from villagers' cruelty by murdering her does not disturb

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his conscience. Saira Mohamed opens up a new perspective on the images of perpetrator's who are not guilty about their crimes as The Happy Killer? "Imagine instead the person who boldly chooses to kill—no draft or coercion or indoctrination to blame. A person who enjoys it, even. Can you also imagine him having nightmares about it for decades to come?" (Mohamed 2015, 1190) She brings in this idea on discussing the experience of Anwar Congo who participated in Soviet purge of 1930's when asked by Joshua Oppenheimer regarding the construction of a film about the mass killings. Anwar was not reluctant to speak about his experience as perpetrator rather eagerly shared his stories with pride and delight, "The scenes they choose to make for their movie—which Anwar Congo, the lead "character," imagines will be a "beautiful family movie"—are astonishing and horrifying." (Mohamed 2015, 1192) Through Oppenheimer's Anwar Congo, Saira Mohammed develops the deeper reflection on the act of killing embraced by the perpetrator because the perpetrator is aware of position as no can question him and only his conscience could traumatize him under his conscious act to experience emotions of his victims. Oppenheimer has specified that he perceived the reenactment of the killings performed by Anwar Congo and his mates in the film as a way of exposing impunity. Only in a society devoid of morality and law, justice is paralyzed and accountability becomes non-existent, murderers like Mashooq find no reason to hide their brutality. The violent acts, staged in plain sight like murdering a young girl, become expressions of hegemony, mocking the very notion of consequence led by the society. The perpetrator walks freely among the innocent, untouched and supported, their unchecked reign of terror is an unsettling reminder of villages like Sabzbagh unravelling into chaos and discord. Having her granddaughter Rani murdered, Kaneez does not allow Mashooq to be hanged and punished by the law. "Think of the scandal, the shame, if it comes out that Rani was killed by her own stepfather. No, no, it must never come out." (Mohsin 2006, 330) This highlights the vulnerable position of Rani, who suffers numerous injustices, including false promise marriage and ultimately honor killing. Her plight goes unnoticed, and justice is never served. The boy who impregnated her has disappeared, and her stepfather, Mashooq, who murdered her for what he saw as a sinful act, is also set free. Kaneez, Rani's grandmother, chooses not to pursue justice, as she no longer has the strength to endure more disgrace than Rani's humiliation in her remaining years. These circumstances allow the perpetrator to go unpunished, leaving Rani, in her innocence and youth, as a victim of society's cruelty. The love and attention she lacked at home led her to accept affection from a stranger, resulting in her tragic fate. This reflects the subaltern position of Rani, whose voice is never regained.

Mashooq's perception of his actions reveals a complex and deeply troubled psyche shaped by his own traumatic past. He justifies the murder of Rani and her unborn child as an act of liberation, believing he has freed them from the inevitable shame and ridicule of society. In Mashooq's mind, this killing is not a sinful act but rather an attempt to restore a sense of dignity, both for Rani and himself. His interpretation of honor is so deeply distorted that he believes he is performing a righteous duty by preventing her from facing the social exclusion he has experienced himself. Mashooq's actions can be seen as a reenactment of his own unresolved trauma. His childhood experience of being thrashed and neglected by the boys in the village for being a 'bastard' has left a deep psychological scarring in his past. He internalized the shame and rejection, which led him to despise the very identity which the society imposed upon him. This past trauma fuels his belief that by killing Rani and her unborn child, he is also 'killing' the part of himself that was marked as illegitimate by the villagers. In this twisted logic, Mashooq imagines that by eliminating this mirror of his own past, he can erase the stigma of branding 'Harami' that once clung to him. In killing Rani, Mashooq attempts to rewrite his own story for personal satisfaction. He believes that this violent act will wash away his 'Harami' identity, and in doing so, he aspires to gain a place among the respectable members of the villagers. This perverse desire for respectability is rooted in his yearning to escape the same societal rejection he suffered as a child. Ironically, Mashooq's search for acceptance through violence only perpetuates the very cycle of oppression that once victimized him. This reveals the tragic and cyclical nature of trauma—Mashooq, a

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victim of societal cruelty, becomes its enforcer. His inability to confront and heal from his own trauma leads him to inflict similar pain on those more vulnerable than him. Instead of breaking free from the oppressive norms that once hurt him, he becomes an agent of those very norms, sacrificing Rani and her unborn child in the process. His story underscores how unresolved trauma can manifest in harmful ways, leading to destructive acts that perpetuate violence across generations.

IV. READING THE NATIONAL ALLEGORIES IN MOHSIN'S *THE END OF INNOCENCE*

In *The End of Innocence*, Mohsin unearths the societal dynamics that shaped Pakistan during post-Partition, particularly how the ruling elite viewed those who migrated during that time from India towards the east side. Through characters like Sardar Begum, the novel exposes the ingrained belief among some native Pakistanis that they had an inherent right to rule, viewing Bengalis—those displaced by the Partition—as lesser, treating them as guests or even servants. This hierarchical mindset is revealed through Sardar Begum's own words: "When people forget their place, they step out of the bounds decided not by us. That's when the devil begins his work." (Mohsin 2006, 180) Her statements reveal a rigid, caste-like structure where everyone has a 'place' decreed by God, with Bengalis, migrants, and other minorities seen as inherently inferior. This mindset perpetuates a system of social control where stepping outside of one's assigned place leads to judgment, coercion, or even violence. Shamsie portrays a similar experience of Zafar's inferiority as Muhajir in *Kartography*'s multicultural Pakistan, he feels subjugated by his own friends namely Asif and Laila. In Moni Mohsin's *The End of Innocence* the rigid hierarchical system of honor and obedience is evident not just in the way Sardar Begum speaks of Bengalis but also in how she reacts to the murder of Rani. Even after Mashooq confesses about killing Rani for her sinful act, Sardar Begum insists that he should be released, framing the murder as an act that restores honor rather than a crime. She tells Tariq her son, "It is not for you to give justice. That is for Him. And this is not about your conscience, either. It is about their honor, their loss." (Mohsin 2004, 331) In Sardar Begum's perspective the murder serves a larger purpose such as preserving the moral and social order that she values above a human life that can be someone like her granddaughter.

This emphasis on honor is a recurring theme, not just in family and community relations but also on a national scale reflecting Pakistan's ideology. The novel draws a direct connection between the personal and the political, especially in the aftermath of Pakistan's surrender to India in 1971. The national humiliation of defeat mirrors the personal humiliation individuals experience when their honor is compromised. This is evident in Barkat, Tariq's driver, who expresses deep shame upon learning that his son, a prisoner of war, had surrendered rather than died fighting in the battleground. Barkat says, he dreaded receiving that telegram telling me that my boy had died fighting. That was his worst fear and never for a moment he thought he would lay down his arms meekly like a girl. Death, he thinks, would have been preferable to this disgrace. He dramatizes how would he live down with this shame, this stain on their honor. For Barkat, the act of surrender is a greater disgrace than death, showing how the concept of honor transcends individual experience, deeply embedded in both personal and national identity. At the heart of the novel is Laila, a child whose innocence and curiosity clash with the rigid structures of power and honor that define the adult world around her. The novel defers the revelation of Rani's pregnancy until Mashooq kidnaps and murders her, centralizing Laila's perspective in the narrative. Laila, though naïve and young, is observant and filled with questions about what is happening around her. The adults in her life, however, continually dismiss and deflect her inquiries, further highlight the societal refusal to confront uncomfortable truths. Laila's honest desire to understand the world contrasts with the adults' need to preserve appearances and avoid scandal.

Laila's innocence serves as an impartial lens through which the readers can examine the complexities of belonging to a nation or a community that places so much significance on honor, social order, and power than humanity and morality. Though Rani's transition from childhood to adulthood, her experience is marked by her sexualization and ultimate victimization, it is through Laila's perspective as a child that offers a

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critical vantage point. Laila's inability to fully comprehend the tragedy surrounding her illustrates the complexities of belonging to a nation often involves in the suppression of truth and the internalization of power dynamics that has marginalized certain individuals like Rani, leaving them isolated and inaccessible even within their own families. *The End of Innocence* explores the collision between individual identities and societal structures, drawing parallels between personal honor and national pride in a larger extent. Through the characters of Sardar Begum, Mashooq, Barkat, and Laila, the novel exposes the destructive nature of rigid social hierarchies, honor codes, and the unspoken trauma that perpetuates violence in other's life indirectly. Laila's journey reveals the painful truths that others cannot or will not acknowledge, serving as a poignant commentary on the price of belonging in a society shaped by both historical and contemporary forces beyond their will and enforcement to submission to avoid exclusion is the essence of the plot movement.

V. CONCLUSION

In *The End of Innocence*, the visible and pervasive paranoia surrounding the relationships between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh is intricately woven into the narrative, often dealt with subtly yet effectively. This tension manifests through the characters' interactions, dialogues, and the societal norms that govern their lives, reflecting the historical and political anxieties that continue to shape these nations. The paranoia is rooted in a complex history marked by conflict, partition, and shifting national identities. Characters in the novel often exhibit a deep-seated fear of being perceived as disloyal or inferior, which echoes the historical animosities and mistrust between these countries. For instance, the language and attitudes displayed by characters like Sardar Begum reveal a persistent need to assert superiority and maintain control over perceived outsiders, particularly those from Bangladesh. Her derogatory remarks about Bengalis are not just personal biases but reflect a broader societal paranoia that sees those from Bangladesh as a threat to their national identity and honor. This atmosphere of suspicion extends to familial relationships, where characters navigate their roles within a society that is constantly on edge. The fear of being eschewed or dishonored influences their decisions, leading to a cycle of violence and repression. For example, Mashooq's actions are driven not only by personal trauma but also by the prevailing societal pressure to conform to rigid notions of honor and masculinity. His paranoia about losing status within his community pushes him to commit heinous acts, illustrating how deeply ingrained societal fears can lead to destructive behaviors. Moreover, the narrative structure allows for a nuanced exploration of these themes. Through Laila's perspective, the reader witnesses how this paranoia affects younger generations, creating a sense of alienation and confusion. Laila's innocent questions about the adult world often highlight the absurdity of the fears that govern their lives, as she grapples with the weight of her family's history and the expectations placed upon her. This juxtaposition of childhood innocence against the backdrop of societal paranoia underscores the profound impact of historical traumas on personal identities. Overall, the novel addresses the palpable sense of paranoia that exists between India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, capturing the intricate ways in which this fear shapes individual lives and societal dynamics. By subtly integrating these themes into the character development and plot, Mohsin invites readers to reflect on the lasting consequences of historical conflicts and the ongoing struggles for identity and belonging in a region marked by division and mistrust.

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