

Feminist Trauma Without Recovery: Why Healing Narratives Fail in Indian Women's Writing

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Abstract

This presentation looks into the category of Indian women's writing using the prism of feminist trauma ethics, particularly focusing on how feminist stories have chosen not to have 'healing arcs' and defy the imperative of recovering, reconciling, and/or redeeming. Against the hermeneutics of trauma that reads it merely as an issue that must and can be addressed, contained, and empowered away, this presentation proposes an anti-redemptive feminist approach that declares the presence of unresolved trauma as ethical truth rather than failure of narrative. Based on trauma studies, feminist approaches in narrative ethics, and feminist realism, this presentation will show how 'silences, fragments, and narrational pathologies' are deployed in feminist texts for the purpose of recording the presence of trauma. Indian feminist texts often explore trauma not as an event that happens and passes but as an enduring structure that transforms subjects, relationality, and ethics.

The article goes on to say: "Healing discourses often, instead, repeat patriarchal comfort through women's struggles refigured as inspiring journeys towards growth." Anti-recovery discourses, on the contrary, invoke "politic necessity of discomfort," recommending "duration, refusal, and survival over reconciliation." As a way of exploring "trauma without recovery" through a narrative mode and with a distinctly feminist move, this study sets out to stretch existing discourse on Indian feminist literature away from models of empowerment towards affirming that "feminist politics of opposition may pursue through pain, through lack of clarity, through uncompletion."

Keywords: Feminist trauma, Narrative refusal, Anti-recovery feminism, Feminist realism, silence, endurance, Indian women's writing

1. Introduction

Trauma has increasingly become a master sign by which female experience is discursively subsumed within current critique, often coupled with an assertive cultural hunger for healing, recovery, and closure. In current feminist interpretations, there is an assumed requisite of female trauma leading to female empowerment, wherein ache must yield to transformation, survival must issue into inspiration, and

suffering must issue into narrative redemption. However, it would seem that this critical discourse appears to be ethically enabling but might well prescribe a normalizing schema for female suffering.

The Indian women's writing tradition resists such a requirement. In varied stories influenced by factors such as caste, gender, class, domestic violence, political turmoil, and travails in history, trauma does not get represented as an interval or occurrence. Rather, the experience resists resolution in many feminist texts. Silence and fragmentation in such works get rendered not as moments of failed representation, or attempts, but appropriate modes of representation of the reality of trauma.

The paper thus argues that unrecovered feminist trauma forms a fundamental narrative mode in Indian women's writing. The study reads unresolved trauma as feminist realism and ethical resistance rather than treating it as pessimism or lack of empowerment. Trauma does not get resolved because the structures which produce trauma remain intact. Healing narratives often serve patriarchal comfort by suggesting that pain can be overcome without dismantling the systems which produce pain.

By foregrounding endurance over recovery, Indian women's writing expands feminist discourse beyond therapeutic models of closure and insists that unresolved trauma can be a politically meaningful and ethically honest form of feminist truth.

2. Review of Literature

Critical interaction with trauma narratives has widened largely due to the trickle-down effect of trauma studies, feminist criticism, and narrative ethics. Research has been conducted to understand how trauma impacts memory, language, and temporality, which leads to disintegrative forms of subjectivity and narrative. Additionally, feminist criticism has underscored how structural violence, such as domestic, national, or caste-related patriarchy, shapes the trauma experience of women, as opposed to their being singular incidents.

In literary analysis, readings on the representation of trauma have long represented a way towards healing through testimony, voice, and catharsis. Feminist readings in particular celebrate stories of transformation from silence to voice, envisioning voice itself as a way towards recovery and empowerment. Yet these readings also tend towards diminishing the problem of trauma into a solvable issue that needs closure as a matter of ethics.

In the context of Indian feminist literary criticism, there are analyses of how female writing addresses violence, domestic incarceration, caste patriarchy, and historical disruption. Yet, there is still an underlying presumption that for feminist narrative, transformation or liberation is necessarily its aim. Unresolved endings, silence, and moral complexity are regarded more commonly as "tragic" than as deliberate elements of female writing.

This paper fills this gap by examining trauma without recovery as a purposeful feminist aesthetic and ethical strategy. This argument is made because a large number of women's texts by Indian women are resistant to a therapeutic recovery because the trauma is inextricably embedded within the structural frameworks. Silence and fragmentation are used, not as a moment of narrative failure, but rather as aesthetic strategies in refusing the patriarchal mandate for recovery. This paper proposes a model for the interpretation of trauma in terms of endurance, refusal, and witnessing.

3. Theoretical Framework

This work draws on trauma theory, feminist narrative ethics, and feminist realism to develop trauma without recovery as a feminist representational strategy. Trauma theory insists that trauma be viewed not as an event but rather as a disruption consistent in repetition, fragmentation, and unassimilated memory. Traumatic experience often resists full narration; it returns as silence or as disjointed recollection or emotional numbness. It also gives reason as to why most narratives are incoherent and sometimes refuse to offer closure.

Feminist narrative ethics further shapes this analysis by prioritizing ethical complexity over moral satisfaction. It resists interpretive frameworks that demand healing, transformation, or redemption as a prime evidence of agency. Instead, feminist narrative ethics privileges constrained choice, vulnerability, and the structural conditions rendering recovery uneven or impossible. In such an approach, refusal, silence, and unresolved endings count as ethically weighted rather than narratively inadequate.

A third axis, feminist realism reaches toward a recognition that resistance by women within patriarchy often occurs without triumph. It interoperates the notion of liberation as an inevitable outcome in the models based on empowerment. It therefore foregrounds endurance, compromise, and emotional cost as truths for feminism.

Taken together, these frameworks enable the paper to theorize anti-recovery narratives as politically resonant feminist discourse. Trauma without recovery is not pessimism; it is ethical honesty. It insists that healing cannot be demanded from women when the conditions producing trauma remain structurally intact. Refusal of closure becomes a feminist strategy that resists narrative domestication of suffering.

4. Trauma as Structure: Beyond the Event Model

However, an important drawback of the healing-oriented models is their tendency to focus on trauma as an incident that concludes—with a crisis to be told, to process, and to move beyond. The women's writing of India often resists the incident model, presenting trauma as an embedded event in everyday life, constructed in and through institutions such as the institution of marriage, family, caste, and national violence. Trauma is neither spectacular nor instantaneous. It can often be slow.

In the domestic, the trauma of women appears in the form of erasure, coercive intimacies, and endurance. In caste, trauma appears in the form of humiliation, exclusion, and vulnerability. In the political, trauma appears in the form of displacement, insecurity, and inherited fear. These forms and types of trauma cannot obviously be cured by the enterprise of recovery, because they are produced by structures, and the structures are unchanged.

Through the trope of trauma as structure, these Indian feminist narratives refuse closure. This is because such narratives challenge the notion that a woman can “heal” and stay within the same oppressive structure. Trauma now becomes norm rather than exception to patriarchy. In this way, trauma without recovery provides a commentary on the liberal feminism that views suffering as a personal problem.

However, in the case of structural trauma, the issue of healing further complicates the topic. The stories of recovery tend to translate trauma into personal journeys of growth, thus annihilating any responsibility on the part of the political structure. The Indian women's writing genre resists such treatment. It firmly establishes the need to keep trauma in sight, not healed, as the social structure continues to cause trauma.

5. Silence as Trauma-Form: Ethical Opacity and the Refusal of Confession

Silence in trauma narratives gets read as a manifestation of repression or victimhood. Feminist ethics of trauma facilitates a reading of silence as a possible form that represents the resistant aspect of trauma to narration. A vast number of women's texts in Indian culture challenge the confession because it usually has a comforting patriarchal aspect. Women are compelled to make pain readable.

Silence is transformed into ethical opacity, and this refers to a situation where trauma is resistant to language. In patriarchal societies, for instance, women's testimonies are presumed to be dubious, moralized, and turned into a liability. Silence may serve the purpose of preserving subjectivity in cases where words are hazardous. In this case, trauma is not narrated in patriarchal societies to be cured, and this is because trauma in such societies is intensified by the reaction to narration.

Indian feminist narratives commonly portray women as carriers of trauma, their voice being unrevealed or unresolved in society, not due to being voiceless, but due to their voice being structurally silenced. Silence is the format in which trauma is reproduced. Silence is not a space; instead, it is filled with memory, fear, and unresolved sadness.

Significantly, the silence is not romanticized either. It is portrayed as painful and isolating. Nevertheless, the silence is still found to be ethically important. Indeed, the application of the feminist concept of trauma without recovery acknowledges the realization that women do not have to speak out about the trauma as a way to seek validation and legitimacy either.

6. Fragmented Narratives: Temporal Disruption and the Afterlife of Violence

In many texts by Indian women writers, trauma is conveyed through non-linear forms of narration: those that do not have linear time structures but interrupted narratives of memory. This reflects the structure of trauma, as trauma is not linear but provides repeated returns.

Healing stories tend to follow an orderly sequence: there is pain, there is pain processing, and then there is healing. Anti-recovery stories subvert this chronology. Trauma's afterlife constructs subjectivity well beyond the occurrence. Women can live with trauma as a parameter, impacting relations, corporeality, and identity.

Fragmentation also resists closure. Where narratives refuse neat endings, they refuse the logic that trauma must be resolved in order for a text to be complete. This refusal, within Indian feminist discourse, really challenges the cultural demands that women must "move on." The narrative remains open because the wound remains structurally present.

Fragmented form is thus political: it does not allow for the domestication of violence into moral lesson. It resists the transformation of trauma into inspirational story. Instead, it keeps trauma ethically discomfiting - unresolved harm with which the readers must engage.

Using fragmentation, Indian women's writing extends feminist literary discourse beyond realist closure and therapeutic satisfaction. It makes form itself a feminist gesture: a refusal of narrative repair that mirrors the impossibility of repair in women's lived realities under patriarchy.

7. The Failure of Healing Arcs: Patriarchal Comfort and Narrative Domestication

Healing stories always offer ethical release: trauma will be over, the subject will heal, the story will close. While soothing, it may offer a problematic form of patriarchal domestication for pain stories told by women. The pain is transformed into positive progress because trauma has value if it results in empowerment.

In Indian feminist scholarship, such stories might perpetuate disparate norms. Women are charged with healing, but patriarchy persists. Healing, in this way, becomes a duty, not justice. Rather, it rests with the woman, a moral burden, a responsibility to heal. This, in turn, puts the healing process under a different type of control.

Moreover, healing trajectories may demand coherence. Women need to tell their pain in a coherent way, identify the lesson, and heal the relationships. However, trauma makes it difficult to allow for confusion, anger, disengagement, and refusal. Anti-recovery narratives defy all expectations through a refusal to provide moral statements and healing.

Much Indian women's writing represents trauma as unresolved because social repair is absent. Institutions refuse justice to women, communities blame survivors, and the family demands silence. Under these conditions, healing becomes impossible or ethically suspect. To heal too quickly would mean forgetting structural violence.

By rejecting healing arcs, the Indian feminist narrative retains the political force of trauma. It does not make any suffering morally useful. Trauma without recovery becomes a feminist critique of cultures that demand women's resilience instead of dismantling the conditions that injure them.

8. Endurance as Feminist Ethics: Survival Without Redemption

Trauma without recovery does not deny agency; it redefines it. Instead of empowerment, agency appears as endurance. Survival becomes feminist ethics when living itself becomes resistance. Yet endurance is not celebrated as heroic triumph but precisely as costly persistence under structural violence.

Indian feminist narratives predominantly depict women performing the quotidian while living with trauma. They continue relationships, care work, and survival routines with unresolved harm. The endurance thus produced problematizes frameworks that equate agency with liberation since, for most women, liberation is structurally unavailable. It is only the act of resistance that takes the form of endurance. Feminist ethics knows that survival is not a passivity. It involves emotional labour, boundary-

making, and refusal of total collapse. To endure would also involve refuse: refuse to forgive prematurely, to reconcile, and to narrate trauma as lesson.

Notably, resilience is still morally complex. It can mean compromise. It can mean staying in oppressive structures. Anti-recovery feminism does not judge such decisions. Rather, it places these decisions in context. In positing endurance rather than victory as a basis for feminist ethics, Indian women's writing enlarges and transforms the scope of feminist thought. This body of writing demands that women's lives themselves benefit from neither redemption nor remedy. Trauma without healing yields a female truth of resistance without victory, of agency without closure, of survival with unhealable wounds.

9. Feminist Trauma Without Triumph: Agency That Remains Unfinished

One of the defining features of trauma without recovery narratives is the refusal of triumph. Women do not overcome trauma in a restitutive fashion whereby wholeness is regained, rather subjectivity remains fractured. This unfinished agency challenges liberal feminist models who would treat empowerment in terms of coherent selfhood.

Indian feminist narratives often resist closure as at stake is the lie that comes with the close. Trauma does not resolve itself because justice does not resolve itself. The patriarchal structures remain in place and unshaken. To offer triumph would be a betrayal of realism. Realism insists that women's resistance is often incomplete, ethically painful, and socially punished.

This partial agency is politically powerful. It declines the cultural insistence that suffering by women must be made inspirational. It declines the demand that trauma be narratively useful. In remaining partial, trauma resists consumption.

Thus, anti-recovery feminism is an ethical move. They argue that women have the right to be wounded, angry, and unsettled without being stigmatized as being in failure. Feminist agency is now presented in the context of refusal and not resolution.

These narratives open the field of Indian feminism by offering legitimate subject positions. They understand that trauma irreversibly alters the lives of women. They do not hold out hope for recovery but test the afterlife of trauma. The implication of undetermined agency is not pessimistic; it is feminist truth.

10. Conclusion

This paper has also claimed that Indian women's writing tends to set up a feminist trauma narrative that embodies a refusal of recovery, a refusal of cure and redemptive resolution. Instead of figuring a traumatic disturbance that can be recovered from through testimony or empowerment, a narrative of recovery can be shown in many feminist narratives as a structural quality that a narrative refuses to resolve. Silence, fragmentation, and refusals have a positive function in literature that will be opposed to failure.

By engaging with trauma theory, feminist narrative ethics, and feminist realism, it has been argued throughout this paper that healing stories regularly enable patriarchal consolation, which subsumes women's pain in terms of moral growth and designates this, in turn, as the responsibility of women

themselves. Anti-recovery feminism opposes this ethical mandate. According to anti-recovery feminism, women are under no compulsion to heal, to forgive, or to reconcile in order for women to be recognized as agents.

The article has also discussed how instead of recovery, survival becomes a feminist ethics in these texts. Resistance becomes embedded in survival, survival as a boundary maker, survival through the refusal of confession, and through the right to remain incomplete. Trauma without recovery becomes a widening horizon of Indian feminist literary studies in terms of empowerment discourses.

Finally, feminist trauma without recovery asserts that pain can have political substance when it is not resolved. By resisting narrative resolution, the Indian women's narrative maintains the visibility of trauma as truth and holds accountable the structures that create that truth. In effect, the text asserts that feminist resistance is not necessarily the conduit to feminist triumph and that it can be the act of endurance in an unhealed world.

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