

Nexus of Loss and Gain in Translating Memory, Traumatized Memory and Memorized Trauma in Partition Literature: A Comparative Study of Ghatak, Manto, and Haque

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Abstract:

This research explores the complex phenomena of “loss and gain” in terms of translating memory; the unique challenges prevailed in partition diaspora literature. The research gap identified lies in the under-explored area of how diaspora writers, who act as translators of their own memories, navigate through the intricacies of cultural and linguistic loss in narrating personal and collective trauma. This study shows that partition literature reflects a translated testimony of memory and traumatized memory, where loss is inevitable, and any potential gain, particularly the reclamation of a lost homeland, remains elusive. Through a descriptive-analytical methodology, the research examines selected works of Ritwik Ghatak, Saadat Hasan Manto, and Hasan Azizul Haque, aiming to uncover how diaspora writers translate not only historical events but also personal and collective traumas. The study also assesses how memory, particularly when it is both traumatized and memorized, affects the translation process. Analyzing the nexus of loss and gain the findings suggest that while loss dominates the translation of such experiences, any notion of gain is symbolic, representing the unreachable desire to reconnect with a lost identity. This research contributes to the discourse on translation studies by proposing that the “gain” in translating such memories is not in recovering what was lost but in preserving the authenticity of the trauma. No word but silence can compensate for this irreparable loss. The conclusion emphasizes the significance of partition literature as a vessel for understanding the diasporic experience of loss, memory, and identity where translation suffers from chronic loss and *gain* is almost unreachable like the gain of lost home.

Keywords: *Partition Diaspora Literature, Translation, Memory, Traumatized Memory, Memorized Trauma, Loss and Gain*

"Yeh daagh daagh ujala, yeh shabgazeeda sahar, woh intizar tha jiska woh yeh sahar to nahin" (This stain-covered daybreak, this night-bitten dawn. This dawn is not that dawn we craved for) — *Poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Subh-e-Azadi: The Paradoxes of Partition, 193* (A dawn has been lost, and the craving for regaining the loss remains alive.)

Loss and Gain—two words around which the world revolves—are also central to the field of translation studies, particularly in the context of “Loss, Compensation, and Gain,” which are complex phenomena that translators face in almost all types of translations, especially in interlingual translation. The degree or extent of loss increases when the translator, language, and culture differ from the source. But what happens when the narrator himself is the translator of his own memory, living far from the original source? Can all loss be compensated for, or is it possible for a loss to be a gain in itself?

This research posits that some losses can never be regained; however, in certain instances, only loss can compensate for loss, thereby turning it into the highest form of gain. Examples of this paradox are embedded in the vast body of works labeled *Partition Diaspora Literature*, which translate the loss of home. These works serve not merely as translations but as testimonies of traumatized memory and the embodied trauma of diasporic minds. Here, loss translates the trauma of a displaced mind, and gain becomes almost unreachable, much like the recovery of a lost home. In such contexts, only loss can compensate for loss, and all other attempts at compensation are essentially efforts to preserve the authenticity of trauma.

To narrow down this qualitative research, selected works of Ritwik Ghatak, Saadat Hasan Manto, and Hasan Azizul Haque are analyzed. These three writers are prominent figures in Partition literature who also merit recognition as diaspora writers. During the Partition of India in 1947, they themselves were displaced from their homeland, and their subsequent works reflect the plight and trauma of expatriated diasporic people, haunted by their experiences of homelessness in a hostland. Their works testify to the deep diasporic feelings of home loss, identity loss, and the loss of life’s meaning that continue to haunt them.

Haunted by the aftermath of Partition, even years later, Ritwik Ghatak created his *Partition Trilogy*—*Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961), and *Subarna Rekha* (1965). Saadat Hasan Manto wrote stories such as *Toba Tek Singh* (1955) and *The Dog of Tetwal* (1955), while Hasan Azizul Haque produced works like *Uttar Basanta* (1964), *Khancha* (1964), *Trishna* (1964), and *Maree* (1967), among others. These works capture the landscape of Partition, its aftermath, and the crisis, dilemma, sacrifice, and agony of home loss that linger within the displaced subject. Living in two lands simultaneously, these writers transform into translators of their own

memories. Their works encapsulate both traumatic memories and memorized trauma.

In this context, memory functions as the Source Text (ST), while the stories or films represent the Target Text (TT). The writer or narrator, in this case, becomes the translator of his own memory. This memory is made up of the nostalgia for the homeland, the trauma of losing it, and the long-lasting imprint of that trauma. In other words, their literary works are outputs of Derridian hauntology. Analysis of certain textual references will clarify this further:

Sadat Hasan Manto, a noteworthy partition diaspora writer who had to migrate from India to Pakistan during Partition. He has written a number of short stories depicting the memory, trauma of partition. If we take just one story, Toba Tek Singh, we can estimate Manto's translation of diasporic feeling, traumatized memory, identity crisis etc. In this story, we see, the old and harmless lunatic Bishan Singh poses a serious problem that nuances the policies pertaining to the exchanges of lunatics—a decision that was manually agreed upon by the two Nations. The delirious lunatic who is supposed to be sent to India in the process, refuses to budge at the Wagah border and comes up with the searching question - "Where is Toba Tek Singh?" He queries about his hometown and though deranged in mind, he is anchored to the mooring of his belongingness and the space he could call his own. Keeping in synchrony with the theme of insanity, the narrator in the story reports that everyone calls the main character "Toba Tek Singh, ie. by the name of his hometown (though in the whole course of the story we never actually hear anyone doing so). And the narrator himself refers to him as 'Bishan Singh/ Bashan Singh' (in certain editions). Thus, the readers are drawn into the mad-house, entangled with the pitfalls and are left confused as to what to consider - Toba Tek Singh, the man, or Toba Tek Singh, the sense of a space / locale? Toba Tek Singh', simply put, is a superimposition of the two that also creates a new space of anguish that any Partition-traumatized psyche can call his/her own. And that is an allegorical translation of Manto's traumatized psyche as well. In fact, realism abounds in the horseplay between various lunatics and new philosophical meanings are crafted of the post-Partition political scenario. Manto translated his traumatic memories of chaos, aftermath of partition, identity crisis well in his other stories like Khol Do, Dog of Tetwal, Kali Salwar, Thanda gosht . Where he faced loss he compensated it with metaphores and allegory.

Riwik Ghatak, like Manto, survived the trauma physically but psychologically, the culture shock was never overcome by Ghatak. As such, the entire oeuvre of his cinematic aesthetics, whether re-created by mnemonic movements or characterized by aphasia, is built, engendered and ontologically determined by this single fact of Partition and its trauma. What is interesting to note in this context, however, is that Partition persists as a spectral after-thought in his cinema. His films, unlike his popular non-cinematic statements,

do not overtly emphasize his resentment of contemporary real-politics and the historical menace called Partition. Instead, the attempt to read his film narratives, especially the popularly identified Partition trilogy comprising of *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (Cloud Capped Star, 1960), *Komal Gandhar* (E-Hat, 1961) and *Subannarekha* (The Golden Line, 1962) as simple Partition narratives is instantly unsettled. It is for this reason that Ghatak is found persistently coming up with different strategies to un-address, sometimes almost to the level of a refusal, in tackling with, the memory, post-memory or any explicit reading of the event of Partition through his creations. This unsettling paranoia between the man, as an extremely aware ideological activist, and the artist, compelled from within by an extremely sensitive creativity, leads to an inevitable aporia in Ghatak's understanding and expression of the trauma of the big event in his films. There is hardly any doubt that Partition and its massive implications are the constituents of Ghatak's essential creative oeuvre, though the event finds indirect treatments in most of his film narratives, leaving aside the one important exception of *Komal Gandhar* (E-Flat) in 1961. Ghatak himself seems to be well aware of this aporia in his creative imagination, as he makes a very rational reply on the bearing of the refugee issue in his films during the course of one interview:

"It doesn't affect me directly. It does in a broader sense, in an indirect way, in a subliminal way. Film-making is a question you know, of your subconscious, your feeling of reality. I have tackled the refugee 'problem', as you have used the term, not as a refugee problem. To me it was the division of a culture and I was shocked. During the Partition period I hated these pretentious people who clamored about our independence, our freedom. You kids are finished, you have not seen that Bengal of mine. I just kept on watching what was happening, how the behavior pattern was changing due to this great betrayal of national liberation. And I probably gave vent to what I felt. Today I am not happy, and whatever I have seen unconsciously or consciously comes out in

my films. My films may have been ridden with expressive slogan-mongering or they may be remote. But the cardinal point remains: that I am frustrated with what I see all around me, I am tired of it." (Ghatak 1987: 80)

Ritwik used to say about the philosophy of cinema, "Film-making is not an esoteric thing to me. I consider film-making to start with a personal thing. If a person does not have a vision of his own, he cannot create the personal experience of partition". He asserts, "I could neither accept the partition of Bengal in those days any ways nor do I today. Whatever happened in history will not alter and I won't venture to do this impossible task. The cultural segregation caused by politics and economics was a thing to which I never reconciled myself as I always thought in terms of cultural integration."

The agony of partition that Ritwik had to endure throughout his life, seems to be his offering or translation in his works.

The agony for this partition or segregation and the cultural integration Ritwik proclaims, he portrayed or translated in his cinema named *Komal Gandhar* (E Flat/ A Soft Note on a Sharp Scale) made in 1961. The theme of this film is the union of two Bengals.

The members of the theater group of the same area divided to form two separate groups. The newcomer members Anusuya of the group Dakkhinapath and Bhriugu of the other group 'Nirkkha' are the main characters of the cinema. They both are uprooted, deported from East Bengal due to partition. Shattered dreams and having new dreams in this illusion of hope and despair the stand of Bhriugu and Anusuya is the subject of the film. However the film is starting with a very staggering dialogue: Why will I go? Make me understand. Why should I leave this lovely country, my river Padma? Why should I leave?.... All of us are cursed, why was I born on the bank on Padma?..I disowned my mother today! My own mother..This is the yard where I gave water to my mother lastly.." (*Komal Gandhar*, 3.50min- 5.15min)

This very first scene or dialogue of the film translates Ritwik's unacceptance of partition, his denial to be a refugee, his nostalgia, his traumatic memory, his agony of losing his mother and home.. He has continued this attempt all through the movie. Later we see that there is a rail- line on the bank of Padma near Murshidabad, which was like a plus sign in undivided Bengal has somehow become a minus sign from where the country was cut off into two pieces. Bhriugu and Anusuya recapitulate their memories standing on that border, but the reality is they will never be able to go back there, that is a foreign country. (*Komal Gandhar*, 34.40min-37.39min). We see that Ritwik Ghatak could translate his feeling of nostalgia, his trauma, his loneliness, alienation, the fact of loss of home in his work with linguistic support and background sound. But if we critically analyze we find that the void feeling of pure loss of home, an irreparable loss can't be translated by Ritwik linguistically. Here he faced loss. And he has tried to compensate for this loss with "silence". The overwhelming silence that pervades the reminiscent scene of Anusua and Bhriugu translates the void feeling, the irreparable loss of home more than any words. (*Komal Gandhar*, 32.40min-33.06min)

And this feeling of homelessness, this traumatic memory and memorized trauma never leave these diaspora souls. Their scar is incurable as in Meghe Dhaka Tara: "Repair? Will you be

able to repair my heart – will you? So that I can enjoy Wordsworth again?" His deep-rooted nostalgia has shattered him irrevocably. Through this agony and shouting Ritwik translated his own traumatic agony. He was haunted by

this agony and trauma. He was obsessed with the nostalgia of his homeland, the tragic effect of partition and the agony of irreparable loss of home.

None other than Satyajit Ray was aware of this subtle mnemonic manipulations of Ghatak while refusing, negotiating, addressing or exhibiting his pathological engagement with the issue of Partition and detects the same engagement as the fundamental component of Ghatak's imagination in his significant preface to Ghatak's book *Cinema and I*.

“Thematically, Ritwik’s lifelong obsession was with the tragedy of partition. He

himself hailed from what was once East Bengal where he had deep roots. It is

rarely that a director dwells so single mindedly on the same theme. It only

serves to underline the depth of his feeling for the subject.” (Ghatak 1987: 12)

Like the films Ghatak's short stories such as “Sarak” (“The Road”, 2018b) and “Sfatikpatra” (“The Crystal Goblet”, 2018a), also translates the hues of nostalgia and the pain of longing that the estranged self-experiences in the fractured and fragmented purview of Partition. The same translations are found in short stories of Hasan Azizul Haque, who migrated from West Bengal to the then East Pakistan, currently Bangladesh. In his short story, ‘Uttar Basante, he translates the feeling of rootlessness by narrating that “...জীবনটা জীর্ণ ন্যাকড়ার মত বাতাসে উড়ছে” (...

Life is like a worn-out rag flying in the wind)” In Maree Hasan translates the sufferings of refugee in hostland, In “Parabasi” he translates the agony of a diaspora soul by narrating, “ তার চোখের পানিতে ধূসর হয়ে এলো দুটো পৃথিবী - একটি সে ছেড়ে এলো এবং যেখানে সে আছে (Two world became blurry in her tears-the one she had left and the one where he lives in)”.

This research finds that the narrators or translators convey the historical realities of violence during the Partition, its far-reaching effects on individuals, and the distress, crisis, and dilemmas faced by those displaced. The narrators also attempt to capture the sacrifices and struggles of the migrant populations, especially as they navigate the complex journey of redefining their identities. The challenges faced in translating these traumatic histories are significant, but the narrators encounter minimal loss in their translation of factual events. However, the complexity increases when they try to translate the more intangible emotions, such as the feeling of void, the agony of homelessness, and the rootlessness experienced by the displaced. These

emotions defy adequate linguistic equivalents, as they are often beyond the reach of conventional language (Hatim & Munday, 2019).

At times, the translators attempt to compensate for these untranslatable feelings with other words, though they often find these compensatory choices inadequate. In some instances, the translators resort to silence, which, paradoxically, becomes a powerful mode of translation. The loss of home, as an emotional and existential crisis, represents what Žižek (2008) refers to as a "sublime catastrophe"—a kind of loss so profound that it defies full representation. According to Žižek, it is impossible to truly contextualize such a human catastrophe, as all attempts to represent it in literary or cultural forms inevitably fall short. Similarly, the translators' efforts to communicate the trauma of losing one's home can never fully succeed because language itself fails to encapsulate such profound loss.

However, the absence of words, the silence in translation, acts as a space for both loss and gain. The silence represents the unattainable linguistic loss—the inability to express the full weight of home's loss in a foreign language—and the loss of home itself. This silence, while not an equivalent, becomes the most effective means of conveying the trauma of homelessness, a phenomenon that language cannot fully encapsulate. In this sense, loss and gain are intertwined, as the silence, a paradox in itself, becomes a form of gain by serving as a conduit for the emotional depth of the trauma (Ghatak, 1987). The silence, which represents the linguistic gap, is also an attempt to communicate the irretrievable nature of the lost home. Thus, in some contexts, loss itself can be seen as the gain, creating a scenario where the untranslatable loss of home is represented not through words, but through the very absence of them.

This theme of loss as a form of gain is evident in the works of poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who eloquently captures this eternal search for a lost home. In his poem *Dil-e-man, musafir-e-man*, Faiz (2000) writes, "In every stranger's face I searched / The maps to my home," illustrating the ceaseless and unfulfilled search for a home that remains unreachable. The poet's words reflect the diaspora's constant quest for a sense of belonging, a search that never reaches its destination.

Similarly, Ritwik Ghatak, in his cinematic works, persistently returns to the imagery of the overarching tree and the river, symbols that underscore the search for the lost utopian home. Ghatak's films, such as *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961), and *Subarna Rekha* (1965), offer a cinematic representation of this search for home, framed by the river Padma, a place that signifies both memory and loss. His characters, like Sita and her son Binu in *Subarna Rekha*, embody this endless search for a new home, where Binu poignantly asks, "Is there our new home?" This sentiment encapsulates the

feeling of displacement that pervades Ghatak's portrayal of Partition trauma (Ghatak, 2003).

For the displaced subject, memory is often a complex juxtaposition of nostalgia and trauma. The memory of home, which sublimates into a broader concept of "homeland," exists within a contradictory space. On the one hand, there is a deep desire to mourn the loss of the homeland, but on the other, this mourning is entangled with the trauma that the loss of homeland evokes. Mishra (2007) notes that "the traumatic moment may be seen as crystallizing that loss, as a sign around which memory gives itself to the past" (p. 8). This crystallization of trauma, where the displaced self becomes fragmented by the loss, serves as the foundation for the displaced subject's quest for home. This quest is, ultimately, a search for a home that can never be fully regained.

The notion of home, for the displaced individual, exists not in the present but in the past, outside of the temporal and spatial context of the present moment. The lost home remains forever out of reach, and the feeling of its loss becomes an eternal void. This void, which words cannot adequately translate, creates a silence—a "black hole" of sorts—that simultaneously reflects the loss of home and compensates for it in the translation process. In this way, the silence is both a linguistic absence and an emotional presence that conveys the inexpressible nature of loss.

In analyzing the interplay between loss and gain in translation, this research suggests that while loss often dominates the experience of translating the trauma of Partition, any notion of gain is symbolic. Gain represents the unreachable desire to reconnect with a lost identity, one that cannot be fully realized through language. Even when the narrator attempts to compensate for the loss of home, they are left with no better alternative than silence. Thus, silence emerges as the most effective form of gain in this context. These paradoxical findings, which may seem to contradict each other, ultimately reinforce one another, much like the "binary opposites" that underpin our understanding of language itself (Hutcheon, 2000).

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