

Trauma, Memory, and Silence: Examining PTSD in the Women Characters of Country of Goodbyes by Mridula Garg

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Abstract

This study critically discusses the memory and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) experienced by the four women characters in the novel *Country of Good-byes* (2003) by Mridula Garg, who got the Shahitya Akademi Award in 2013, the highest national literary award in India. She is widely acclaimed as a bilingual author, writing in Hindi and English on the socio-political issues of women in India. The study examines the various dimensions of trauma and its causes faced by the women characters, Smita Marianne, Narmada, and Aseema, who are trapped in the vicious vagaries of their lives. Through the prism of traumatic theory, the study investigates the psychological underpinnings encompassing their emotional, behavioral, physical, and familial perspectives. Moreover, by implementing the qualitative method, this analysis deals with the other paradigms of traumatized memory predominantly in those women characters who, in the novel, toil hard to connect across a chasm of loneliness, disappointment, and miserable dysfunctional relationships. Furthermore, it elucidates and, at the same time, exemplifies a plethora of post-traumatic disorder symptoms associated with mental health, cognition, and dissociative disorders. The study addresses and resolves how those women characters (re)construct their true identities after revisiting their past traumatic events. The study shows the radical approach of the author, who, by situating those women characters in tumultuous social milieus, tries to advocate the fact that despite undergoing many traumatic tribulations in their lives, they venture to break the social stereotypes associated with the category 'women'.

Keywords: Memory, PTSD, Trauma, Gender, Narrative

1. Introduction

The proximity between trauma and literature has claimed a consummate position in the arena of interdisciplinary studies (Caruth, 1996). The confluence of these disciplines has invariably paved the way for readers to build a robust inclination towards the traumatic aspect of any literary text. Tracing back to the historical chronicles, it is recorded that the elements of trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (hereafter PTSD), one of its engendered offshoots, were there even in the literary antiquities, and it has continued to the literature of this new millennium and beyond as well ("VA.gov | Veterans Affairs," n.d.). It is to be argued that where there is an indulgence in the individual psyche and functions of

thoughts and memories, trauma is palpable both in explicit and implicit forms that determine the subsequent course of that individual. One of the most erudite theorists of trauma studies, Ted Morrissey, points out:

There is no doubt that these traumatic events will manifest themselves in the work of writers, poets, artists, and every sort of creative person for years and even decades to come. Literary trauma theory, as discussed here, seeks to recognize the characteristics of the traumatized psyche, especially in works of fiction (Morrissey, 2021, p.5).

Before delving deep into analytical discussions, there has to be a precise perception of the traumatic orientation termed PTSD that fundamentally attacks an individual's psyche, causing it to invite some unwanted instincts and eccentric behaviors in place of commonly understood 'normal conduct'. This disorder instigates and triggers the 'associative process' of the mind, wherein an unpleasant memory pulls a train of similar memories. In such a condition, the balance of the psyche is challenged. Post-traumatic stress is a negative and unhealthy syndrome of anxiety, extreme depression, emotional vulnerability, and, most importantly, the over-retrospection and flashbacks of abominable experiences and stress that surpass the limits of one's endurance (Kaplan et al., 1997). Traumatic experiences are emphatic, excruciating, and sometimes enraging in nature, both in men, but the orbits of women-centric activities are defined and manipulated to a great extent by male dominance. Through the critical analysis of the novel *Country of Goodbyes* by the eminent Indian woman author Mridula Garg, it is found that the novel unfolds the four different traumatic stories of four women who, smitten by the radical desire to go for the quest of their independent subjectivity and having undergone painstaking traumatic circumstances, emerge as new women of the era. Characters are individuals that appear in plays or novels and have moral tendencies that are communicated through their words and actions (Abrams, 1981).

In recent decades, the intersection of trauma and literature has emerged as a highly productive area of interdisciplinary research. Literary texts, particularly those focusing on women's experiences, have become critical sites for examining the psychological, cultural, and emotional complexities of trauma. The novel *Country of Goodbyes* (2003) by Mridula Garg exemplifies this interrelation, offering a deeply introspective portrayal of women whose lives are marked by memory, silence, and psychic disintegration. Through the exploration of the emotional landscapes of Smita, Marianne, Narmada, and Aseema, Garg unravels the layered realities of female existence within India's patriarchal society. Her narrative extends beyond personal suffering to address the collective condition of women who inhabit spaces of vulnerability, displacement, and resistance. Trauma theory, as developed by scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Judith Herman, provides a conceptual framework for examining the haunting aftermath of distressing experiences. Caruth's notion of trauma as an "unclaimed experience" foregrounds the idea that trauma resists full articulation, manifesting instead in fragmented memories, dreams, and bodily sensations. In the context of Garg's female characters, this becomes evident through their oscillation between remembering and forgetting, between expressing pain and retreating into silence. Their fractured narratives mirror the non-linear temporality of trauma itself, suggesting that recovery is not a straightforward process but a gradual reassembly of identity. The significance of *Country of Goodbyes* lies not only in its psychological depth but also in its feminist intervention. Garg's writing exposes the emotional violence embedded within domestic, religious, and social institutions that regulate women's lives. Her portrayal of trauma is not confined to overt acts of abuse but extends to the subtle, systemic forms of subjugation that erode women's sense of self. The novel underscores how cultural expectations of chastity, obedience, and endurance perpetuate psychic suffering, thereby linking individual

trauma to structural inequities. This study, therefore, positions *Country of Goodbyes* as a text that negotiates between personal and collective histories of trauma. It investigates how Garg's narrative technique—through introspection, stream of consciousness, and temporal fragmentation—replicates the workings of traumatic memory. The psychological dissonance of her characters serves as a mirror to the broader cultural anxieties surrounding gender, autonomy, and selfhood in post-liberalization India. Moreover, the study emphasizes the role of memory as both a wound and a means of recovery: it is through confronting the past that the characters begin to reclaim their identities. By engaging trauma and memory theories, this paper seeks to demonstrate that Garg's novel transcends its fictional boundaries to make a socio-psychological commentary on women's resilience. It presents trauma not merely as an endpoint of suffering but as a transformative force that propels self-awareness and emancipation. In doing so, *Country of Goodbyes* situates itself within the evolving tradition of Indian women's writing that redefines narrative agency through the lens of pain, survival, and renewal.

1.1 Psychological Approach

Psychology might be defined as the study of human behavior and its motifs (Hilgard et al., 1991). This is so because human behaviors and conduct are seen as tangible and measured, but the functioning mind behind them deals with abstraction. By tracing the actions of an individual in his or her everyday life, it outlines and sets a conceptualization about the nature of the individual. The psychoanalytic analysis reveals those things and facts that were found dormant in the psyche for a long period of time (Storr, 2001). Before the treatment of any traumatic mind, retrospective analysis is as prerequisite as taking a blood sample before major surgery. In the opinion of Freud, any literary text is a repository of the sublimated thoughts that may or may not necessarily be the outcome of traumatic experiences. In addition, psychology plays a crucial role in deciphering the reasons and motifs behind the development of characters in literary texts. On the other hand, the readers respond to those characters by formulating a community, as Stanley Fish terms 'interpretive community' ("Stanley Fish's Theory of the Interpretive Community: A Rhetoric for Our Time? On JSTOR," n.d.)

1.2 Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

The American Psychiatric Association (APA), one of the most recognized institutes, deals with individuals with PTSD who have powerful and distressing thoughts and feelings related to their experiences that persist long after the traumatic event has finished. PTSD responds to traumatic experiences with anxiety and sorrow; they will continue to reminisce about the occurrence and avoid things that will remind them. Irritability, loss of concentration, loss of interest in interacting with the environment, feeling alienated from others, and having nightmares are all symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Davison, 2006). Researchers have carried out related studies on PTSD in many circumstances (Gea, 2018; Rai, 2020; Silalahi & Saragih, 2021; Fadillah, 2021). Meanwhile, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms are divided into four parts: re-experiencing symptoms, avoidance symptoms, mood and cognitive changes, and arousal and activity symptoms (Schiraldi, 2009). The profound "feelings of detachment or estrangement from others" is the hallmark condition of posttraumatic stress disorder (Regier et al., 2013).

2. Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to examine how the women characters in *Country of Goodbyes* navigate the psychological aftermath of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. It seeks to analyse how their fragmented identities and emotional breakdowns reflect both personal and collective dimensions of suf-

fering. The paper further aims to explore how Mridula Garg's narrative embodies the socio-cultural and gendered constructs that contribute to trauma among Indian women. By foregrounding the characters' internalized distress, the study aspires to understand the processes of memory reconstruction and self-realization that lead to emotional resilience and healing.

3. Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative interpretative approach grounded in textual analysis and supported by trauma and memory theories. Since *Country of Goodbyes* is primarily a psychological and socio-cultural narrative, qualitative inquiry is best suited to examine its subjective dimensions and the inner emotional landscapes of its women characters. The research relies on close reading as the primary analytical tool to uncover the nuanced representations of trauma, dissociation, and resilience that Garg embeds within her prose. The interpretative process involves examining language, imagery, symbolism, and narrative structure to reveal how trauma manifests through memory, silence, and bodily expression. The study also employs thematic analysis to identify recurring motifs associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including isolation, loss, displacement, and recovery. Each theme is discussed in relation to the psychological and sociocultural contexts in which the women characters exist. The analysis focuses on how the author constructs trauma not as an isolated psychological event but as an outcome of continuous emotional and social oppression. Furthermore, the research integrates interdisciplinary perspectives from psychology, feminist criticism, and cultural studies to illuminate the intersection of gender, identity, and emotional vulnerability. The selection of trauma theorists—Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, Dominick LaCapra, and Bessel van der Kolk—serves as the guiding framework for analyzing both the textual and psychological dimensions of the characters' experiences. These theories inform the interpretive lens through which the women's fragmented consciousness and memory processes are understood. The study avoids statistical generalization and instead emphasizes conceptual depth and contextual sensitivity, aligning with the humanities' focus on meaning rather than measurement. Ultimately, this methodology seeks to reveal how Mridula Garg's narrative not only portrays trauma but also gestures toward healing and the reclamation of agency within a patriarchal social fabric.

4. Theoretical Framework

The study draws on the theoretical foundations of trauma and memory studies to interpret the experiences of the women characters in *Country of Goodbyes* by Mridula Garg. The conceptual base of the paper lies primarily in the works of Cathy Caruth (1996), Judith Herman (1992), Dominick LaCapra (2001), and Bessel van der Kolk (2014), whose contributions have deepened the understanding of trauma as both a psychological and cultural phenomenon. Each of these theorists approaches trauma not simply as a personal affliction but as a disruption that affects narrative, time, and identity. By engaging these theoretical paradigms, this study situates Garg's novel within the larger discourse of trauma representation in literature, where the female subject becomes the site of both suffering and survival. Cathy Caruth's conception of trauma as "the unclaimed experience" forms a critical lens for reading the women in Garg's narrative. Caruth suggests that trauma is characterized by its belatedness—the inability of the mind to fully process a catastrophic event when it occurs. Instead, the experience returns in repetitive flashbacks and intrusive memories. In *Country of Goodbyes*, the women's fragmented recollections and emotional disorientation echo Caruth's model of deferred understanding. The characters' struggles to articulate their pasts, and their persistent reliving of distressing memories, indicate how trauma resists closure and

linear narration. This notion of belated return aligns with the structure of the novel itself, which moves fluidly across time and consciousness. Judith Herman's tripartite model of trauma recovery—comprising safety, remembrance, and reconnection—offers another interpretative framework. The women characters oscillate between vulnerability and empowerment, seeking both inner security and relational belonging. For instance, their interactions within dysfunctional family structures reveal the gendered dynamics of power that perpetuate trauma. The process of healing, as Herman posits, begins when the survivor reclaims her narrative and reintegrates her fragmented self into a coherent identity. Garg's portrayal of her women protagonists mirrors this therapeutic progression, emphasizing the importance of empathy, solidarity, and emotional expression. Dominick LaCapra's distinction between acting out and working through trauma provides an essential critical vocabulary for understanding the affective behaviors of Garg's women. While "acting out" involves compulsive repetition of the past, "working through" implies a reflective engagement with painful memory, enabling a transition from victimhood to agency. The novel's characters vacillate between these two states, embodying the cyclical and non-linear nature of trauma recovery. LaCapra's framework helps trace how Garg's narrative transcends mere depiction of pain to chart the gradual reconstruction of subjectivity. Bessel van der Kolk's insights on the somatic dimensions of trauma underscore the role of the body as a repository of unarticulated pain. His assertion that "the body keeps the score" finds resonance in the physical symptoms experienced by Garg's women—insomnia, anxiety, and psychosomatic distress. These manifestations highlight how trauma imprints itself not only on the psyche but also on the corporeal self. Integrating van der Kolk's perspective allows the study to examine how bodily memory complements emotional and cognitive dimensions of trauma. With these theories, the study illuminates how Mridula Garg transforms private psychological anguish into a literary exploration of gender, memory, and resilience. The trauma theories help decode the silenced histories embedded in the female consciousness and reveal the subtle interplay between suffering and resistance that defines *Country of Goodbyes*.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1. Trauma-Centric Reading of the Characters

The present novel *Country of Goodbyes* taken for this study seems to be a deliberate attempt by the novelist Mridula Garg to explore and justify on some levels the traumatic experiences of those women characters who stand apart as 'new modern women' despite their utter resentment and despondency in their lives. The poignancy of the narrative divided into chapters on the characters Smita, Mariane, Narmada, and Aseema, sets the autobiographical tone of the narrative. The politics of representation of characters in a fictional text does not let wane the sheer amount of reality in terms of the portrayal of unoblivious and obnoxious incidents in the lives of the characters that the author has intended to have in the novel. It is argued that most of the female characters in the novels of Mridula Garg go through different tormenting phases of psychosis, where the traumatic experiences and identities of those characters come into a fluid amalgamation only to problematize the linearity of the thought process. Coinciding with the mental trauma, there is a greater elaboration of corporeal trauma in the novel, as far as the feminine body is concerned. The 'feminine body' is emphatically represented, and, arguably, it becomes battle ground where the 'masculine body' exercises the power politics of subjugation and sexual exploitation. The female characters who are reduced to mere corporeal bodies involuntarily by their male counterparts encounter trauma related to their exploited bodies that was often considered to be docile by their patriarchal social and cultural institutions, like marriage. When a female body is harassed, it exacerbates more

anguish and trauma than those of my strangers. Afterwards, the corporeal wounds keep on languishing psychically. The novel is fraught with instances of corporeal trauma that, on the one hand, result in acute depression, anxiety, guilt, and, most importantly, sexual vulnerability in female characters, and on the other hand, the characters indefatigably aspire to overcome their adversities as well as stereotypes stigmatizing the female gender. The traumatic episodes occur on occasion, but Freud and Josef Breuer opine that maniac behaviors resulting in the forms of domestic violence and sexual harassment are outbursts of repressed desires (Freud & Breuer, 2013). In the case of Smita, who, after her parents' demise, comes to stay with her sister Namita, it is the husband of her sister who rapes her brutally, and the bruises on her body are more intensified when Namita stops her from going to the police just to keep the reputation of her husband and family. Because of the biased, orthodox view of society, rape stigmatizes the victim and makes her the one who experiences social exclusion rather than the rapist. She is unable to let go of her anger and humiliation, and she harbors a constant yearning for vengeance. She observes: "The time frame for my revenge may have shifted, but the idea never left my mind. It grew stronger by the day. Not a moment passed without me planning ways to make it happen. Fantastic thoughts filled my head...I was an avenging goddess, brutally annihilating him" (Garg, 2003, p.18). Victims of rape have lifelong anguish, self-devaluation, and reversal guilt. Many feminist authors have made an effort to alter how society views rape victims. The rape victim must cease believing she is guilty before efforts to change society's viewpoint can be successful, according to Mridula Garg. Such memories of rape linger as ruins in an alternate spatiotemporal reality, always in a perpetual "longing and imperfect process of remembrance" (Boym, 2008, p.80). The biggest impediment to her becoming human is the internal turmoil she experiences. She follows convention in order to be a part of the stable and safe old order that dominates the globe. Smita's persona is unique in that she doesn't harbor any unwarranted guilt. Instead, she puts a lot of effort into her education to develop independence so that she will be strong enough to exact revenge. She receives a scholarship to Boston for a Master of Science in Economics. In that location, she marries Jim Jarvis, a doctor who finds her attractive since she has no sense of vanity. He informs Smita there is dread in her, but without a trace of dread, rage, agitation, mistrust, or even intellectual haughtiness. He had intended to use her as a subject in his psychoanalytic study. The dubious nature of the relationship between Smita and Jim testifies to the fact that Smita's traumatic experiences with her sister's husband have left an indelible negative print in the canvas of her psyche. Smita herself states:

After my rape, whenever I watched a film or read a novel about it, I was amazed that I did not feel unclean like a sinner. If at all my conscience lacerated me, it was only because I had not avenged my violation. Why did I run away like a coward (Garg, 2003, p.27)?

The death of a corporeal entity comes into a dual situation in Smita's life when she hears the news of her sister's husband's death; she feels ecstatic and at the same time morose. In a brooding monologue, she expresses expectations pent up in her consciousness: "How had I been avenged by his death? In fact, I had been deeply cheated. I had spent all this time gathering my resources, and somebody else had done the deed. That somebody was none other than God" (Garg, 2003, p.30). The novel makes the female characters navigate their minds at various stages and diverse situations in their lives. Due to Marianne's ownership of a three-bedroom apartment, Irving Whitman marries her. Irving aspires to be a writer, so he has Marianne conduct research on numerous topics to provide him with material for a novel. She spends ten years doing research on several topics Irving wants to write a book about, but he can't settle on one. She occasionally wonders if she might have completed a PhD in any of these areas, but she never acts on the thought because Irving could need to work on any of the subjects covered in her files. Ir-

ving assures her that she will receive half the credit for any future works of literature he produces. Irving talks Marianne into getting an abortion after she becomes pregnant. Irving persuades her that the book will be the result of their shared awareness and will be published in both of their names, but he exploits all the information she gathered and publishes it under his name alone. Marianne continues to hold out hope that the day will come when she will be recognized for her contributions. She voices out with anguish and hope:

Who knows, a time may come when it is critiqued and reassessed; it is possible that feminist critics will uncover my primary role in its creation...Connected as they are to the earth, they are essentially pragmatic—abstract thought and ahistorical sense are obscured by their immediate experiences. (Garg, 2003, p.84)

Being unable to combine the sensual with the cerebral is a bias against women. Garg reveals the patriarchal rule over the literary world that has kept women out of literary history. Marianne gets married for the second time because she wants a baby badly, but in spite of her hopes, she has three miscarriages and is unable to conceive. She makes another attempt to adopt a kid but is unsuccessful because her second husband, a widower with a son from his first marriage, forbids her from bringing a child into his home. The third section of the novel is entirely about the life of Narmada, a working-class woman who gets trapped in a vicious cycle of sexual exploitation owing to miserable economic circumstances. However, with rigorous trials and tribulations, Narmada stands on her own two feet with dignity. She is also traumatized like Smita and Marianne; nevertheless, her solidarity with her will salvage her from the dungeon of trauma, specifically post-traumatic stress disorder. In the fourth section, Aseema hates her father for abandoning his duties to his family and betraying her mother. She becomes a misandrist when her hatred grows from an individual to a general level. Her perception is clouded by this personality imbalance, and she perceives sexism in every man-woman relationship. In the fifth section also, Vipin's mother is the one who undergoes traumatic experiences maneuvered by her husband.

5.2. Narrative Structure and the Temporality of Trauma

The narrative structure of *Country of Goodbyes* mirrors the psychological disorientation characteristic of trauma. Mridula Garg adopts a fragmented, non-linear mode of storytelling that corresponds to what Cathy Caruth describes as the “inherent latency” of traumatic experience—the impossibility of grasping the event as it occurs. The novel unfolds through shifting perspectives, interrupted timelines, and memory fragments that refuse chronological order. This structure recreates the ruptured temporality of trauma, compelling readers to experience the characters' confusion, disassociation, and attempts at coherence. Each woman in the novel reconstructs her identity through disjointed memories that emerge unpredictably, suggesting that trauma resists containment within linear narrative logic. The recursive storytelling, with its repetitions and sudden silences, reflects the psyche's effort to process the unassimilable. Through this stylistic fragmentation, Garg transforms trauma from a thematic concern into a formal device that shapes the novel's rhythm and tone. The narrative's discontinuities echo Dominick LaCapra's distinction between “acting out” and “working through.” While “acting out” is visible in the characters' compulsive return to painful recollections, “working through” emerges when they begin to reinterpret these memories in a new light, turning remembrance into reflection. Moreover, the novel's narrative oscillation between interior monologues and external events highlights the interplay between subjective and social realities. This stylistic duality captures the dialectic between silence and speech that defines trauma representation. As Marianne and Smita negotiate between remembering and repress-

ing, the narration itself becomes a therapeutic space where repressed emotions surface. Garg's use of interiority thus aligns with Judith Herman's emphasis on the importance of narrative reconstruction in the healing process. In this light, *Country of Goodbyes* can be read as a "trauma text" in the sense proposed by Michelle Balaev—one that foregrounds the instability of memory while seeking coherence through storytelling. The non-linearity of Garg's prose not only reflects the women's fractured consciousness but also resists the cultural imposition of linear progress and closure. The text's open-ended structure becomes an act of feminist resistance, rejecting the deterministic closure of women's suffering and instead affirming the complexity of their emotional worlds. Through this narrative design, Garg creates a dynamic aesthetic of trauma that integrates fragmentation, introspection, and resilience into a unified artistic vision.

5.3. Gendered Memory, Silence, and Resistance

Another critical dimension of the novel's analysis lies in its exploration of gendered memory and silence. Mridula Garg exposes how memory in patriarchal cultures is not merely personal but political—regulated by gendered codes of shame, morality, and repression. The women in *Country of Goodbyes* inhabit a world where their voices are persistently marginalized, and their suffering often dismissed as a private burden. In such contexts, silence becomes both a symptom of trauma and a strategy of survival. Drawing on the feminist insights of scholars such as Judith Herman and Shoshana Felman, this study interprets silence not as an absence of expression but as a complex response to the constraints of patriarchal speech. Herman observes that trauma survivors often oscillate between the need to remember and the compulsion to forget, creating a language of partial disclosure. In Garg's novel, the women's fragmented speech and interior dialogues illustrate this dual movement. Their inability to articulate pain within familial or social spaces reflects the cultural silencing imposed on women's emotions and bodies. Yet, within the private domain of thought and memory, they cultivate an alternative language of resistance. Garg's depiction of female trauma also highlights how collective memory perpetuates gendered suffering. The characters' emotional inheritance—their learned endurance, guilt, and self-effacement—illustrates what Marianne Hirsch terms "postmemory," where the next generation inherits the affective residue of others' trauma. Narmada and Aseema's internalized conflicts, for instance, bear traces of maternal trauma transmitted through silence and repression. This inherited pain becomes a form of cultural memory that binds women in an intergenerational chain of emotional suppression. However, Garg does not let silence remain a site of defeat. Instead, she transforms it into an instrument of reflection and subversion. When the women begin to speak—to themselves or to others—they break the cycle of repression and reclaim narrative authority over their lives. Their act of remembering becomes politically significant, converting private anguish into collective awareness. By foregrounding this transformation, Garg aligns with feminist trauma narratives that link healing with articulation. *Country of Goodbyes* redefines memory as an act of resistance against erasure. The novel suggests that trauma, when voiced, becomes testimony—a reclaiming of subjectivity from the margins. Garg's women embody the possibility of turning silence into speech and memory into moral agency. Through their fragmented recollections and quiet defiance, they assert that survival itself is a form of protest. Their journey from voiceless endurance to self-expression captures the essence of trauma recovery as envisioned by both Caruth and Herman: to narrate the unspeakable is to begin to heal.

6. Findings of the Study

The analysis of *Country of Goodbyes* reveals that Mridula Garg intricately constructs her women characters as embodiments of trauma, each negotiating the scars of memory in unique ways. The study identifies several key findings that illuminate the psychological, social, and thematic dimensions of trauma as represented in the text. Firstly, the novel demonstrates that trauma operates as a cyclical and intergenerational phenomenon. The emotional and psychological wounds of one character often echo in another, suggesting that trauma, especially in patriarchal societies, is collectively perpetuated. Smita's internal conflict, Marianne's alienation, Narmada's suppressed desires, and Aseema's moral exhaustion together form a tapestry of women's suffering under societal and familial pressures. Their experiences reveal how personal trauma is inseparable from the cultural scripts that define womanhood in India. Secondly, the findings underscore the role of memory as a double-edged force—both a source of torment and a vehicle of healing. The characters' fragmented recollections and flashbacks exemplify Caruth's notion of "belatedness," wherein trauma resurfaces through involuntary remembrance. Yet, these recollections also become the starting point for recovery. By confronting their repressed memories, the women move toward a tentative reconciliation with the past, illustrating Herman's stages of trauma recovery—safety, remembrance, and reconnection. Thirdly, the study finds that Garg uses the body as a site of trauma inscription. Physical ailments, insomnia, anxiety, and psychosomatic disturbances reflect the somatic dimension of pain that van der Kolk identifies in trauma survivors. The women's bodies function as repositories of unspoken suffering, revealing that trauma is as much physiological as it is psychological. This corporeal dimension deepens Garg's portrayal of trauma, aligning it with feminist explorations of embodiment and emotional suppression. Fourthly, the analysis establishes that Garg's narrative structure itself mirrors the psychology of trauma. The non-linear timeline, shifts in narration, and stream-of-consciousness passages represent the fragmented and recursive nature of traumatic memory. This stylistic fragmentation reinforces the sense of dislocation experienced by the characters, making the narrative form an extension of their inner turmoil. Lastly, the study concludes that Garg envisions trauma as a potential site of transformation. While her women characters are initially immobilized by guilt, grief, and confusion, they gradually discover inner strength through self-recognition and empathy. Their eventual assertion of individuality reflects LaCapra's idea of "working through" trauma, where survivors move from passive repetition to active engagement with their pain. Thus, Garg's women embody resilience—transforming their suffering into a form of self-knowledge and liberation. In essence, the findings reveal that *Country of Goodbyes* portrays trauma not as an isolated mental disorder but as a socio-cultural condition intertwined with gendered oppression. The novel becomes a compelling study of how women confront and transcend the forces that seek to silence them, demonstrating that healing, however incomplete, begins with the courage to remember and to narrate one's story.

7. Conclusion

Country of Goodbyes stands as one of Mridula Garg's most psychologically charged novels, weaving together the intimate narratives of women caught in the web of emotional deprivation, patriarchal constraints, and fragmented selfhood. Through Smita, Marianne, Narmada, and Aseema, Garg constructs a nuanced portrait of women whose lives are marked by loss, alienation, and the silent endurance of trauma. Yet, beneath this surface of despair lies an undercurrent of resilience—a determination to reclaim one's sense of agency despite repeated assaults on dignity and identity. This paper concludes that the novel is not merely a story of suffering but a profound reflection on the human capacity for renewal. By

applying trauma theory, this study underscores how Garg's women exemplify the core features of post-traumatic stress disorder: intrusive recollections, emotional numbing, and oscillation between remembering and forgetting. Their fragmented selves mirror the fractured narrative structure of the text, where temporal dislocations and shifting perspectives mirror the psychological disarray of trauma. The process of recovery, as outlined by Judith Herman, unfolds slowly as the women seek both internal and external means of healing—through self-reflection, social relationships, and in some cases, through acts of defiance. Their movement toward self-awareness marks the novel's transformation from a narrative of pain to one of empowerment.

The novel also serves as a critique of India's patriarchal social order, which perpetuates gendered trauma by normalizing female silence and subordination. Garg's feminist sensibility lies in her refusal to sentimentalize women's suffering; instead, she exposes the systemic roots of violence that lie within the family, religion, and social morality. The trauma of these women thus becomes symbolic of the collective condition of Indian womanhood, entrapped in socio-cultural expectations yet yearning for autonomy. Garg reclaims the narrative space of women's pain and converts it into a site of articulation and resistance. From a literary standpoint, *Country of Goodbyes* redefines the aesthetics of trauma representation by blending psychological realism with emotional introspection. The non-linear narration, interior monologues, and shifting focalizations evoke the fractured temporality of memory. Garg's style—rich in metaphor and emotional nuance—allows readers to inhabit the inner world of her protagonists. Her exploration of the unspeakable transforms trauma from an individual pathology into a universal human experience, linking personal grief with collective consciousness. The study concludes that Garg's women emerge as survivors rather than victims. Their journey from silence to self-expression encapsulates the broader struggle for identity and psychological freedom. Through them, Garg articulates a moral vision of endurance that acknowledges pain yet affirms life's regenerative possibilities. In this sense, *Country of Goodbyes* is not only a novel about trauma but also about transformation. It stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of women who, despite the scars of memory, continue to seek connection, meaning, and liberation in a fractured world.

8. Limitations of the Study

While this study offers a critical interpretation of trauma and PTSD through literary analysis, it remains limited in scope due to its reliance on textual evidence rather than empirical psychological assessment. The paper focuses primarily on four major characters, leaving out other secondary figures who may also represent significant forms of trauma. Moreover, the analysis is confined to the selected theoretical frameworks and does not incorporate intersectional or postcolonial trauma theories that could further enrich the understanding of cultural trauma. Future research could expand this inquiry by engaging comparative readings across regional women's writings and by integrating insights from neuroscience and affect studies to explore how memory and emotion operate in post-traumatic narration.

9. References

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