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Flashback as Resistance: Traumatic Memory Beyond Catharsis

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the function of flashbacks in trauma narratives not as therapeutic tools leading to closure or catharsis, but as potent acts of resistance. Using *Desha Kala Patra* by Jagannath Prasad Das, a groundbreaking work in Odia literature that skillfully combines personal and collective memories, the paper looks at how broken memories mess up the flow of time and deny the end of healing. Here, memory is not just a place to heal; it's also a place to face the past, where the things that can't be said come back to life in the present. This study goes against the grain of traditional psychoanalytic frameworks that look for resolution through expression. Instead, it uses postcolonial and affect theory to say that flashbacks show histories that have been silenced and show a politics of incompletion and narrative rupture. These returns that happen over and over again are emotional protests against forgetting, erasing history, and the clean arc of redemption. The article shows how the flashback, through its repetition and disorientation, becomes a formal strategy of survival and subversion by making readers stay in the discomfort of memory instead of escaping it. In this way, it takes back trauma as a place not of closure but of ongoing resistance.

Introduction

Trauma and memory have become important themes in postcolonial literary studies, not only because they are emotionally powerful, but also because they raise moral and political questions. In societies that have been colonized, divided, and subjected to caste violence and systemic erasure, trauma is rarely a personal wound. It is historical, communal, and often kept quiet. In this case, memory becomes an act of reclaiming, a place where people who have been left out of history rewrite it in ways that official records have hidden or changed. As postcolonial literature continues to deal with the effects of collective breaks, memory is no longer just something that heals; it is also something that is deeply resistant, unsettling, and unresolved. The flashback is one of the most powerful ways that trauma shows up in stories. It is a non-linear, recursive return to a moment or event that doesn't fit into a coherent past. Trauma narratives often break up time, going against the linear logic of beginning, middle, and end that most stories follow. The flashback breaks up this flow, making narrative time suddenly stop and start, which is like the subject's mental break. Cathy Caruth says in *Unclaimed Experience* that trauma "is not simply an event that is remembered, but an event that is only experienced in its belatedness" (Caruth 11). In this way, the flashback is not a memory that you choose to have; it is an unwanted memory that comes to you, like a haunting rather than a healing. The story of trauma has traditionally been linked to the psychoanalytic idea of

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catharsis, which comes from Aristotelian poetics and was further developed by Freud. Catharsis is based on the idea that talking about trauma and telling someone about your pain can help you feel better, solve your problems, or clean your emotions. In this therapy style, reading serves as a stand-in for mental healing. This article, on the other hand, disagrees with that model by saying that not all stories of trauma want or need catharsis. In postcolonial situations, the need for closure can be a form of repression in and of itself, as it limits the ongoing injustices in an aesthetic or psychological way. Dominick LaCapra says that the idea of "working through" trauma can sometimes take the place of facing its unresolved, structural conditions (LaCapra 70).

This article suggests that flashbacks are not helpful for resolution but are instead ways of resisting. They keep the rawness of trauma alive by not wanting to "move on" or make sense of the past. By doing this, they go against the politics of forgetting and show that memory can be a powerful force for change. Drawing on *Desha Kala Patra* by Jagannath Prasad Das—a deeply introspective Odia text that reflects on time, identity, and historical displacement—this paper argues that flashbacks are not mere narrative ornaments but formal devices that interrupt linearity and demand engagement with silenced or invisible histories. The article looks at the role of memory in literature again, but this time not as a way to deal with emotions, but as a political and aesthetic refusal to forget. It does this by looking at affect theory, postcolonial critique, and trauma studies. In fact, the flashback is not just a simple literary device; it is a subversive way of telling a story that makes the reader feel uncomfortable with the story and forces them to see what is often left unsaid. In *Desha Kala Patra*, the changes in time don't help things get better; instead, they show how the past can't be avoided and how it keeps coming back into the present. The main character's memory doesn't help them put back together a lost sense of wholeness; instead, it shows how identity is made up of pieces because of historical dislocation and cultural silence. This fragmentation becomes a strong counter-narrative, especially in postcolonial settings where official histories tend to erase, sanitize, or homogenize lived experiences. In this way, flashbacks go against the redemptive arc and instead focus on how uncomfortable it is to remember, which is a politically charged feeling. Michael Rothberg's theory of multidirectional memory says that the memories of one group don't exist on their own; they connect with and shed light on the traumas of other groups (Rothberg 3). This intersectionality in the story of flashbacks fights against single, dominant views of history and creates a space where different memories can grow. So, the flashback is not just a return; it is also a refusal—a refusal to forget, to forgive too soon, or to tell pain in a way.

I. Rethinking Wounds That Speak: Trauma, Memory, and the Poetics of Disruption

In postcolonial literature, trauma and memory are more than just story elements; they are ways of bearing witness, forms of resistance, and echoes of lives that were cut short. They don't fit well into linear plots or resolutions that happen in order. Instead, they disturb, come back, and break apart, refusing to fit into the logic of cause and cure. Trauma doesn't always lend itself to articulation, especially in communities that have been historically silenced. It often stays in the body, in affect, in repetition, and in flashbacks that confuse both the subject and the narrative form. Memory, like this, becomes a political space where different histories are kept alive and where the forgotten demand to be remembered, not to heal but to stop forgetting. In these situations, trauma isn't a wound that needs to be healed; it's a door that lets lost voices speak. As literature tries to make room for these breaks, it also needs to come up with new ways to look at things, like structures that can handle dislocation, non-linearity, and silence.

This part looks at how trauma and memory have been rethought in literary studies and other fields, especially when it comes to experiences that are not Western or postcolonial. It happens in three connected movements:

i. Beyond the Freudian Paradigm:

Psychoanalytic thought, especially the work of Sigmund Freud, is where our modern understanding of trauma, especially in relation to narrative and memory, comes from. Freud thought of the "talking cure" as a way to heal by letting people talk about things that were bothering them. This would let the repressed parts of their minds come back into their conscious minds. Freud stressed in his early work with Josef Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria* (1895), that traumatic symptoms were caused by memories that had not been properly verbalized or processed at the time they happened. So, the answer was to dig up and tell those buried memories. This would bring the unconscious to light and ease the mental stress they caused. This model, based on catharsis, saw memory as both the place where harm was done and the way to heal. In this type of therapy, stories acted as a straight line between the past wound, the present memory, and the future relief. But trauma as a lived experience This change in how we think about memory takes us away from seeing it as something that can be fully remembered and put together into a coherent self. Freud's theory says that remembering requires mastery, both of the self over its past and of language over pain. But trauma, especially the way Caruth sees it, makes it hard to keep that kind of control. The person doesn't have control over when the traumatic event comes back; instead, the memory comes back to them in unexpected ways, like through dreams, flashbacks, or sudden emotional changes. These signs are not signs of healing; they are signs of breaking up. They show that something hasn't been absorbed into language or consciousness, and maybe, never will fit into this neat structure. It doesn't follow a path of injury, story, and healing. Instead, it stays unpredictable, broken up, and often hard to understand. Because Freud was so sure that traumatic memories could be healed, but they are so hard to change, modern scholars are starting to wonder how far the cathartic model can go. One of the most interesting criticisms comes from Cathy Caruth, who wrote *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), which questions the idea that trauma can ever be fully understood, let alone told. Caruth says that trauma isn't something that happens in real time and then is remembered later. Instead, it's an experience that can't be fully understood at the time it happens and comes back later, often through involuntary repetitions and disruptive flashbacks. She writes, "To be traumatized is to be possessed by an image or event" that you can't fully understand when it happens (Caruth 4). This lateness, which she calls "deferred action" or *"Nachträglichkeit,"* goes against the idea that stories can bring closure or catharsis. Instead, trauma shows up as a state of never being whole.

This change in how we think about memory takes us away from seeing it as something that can be fully remembered and put together into a coherent self. Freud's theory says that remembering requires mastery, both of the self over its past and of language over pain. But trauma, especially the way Caruth sees it, makes it hard to keep that kind of control. The person doesn't have control over when the traumatic event comes back; instead, the memory comes back to them in unexpected ways, like through dreams, flashbacks, or sudden emotional changes. These signs are not signs of healing; they are signs of breaking up. They show that something hasn't been absorbed into language or consciousness, and maybe never will be. This way of thinking about trauma makes a lot of sense in postcolonial settings, where historical traumas like colonization, partition, caste oppression, and displacement are still not dealt with

and are often denied or silenced by dominant narratives. Trauma can't be easily told or closed in these kinds of spaces; its memory stays alive as an ongoing, often disjointed presence, not as a lesson learned. The flashback is more than just a sign of a mental illness; it is a way of telling a story that shows how time is broken and how hard it is to move on. It tells you to remember when the world tells you to forget. It throws out the redemptive arc of recovery and replaces it with a politics of recurrence, a return that won't let go.

So, going beyond the Freudian model is not just an academic exercise; it is also an ethical necessity when dealing with trauma in literature that comes from historically marginalized areas. The flashback's recursive temporality and refusal to put memories in neat sequences are similar to how trauma is experienced, especially in communities where historical wounds are actively hidden. It's not just the story of trauma that matters, but also how it is told, with its breaks, repetitions, and refusal to let go. In this way, modern trauma theory, especially Caruth's work, helps us see memory not as a way to solve problems, but as a way to fight against the closure that history and psychoanalysis both too often call for.

ii. Flashback as Narrative Disruption

Memory has long been a bridge in the structure of stories, connecting the past and the present, cause and effect, experience and reflection. But memory doesn't always act so obediently when it comes to trauma stories. It doesn't come when you call it, and it doesn't tell a story well. Instead, it breaks time. It comes back without asking. It makes you uneasy. In this way, the flashback in trauma literature shouldn't be confused with a normal memory tool, like a mirror that shows you the past. Instead, it's a break—a sudden tear in the fabric of narrative time that people often find intrusive, chaotic, and unsettling. In regular stories, memory gives the story a sense of order. In trauma literature, the flashback shows that the person is confused. It mimics the erratic rhythm of traumatic recall, which is not based on chronological memory but on the fact that the experience has not been fully processed. This kind of disruption is a sign of what trauma is really like. Cathy Caruth says that trauma is not something that is fully understood when it happens, but something that comes back in delayed and often broken ways (Caruth 4). In this case, the flashback is not a conscious remembering but an involuntary re-experiencing. It's a time when the story loses control, just like the traumatized person loses control of time. These kinds of returns don't save; they repeat themselves. They don't explain; they explode. They fight against the plot's linear progression by suddenly going back in time, which is often emotionally charged and broken up. In this way, the flashback becomes more than just a stylistic choice; it becomes a sign of trauma in the story itself, showing both the character's mental confusion and the text's political urgency.

The flashback is even more important in postcolonial literature, where trauma often comes from systemic violence, colonial rule, caste oppression, or being forced to move. It doesn't just look back on the past; it demands it, even when the government wants people to forget. So, the disruption is bad for both morals and looks. The story doesn't go in a straight line, so the reader can't relax. Instead, they are stuck in a story that won't end and makes the reader go back to a painful place and witness it too. In Life and Words, Veena Das says that "the event of trauma is folded into the ordinary," which means that it doesn't come back with a lot of drama but instead in the quiet ways that it affects daily life (Das 5). The flashback echoes this folding, suddenly breaking through the ordinary and shattering the illusion of narrative distance, bringing the past into the present with almost physical force. The flashback also questions the power of time in history. By adding a logic of repetition and disruption, it fights against the forward pull of

developmental narratives, which are often used by colonial and nationalist discourses. Michael Rothberg's idea of "multidirectional memory" is very helpful here. It says that traumatic memories don't just go in one direction; they move across histories, communities, and times (Rothberg 3). The flashback becomes a point where these tangled memories meet—a place where one trauma can bring up another, and time seems to stop as they all feel the same strong emotion. The story doesn't allow for single truths or all-encompassing explanations at these times. It becomes polyphonic, haunted, and very political.

In Jagannath Prasad Das's *Desha Kala Patra*, the flashback's disruptive role is very clear. The story doesn't go in a straight line; instead, it takes sudden turns that bring back memories. The main character's memories don't seem like reflective pauses; instead, they seem more like intrusions that shock the reader out of their comfort zone with unresolved emotional baggage. These flashbacks often come out of nowhere and don't have anything to do with a certain time, which makes you feel like you're stuck in a loop where the past never really goes away. The effect is meant to be confusing because that's how trauma really is: time doesn't heal, it folds in on itself and keeps coming back. The flashbacks in the text don't try to explain or put things in context; in fact, they fight the urge to do so. Instead, they show what Dori Laub calls "the collapse of witnessing," which is when both the narrator and the reader are faced with a silence that is too deep for words (Laub 69).

Flashbacks are both an artistic form and a political tool in trauma literature, especially in postcolonial settings. They not only mess up the order of events in the story, but they also ruin the reader's hope for a good story. They keep things open, make things harder to understand, and encourage people to think more deeply about the moral issues that come up when they suffer. They remind us that trauma isn't a wound that can be told and healed; it's a break that time and comfort can't fix. For example, one of the most haunting scenes comes from a random memory of the village temple, when the main character suddenly remembers the priest's daughter. She was a girl whose body bore the invisible scars of gendered silence and whose death at a young age left an imprint that was too complicated to put into words. This memory doesn't come as a story; it comes as a wound that has been reopened, which interrupts the main character's internal monologue. The story's voice breaks away from the present and falls into a piece of the past that is full of emotion, only to come back up with a strong sense of incompleteness. These memories don't help us understand the past or find redemption; instead, they intrude on the present, demanding to be dealt with as unresolved, raw, and morally demanding. These flashbacks are so strong because they don't stay put—they come out of nowhere and shake up both the narrator and the reader. The main character never fully expects or controls these returns. They overwhelm him, pulling him out of the present and into a place where memory and emotion clash without coming together. This story structure is similar to how trauma works in real life. As Cathy Caruth says, "it does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned" (Caruth 151). In *Desha Kala Patra*, the flashbacks turn into moments of possession instead of agency, where the memory takes over the main character instead of the other way around.

Dori Laub calls this "the collapse of witnessing"—a time when trauma makes it impossible to tell a story, so speech turns into silence, confusion, or repetition (Laub 69). These memory fragments are full of emotion but lack clear explanations. In *Desha Kala Patra*, these moments happen a lot: the main character's awkward attempts to explain how a friend was humiliated because of their caste, the lingering discomfort over his own role in inherited hierarchies, and

the haunting memory of a funeral procession in the rain where grief was too painful to talk about. These events do not help people get along. Instead, they stay unresolved, showing the main character's broken inner self and a shared past that can't be turned into a single story arc.

So, the flashback in *Desha Kala Patra* is both an aesthetic and moral break. It fights against the comforting closure of memory as reflection and instead puts remembrance in the role of confrontation. The story breaks up linear time, which goes against the colonial and patriarchal urge to organize, control, and master history. It brings to the front the stubborn return of the unresolved—what won't go away even when it can't be fully explained. Das's writing fits with a larger postcolonial ethic of remembering that doesn't try to make things better but instead insists on breaking things apart, that doesn't heal but keeps haunting, and that doesn't explain but makes room for the unspoken to be felt.

In trauma literature, and especially in postcolonial settings, flashbacks are both an artistic form and a political tool. They not only mess up the story's timeline, but they also mess up the reader's expectation of a satisfying story. They keep things open, make things harder to understand, and encourage a deeper, more moral engagement with the difficulties of suffering. They remind us that trauma is not a wound that can be told and healed; it is a break that time and comfort can't fix.

iii. Echoes from the Margins: Postcolonial and Subaltern Trauma as Everyday Resistance

In the postcolonial and subaltern context, trauma is not often a show. It doesn't always come from the shock of huge disasters; more often than not, it lives quietly, hidden in the rhythms of everyday life. In these kinds of places, the signs of violence aren't always visible scars on bodies. They can also be found in the pauses in speech, in broken rituals, and in the way memories are passed down through generations. The classical trauma model sees suffering as something sudden, isolating, and needing to be fixed. Postcolonial trauma, on the other hand, is woven into the very fabric of everyday life, caste systems, cultural erasures, and gender roles. The flashback here doesn't explode like a movie jolt; it comes up like a forgotten smell or a half-finished sentence, making the normal things around it feel strange.

In her deeply moving book *Life and Words*, Veena Das makes the point that trauma is not always found in dramatic events but is often found in the quiet moments of everyday life. She writes, "violence is absorbed into the recesses of the ordinary" (Das 7), where women keep cooking and the body keeps working, even though memory hurts in silence. In this way of thinking, trauma can't be separated from life. It lives with survival and routine. So, flashbacks aren't strange trips back to a long-ago time; they're built into gestures, everyday actions, or the casual language of shared pain. In books like *Desha Kala Patra*, this quiet trauma comes out through the main character's broken memories, which bring back not only old wounds but also the small acts of violence that come with caste, family, and moving. These memories don't just come to mind as separate events; they come back through everyday memories, like an old courtyard, a broken ritual, or the haunting smile of someone who has been forgotten by society. These kinds of memories are not often private. In postcolonial and subaltern settings, they are communal, intersubjective, and historically linked. Michael Rothberg's idea of multidirectional memory really helps here. Rothberg says that trauma is shared across histories and identities, able to cross borders and bring people together, rather than seeing memories of suffering as separate or competitive (Rothberg 3). In *Desha Kala Patra*, the main character's memories of caste

humiliation, cultural dislocation, and loss of a generation do not stand alone. They spread out and connect with other voices that have been silenced in the village—women who are quiet because of tradition, lower-caste men who are not allowed to mourn, and a generation that speaks through ellipses. The flashbacks in the text let these memories that are linked to each other breathe. They break up the false order of historical stories and remind us that trauma is often passed down through generations, held in bodies, whispered in stories that aren't written down, and brought back to life not by choice but by emotion.

As Gargi Bhattacharyya writes about race and empire, this intersubjective quality of memory is deeply rooted. Traffick talks about how trauma changes the skin, posture, and automatic reactions of people who have been victims of racialized violence (Bhattacharyya 15). She writes from the point of view of a global empire, but her ideas are very relevant to how gender and caste work in India. In *Desha Kala Patra*, the main character's body is a source of tension because it lets upper-caste men move around freely, but it also reminds him of the pain of people he has seen but couldn't save. Memory isn't neutral in this space; it's moral, active, and stored in the body. The main character can't talk about other people's pain without getting involved himself. His flashbacks don't just show him what's going on; they also haunt him physically, making him feel it in his throat, in his hesitation, and in his inability to finish a thought. These memories don't free him; they tie him down by reminding him of what he owes the past and what he hasn't paid yet. So, flashbacks in postcolonial trauma stories are more than just literary devices; they are also ways to get back into the moral world. They break up the comfort of forgetting and write a history that is too often lost in the everyday. They go back to caste wounds not to clean them up, but to leave them open so that people can see them, be upset by them, and not finish them. They don't want to go beyond themselves; instead, they live in the areas of speech and memory that aren't perfect. They want to know what it means to remember when it's easier to forget. What does it mean to speak when you have inherited silence?

Desha Kala Patra and other postcolonial works don't give easy answers to these questions. But in the repeated return of memory, in the jagged edge of the flashback, it enacts a subtle and persistent resistance—one that lives not in the spectacle of suffering, but in the soft echo of pain embedded in the everyday.

II. Flashback as Resistance – An Analytical Framework for Unfinished Testimonies

In the usual way that stories work, flashbacks are often used to look back on things—filling in the gaps, giving the reader background information, and making things clearer. In trauma literature, and especially in postcolonial stories like *Desha Kala Patra*, the flashback serves a more radical and resistant purpose. It's not just a story anymore; it's a refusal—an interruption that makes linearity and closure less comfortable. It doesn't go back to explain the past; it comes back to make sure it is still there. In this way, the flashback becomes a place where people fight back—not just against forgetting, but also against the normal ways of thinking about history, time, and healing that often hide more than they show.

i. What Is Resistance in Memory?

When you say that memory is resistance, you are saying that memory isn't always passive or reflective. In many cultural and political situations, especially those that are violent, colonized, or systematically erased, remembering itself is an act of rebellion. When state-sponsored stories try to rewrite history by downplaying caste violence, ignoring regional voices, or forgetting the pain of partition, memory acts as a counter-narrative, keeping alive what official

stories would rather forget. In *Desha Kala Patra*, the main character's memories of caste humiliations, abandoned rituals, and the village's unspoken sorrows don't help him move on from the past; instead, they keep it alive, stirring in the background of his city life. These memories don't fit into the main story of progress or personal growth. Instead, they are breaks that make the reader face wounds that haven't healed.

In this case, the flashback is both a formal and a moral tool. It goes against the idea that we should not think about the past. It breaks the story of "moving on" by saying that some histories don't go away but instead live on in different, often quiet, forms. This refusal is morally strong because it keeps wounds visible in politics. Dominick LaCapra, a theorist, has said that wanting to "work through" trauma is not a good reason to ignore its effects. Instead, literature should sometimes "act out" trauma to keep its questions open (LaCapra 70). The main character in Desha Kala Patra doesn't heal; instead, he remembers, and that memory is the most radical thing he does. He doesn't want to get better; he wants the truth—a painful, unfinished, and necessary confrontation with the past.

ii. Flashbacks and the passage of time

The way the flashback is structured in time has a lot to do with how it resists. Trauma stories often use a cyclical or broken time frame to change the normal flow of time, which goes from past to present to future. In these kinds of texts, the past doesn't come before the present; it gets in the way. This story structure is like how trauma works over time. Cathy Caruth says that trauma is defined by belatedness: the traumatic event isn't fully experienced when it happens; instead, it comes back in bits and pieces through intrusive repetition (Caruth 11). The flashback shows this time distortion by breaking up the smooth flow of events and instead making a jagged rhythm of return, break, and return. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur talks about the difference between "calendar time," which is measured, objective, and historical, and "experienced time," which is fluid, subjective, and heavily influenced by memory (Ricoeur 3:105). This separation is important for the way trauma stories like Desha Kala Patra are told. The main character is never really in the present. His mind is always pulled back into an unresolved past, where memories of people and events that happened a long time ago come back to him in moments that make it hard to tell the difference between then and now. These returns don't make sense or follow a cause and effect pattern. Instead, they are based on affect, which is the sudden rise of an unresolved feeling, a sensory echo, or a name that has been kept quiet.

This unstable time is not just a stylistic choice; it is a strong rejection of the idea that time is linear and history moves forward. The flashback's refusal to "stay in its place" goes against the way people think that keeps them from remembering the past. It shows what historian Hayden White called "the repressive structure of historical discourse" (White 9)—the way that history puts events in neat order to hide how violent and uneven real life is. Flashbacks don't just take you back in time; they also stop the present, which takes the story away from its goal of healing or national progress.

iii. The Politics of Not Completing

The flashback's refusal to let go may be the most extreme form of resistance. Trauma stories, on the other hand, often leave their wounds open, unresolved, and painful. Redemptive stories, on the other hand, use memory to heal or make up. This politics of incompletion is a deliberate choice of style and morality that makes it hard for the reader to feel good about how the story ends. The flashback doesn't make things less tense; it keeps them tense. It goes around the

wound without closing it. This unfinished state is not a flaw; it is a feature that keeps the memory politically alive, fighting against turning trauma into a lesson or a past that has been resolved.

In *Desha Kala Patra*, the main character's memories never help him understand or change. He doesn't "come to terms" with his past or talk to himself about it to feel better. The story ends with memory still not settled and testimony still not done. When words fail and the voice stops, the silences are not empty spaces that need to be filled. They are truths that need to be respected. Dori Laub's absences show that she knew that trauma can make it hard to testify and that silence may be the most honest testimony (Laub 69). But even in this quiet time, the flashback is still a way to fight back. It marks the site of trauma not as a place of closure but as a place where moral demands continue. This is very different from stories that try to find a solution by dealing with suffering, explaining it, and finally getting over it. These kinds of stories can be emotionally satisfying, but they often show how hard it is to close, heal, and fit in. The flashback, on the other hand, doesn't want to be fixed. It makes people question the idea that pain has to follow a story arc or that history has to make sense. The flashback is a way for writers like Jagannath Prasad Das to keep things open. They say that some wounds should stay open, some silences should stay quiet, and some histories should not be turned into stories.

This refusal shows a deeper truth about trauma in postcolonial literature: remembering doesn't always mean explaining, and sometimes the best way to remember is to stay in what isn't finished.

III. Excavating Memory and Silences – A Reading of *Desha Kala Patra* by Jagannath Prasad Das

Jagannath Prasad Das's *Desha Kala Patra* (which loosely means "The Country, The Time, The Person") is more than just a book about nostalgia or personal memories. It is a book that talks about the trauma of living in a society that is changing in a very personal and honest way. Das tells a quiet, thoughtful story that looks at how the psychological and political effects of colonial modernity, caste marginalization, and cultural loss live on in memory. The text is interesting not because of how it is written, but because it doesn't want to be dramatic. The flashbacks in this novella don't do anything other than make you feel like you have to read them. They don't light up; they annoy.

i. Contextualizing the Text: Memory Amidst Shifting Landscapes

Jagannath Prasad Das's *Desha Kala Patra* doesn't take place on a real map; it takes place on the emotional map of dislocation. It follows the feelings of an older narrator who feels lost, not just from his ancestral village in Odisha, but also from the way memory works. He lives in Delhi now, but his separation is more than just physical; it is also ontological. He is cut off from his home, his language, and most terrifyingly, the person he used to be. The novella makes it clear that the main character's real journey isn't about moving from one place to another. Instead, it's about mnemonic spirals, where the past comes back as involuntary hauntings that are erratic, visceral, and persistent. A key moment early on doesn't come from looking back with sadness; it comes from being tired. On a hot afternoon in Delhi, the narrator is suddenly hit by a vision that he can't remember but that is forced on him: his grandfather's ancestral room. Das says, "It was like the wall of the room leaned toward me and whispered secrets in a language I had forgotten" (*Desha Kala Patra* 17). The cracked lime walls, the strong smell of neem oil, and the sound of evening prayers make the scene come to life, but what sticks with you is not comfort but fear of

small spaces. Memory is not a safe place; it is a siege. The past doesn't come back; it gets in the way.

These moments show the larger disillusionment at the heart of the text: the slow fading of a postcolonial dream. The narrator is part of a generation that once saw the exciting promise of national independence, but it was ruined by bureaucratic stagnation, cultural fragmentation, and spiritual depletion. He says in one of the most telling memories that he can't remember the exact rituals of Pinda Daan, the ancestral offering that was very important to his upbringing: "I remember the ceremony, but not the words... and I wonder if forgetting is its own form of betrayal" (*Desha Kala Patra* 24). His unclear syntax is like the loss of cultural heritage itself. In this case, forgetting isn't just a passive mistake; it's a break, a moral indictment, and a pain that won't go away. This mnemonic collapse isn't just a problem for one person; it's a sign of a bigger problem in society. In Odia literature, Desha Kala Patra is part of a long tradition that is very interested in the inner life and moral complexity. Das doesn't tell big nationalist stories; instead, he tells microhistories that show how trauma builds up instead of blowing up and how violence is quiet but normal. This is like how Fakir Mohan Senapati and other writers talk about psychological realism. "Violence returns in the folds of the ordinary," as Veena Das wisely says (*Life and Words* 7). So, the trauma in Desha Kala Patra is deep, slow, and atmospheric. Not through big events, but through forgotten rituals, lost sayings, and silences that get thicker over time.

The novella is no longer just a story about exile or return; it is now a meditation on memory as resistance, on remembering not as a way to heal but as a way to face the past. The flashbacks don't help you understand the past; they make the present less stable, like moral stains that won't go away. Das's story says that remembering the past correctly doesn't mean making peace with it; it means living in its cracks, honestly and with difficulty.

ii. Flashback as a Structure: Memory as a Break, Not a Frame

The story of *Desha Kala Patra* can only be told through memory. Things don't always go in a straight line from the past to the present. The text, on the other hand, looks like a palimpsest, with scenes from different decades bleeding into each other and not being able to be put in order. This style of writing uses flashbacks to break up the present, which makes the text feel like trauma's time dislocation.

An old Odissi song on the radio brings back one of the saddest memories. As the main character listens, he remembers a time when he was a child and saw an elder from a higher caste insult a graceful dancer from a lower caste at the village temple. He remembers, "She bowed her head not in reverence but in resignation," and the music that should have lifted her seemed to fall flat against the temple walls (Das 41). This flashback is especially strong because it doesn't show any violence or loud anger; it just shows how cruel it is to be left out. This memory is important because it doesn't have any moral or analytical comments. The narrator doesn't say why or why not; they just stay. This method fits with Caruth's idea that trauma's latency means that events are too much to handle in real time and only come back through repetition (Caruth 11). The flashback in *Desha Kala Patra* doesn't help the story make sense; it just breaks it up. It mimics the rhythm of trauma, showing how memory comes to us in strange ways, like half-seen and half-felt.

iii. Remembering Characters and Political Silence: What Isn't Said

The text is deep not because of what the narrator says, but because of what he doesn't say. His

memories are full of holes, cuts, and sentences that don't end. These aren't just strange ways of writing; they're ways of showing moral paralysis in the story. In a lot of scenes, especially those that deal with caste or gender violence, the main character seems to know what's going on but can't say it. He remembers Bhikari, an old friend who was a Dalit boy and used to play with him. This is an important moment. One day, villagers beat the boy for going into the sacred courtyard of Tulasi Chaura. The narrator, who is a child at the time, doesn't say anything. As an adult, he remembers saying, "I watched from the steps." I think I cried. Or maybe I didn't. But I remember the sound, which was like bamboo breaking in the wind (Das 58). This description doesn't use fancy words; instead, it uses metaphors to talk about a memory that has been hidden for years.

The fact that the narrator never talks about what happens to Bhikari again says a lot. Dori Laub calls this kind of political silence the "collapse of witnessing." It's not that people aren't there; it's that they feel so responsible (Laub 69). The narrator's silence is a way for him to be involved, and his broken memories make him feel guilty. In this way, memory in Desha Kala Patra is both a moral burden and an emotional witness.

iv. Flashback: The Feel of Visual and Sensory Memory

Das's way of thinking about memory is very phenomenological, based on touch, sight, sound, and space. Most of the time, the flashbacks are not mental; they are physical. Things in the narrator's environment, like the smell of turmeric, the way the floor looks, and the way the light hits it, always make them think. These cues create emotional gaps that words have trouble filling.

He goes to an old Odia restaurant in Delhi and gets rice on a banana leaf. It seems like a harmless moment, but it makes him remember strongly when his mother served food to a woman who was on her period and had to sit alone in a corner during a festival. "I saw her pour water on the leaf, but she was careful not to touch her. "Das 73: I wondered if food made people feel bad along with salt." This flashback uses synaesthetic layering—visual, tactile, and emotional—to show how ritual hypocrisy is passed down from one generation to the next and how gendered trauma is a part of everyday life. This is a great example of Veena Das's idea of "the return of violence in the folds of the ordinary" (Das 8). There is no big drama; just a banana leaf, water, and silence. But these things mean something that words can't fully explain. The trauma isn't just one thing; it's a part of habits, repetition, and everyday things that memory changes.

This event is important because it shows the text's non-verbal rules for remembering. The narrator doesn't tell you what happened; he makes it happen. It doesn't help to remember; it haunts.

v. Memory as Rupture, Memory as Responsibility

In *Desha Kala Patra*, flashbacks don't add to the story; they are used as moral and aesthetic centers instead. We can't escape the past; we have to deal with unresolved silences and moral gray areas. The novella makes it clear that trauma is common and not unusual in postcolonial settings. Everyone does it, it's part of their daily life, and it never ends. Jagannath Prasad Das makes a literary space where remembering is a form of resistance—not because it explains, but because it won't let go—through sensory memory, incomplete testimony, and fragmented recollection.

IV. Comparative and Interdisciplinary Reflections—Flashbacks Across Forms, Memories Beyond Boundaries

There is a lot of emotional truth in the flashback in *Desha Kala Patra* that is hard to understand. In both commercial Indian movies and the main Western canon, trauma is often seen as a temporary break that ends with confession, confrontation, or closure. Das, on the other hand, makes a quiet case against it. Bollywood stories often use pain to make things look good and useful. For instance, a dramatic event that brings about redemption, sacrifice, or poetic justice. The melodramatic ending of Kal Ho Naa Ho brings about a return to a pure self or a new social order. In Raazi, the patriotic reconciliation leads to a return to a pure self or a new social order. Western movies also follow a broad Freudian model that sees trauma as an internal wound that can be healed by talking about it, whether through therapy, family revelation, or self-actualization. Movies like Good Will Hunting and Ordinary People show that talking about your pain can help you feel better. In these kinds of models, memory becomes medicine. On the other hand, Desha Kala Patra does not want this kind of comfort from the narrator. The main character's flashbacks don't help them figure anything out, take action, or move the story forward. Instead, they stall, stutter, and fold back into themselves. In this case, the past doesn't come back to heal; it comes back on its own, without help, and in a way that doesn't make sense. Das's flashbacks don't help the story; they just confuse the reader and the narrator because they don't follow the usual patterns of trauma stories. The text is so powerful because it is written in a way that is morally incomplete—living in the dissonance of memory. It fits with what Zahra Meghani calls "literature that dismantles the grammar of trauma that seeks meaning in pain" and instead "dwells in the messiness of loss without map or compass" (Meghani 93). Das's memories are hard to reach; they are feelings of unease, guilt, and echoes that don't have a source.

This refusal to end the story fits in with other South Asian trauma literature. Intizar Hussain's Basti is a book with flashbacks that don't explain things but make them feel real. This is a good example of a work that is similar. Zakir, the main character in Basti, also has to deal with a collapsed temporality, where Partition, dislocation, and cultural erosion all come together in a fog of broken memories. Memory doesn't push Zakir forward like it does for Das's unnamed narrator; it pulls him back. He carries the weight of a world that has slipped away, but not with a scream; instead, it is a murmur. Basti talks about the historical trauma of Partition and the problems that Muslims have with their identity in postcolonial Pakistan. *Desha Kala Patra's* trauma, on the other hand, comes from things that are quieter and more local, like caste, custom, gendered rituals, and the fact that rural decay is hard to see. Both works are different in terms of their scope and effect, but they both want to show trauma as something that is incomplete, repetitive, and deeply connected to cultural forgetting. This problem gets even worse when we think about Odisha's rich oral and visual traditions, which keep memories alive through rhythm, repetition, and ritual instead of a straight timeline. People don't finish stories in folk tales like Pala or Daskathia; they act them out to remember them. The goal is not to find a solution, but to connect with each other. Every retelling is full of community voice, experience, and gesture. Memory isn't a thing here; it's a way of doing things. In the same way, Odia Janana songs, which are devotional laments sung by women, have the hidden voices of people who were never allowed to speak out in public. Mothers pass these songs down to their daughters. They talk about abandonment, longing, and injustice, but never in a straight line. They come back in cycles, which Veena Das calls "the descent into the ordinary." In this cycle, violence doesn't break out but stays hidden in everyday life (Das 7). This style of writing is similar to

Das's. He has flashbacks when he smells, hears, or touches things that are normal for him. These flashbacks have the same rhythm as embodied memory in oral performance. There are also strong silences in *Desha Kala Patra*. They are like rests in a musical phrase: not empty spaces, but breaks that are very important. The main character can't say how guilty he feels or fully understand how he was involved in caste- and gender-based discrimination. This is like Janana's indirect speech, where the pain is clear but never named. In both cases, memory becomes a kind of ethical haunting, a way of fighting back that doesn't want justice but needs to be there.

Lastly, the way Odia folk art looks, especially Pattachitra scrolls and temple murals, is very different from the way *Desha Kala Patra* is written. These styles of art don't care about realism or point of view. Instead, they look at symbols, repetition, and meaning that builds on itself. A single god could show up in the same scroll more than once, and each time they would have a different emotional tone. This suggests that time is fluid, like Das's mnemonic spirals. Das's flashbacks, like Pattachitra paintings, don't want to move forward; they want to stay in the past. In both, the past is not something that has been forgotten; it is something that comes back and changes every time it is thought about. So, when you read *Desha Kala Patra* in different ways and on different platforms, it becomes more than just a story. It becomes part of a larger South Asian, Odia, oral, and visual aesthetic tradition that sees trauma not as something that needs to be healed, but as something that needs to be lived through. It is part of an archive where memory is not historical or healing, but alive, stubbornly incomplete, and woven into the textures of language, body, and form.

Conclusion

In *Desha Kala Patra*, memory doesn't work like a straight line of remembering, and it doesn't end with a solution. It fights against the end of the story. The flashbacks in the text aren't helpful ways to remember a painful past; they're loud refusals to forget, forgive, make peace, or make the pain clear. In trauma literature, pain usually leads to clarity or catharsis, but these moments of mnemonic break don't follow that pattern. They don't close the wound, not for show, but to make a point about morality. Das's story shows that trauma is not something you can put behind you; it's something you have to carry with you, unfinished, unresolved, and in many ways, impossible to resolve. If you think of flashback as resistance, then you are reading memory as a political act instead of a psychological process. It makes us think about how some ways of remembering aren't meant to help us heal, but to change the comfortable stories we tell ourselves about who we are, where we came from, and how far we've come. We need to think about the ethics of memory again in this light. Not all memories heal; some memories hurt on purpose because they need to be written down again, over and over again, in a painful way. We remember not to fix things, but to mark them so that what dominant stories want to get rid of stays around. In postcolonial countries like India, where caste, gender, displacement, and cultural erasure are still important parts of daily life, trauma isn't always loud or in the past. It is often quietly woven into the fabric of daily life. *Desha Kala Patra* reminds us that trauma's work is never really over. It is still stuck in half-finished rituals, forgotten words, unspoken prayers, and sudden flashbacks that come out of nowhere. These problems aren't illnesses that need to be treated; they're stories that need to be told over and over, but never completely.

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