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Representations of Trauma in Booker Prize-Winning Fiction: A Comparative Study of *Shuggie Bain*, *The Promise*, and *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores a comparative analysis of trauma in all the three Booker Prize winning novels from 2020-2022- *Shuggie Bain* by Douglas Stuart, *The Promise* by Damon Galgut, and *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by Shehan Karunatilaka. These novels have employed various narrative approaches, the present paper reflects personal, familial, socio- political pain and struggles. All the three novels are connected to their own special cultural and historical backgrounds — 1980s Glasgow, apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, and conflict-affected Sri Lanka. From the viewpoint of trauma theory and literary analysis, this study examines how these novels express experiences of pain and suffering, and also seeking instances of resilience and hope. It also thinks about the responsibility of literature to present trauma carefully and meaningfully. The research poses significant questions about what deserves to be voiced, what should be left unsaid, and how narratives assist us in recalling past wounds, making sense of them, and gathering the strength to challenge the world we live in.

Trauma has emerged as a vital prism through which modern literature questions the human condition, engaging with profound psychological damage and social breakdown. Trauma in literary contexts includes both obvious events—violent assault, war, and domestic abuse—and subtle processes such as emotional abandonment, introjected pain, and social exclusion. The reflection of trauma in the novels as a literary theme for the reader is its ability to present multidimensional explanations for individual and collective pain, enabling readers to empathetically experience occurrences normally relegated to the periphery of dominant cultural discourse. Trauma literature speaks across the world as it evokes the timeless stories of humanity's struggles against political repression by the state, economic hardship, and social breakdown, making it a universal subject matter in all different cultural contexts. The Booker Prize, is a premier award for contemporary fiction, has assisted in bringing such trauma narratives to the fore, heightening voices which open up multifaceted aspects of historical and individual trauma and placing these experiences within broader socio-political contexts (Caruth 4).

Overview of the Three Novels and Their Authors

The Booker Prize winning novel *Shuggie Bain* (2020), written by Douglas Stuart, presents the social issues of working-class Scotland, through his writing, he explores a detailed but devastating image of 1980s Glasgow, shaped by post-industrial effect like economic ruin, family disintegration, and social fragmentation. From the perspective of the protagonist of the novel, Shuggie, the novel reflects the intergenerational trauma caused by parental

abandonment and addiction, set against a backdrop of structural poverty and community disintegration (Stuart 248).

The 2021, The Booker Prize winning novel, *The Promise*, written by Damon Galgut, a South African writer, sets its story within South Africa's troubled political transition from apartheid to post-apartheid times, focusing on shattered family promises and residual wounds of racial and social injustice. The novel interweaves individual and communal trauma into its narrative, employing allegory to examine intersections of history and identity (Galgut 25).

The Sri Lankan writer, Shehan Karunatilaka, winner of The Booker Prize -2022 for his fictional novel *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida.* In this work*,* he uses magical realism in his work to illustrate the Sri Lankan Civil War's ruinous effect, both in terms of personal trauma and more generalised human rights abuses during ethnic conflict. His novelistic strategy mixes ghostly dialogues with historiographic critique to move through memory, death, and justice (Karunatilaka 192).

Methodological Approach to Analyzing Trauma

In this paper, the comparative analysis of the three mentioned novels has been done which is based on trauma, frameworks theory, and literary criticism. It is believed that trauma literature is just a tool of narrating stories, but it is also a tool for raising moral questions and addressing social and political issues through literature. In this paper, trauma and its effects have been examined by analysing the three novels. This examination takes into account the historical and socio-political frameworks behind each work, understanding how distinct locations and political climates shape the depiction of trauma and its narrative forms. It is research where the methodologies are used to explore and find the social and historical reasons behind trauma, the role of memory and silence in communication, and how shared meanings are created in society. All the three novels portray a complex layer of trauma through their themes.

Overt and Subtle Trauma Representations in Shuggie Bain

Parental Abandonment and Familial Breakdown

In the novel, Shuggie Bain, the centre point of the story is the painful representation of family trauma and sufferings especially the alcoholic addiction of Shuggie's mother Agnes Bain due to Big Shug's abandonment attitude towards his family. The writer Douglas Stuart beautifully explains how the absence of a father and the mother's worsening condition due to addiction break the safety and identity-building process of a child especially in the case of young Shuggie. Stuart also points out hidden pains like emotional negligence and how society treat and ignore him and his family due to that reason. These small but constant ignorance also leave deep wounds in Shuggie is physical and mental growth. The author reveals that trauma is not always caused by major incidents, but quietly grows when family and the community fail to provide care and attention (Nazki).

Socioeconomic Trauma and Community Disintegration

The individual struggles of a family are linked with the broader scenario of economic crisis in Glasgow during the 1980s has been point out in this novel. At that time, factories were being shut down and poverty was rising, due to which the unity and bond within the community were being weakened. People were made emotionally numb by this economic crisis, and care for

each other's pain was vanished from the society. When society itself starts falling apart, even more loneliness and isolation are felt by people like Shuggie and his mother. These social conditions are condemned by the writer, Douglas Stuart, in the novel, and it is portrayed how poverty not only inflicts pain but also drives people apart.

Continuous poverty and losses were causing people to become mentally tired. This indifference of society is seen as a kind of abandonment — just like when a family member is left alone. In this way, personal and social griefs are interwoven by the writer, and the disregard by major institutions along with the social and economic factors responsible for people's suffering is denounced.

Trauma as Motif for Hope and Resilience

Although gloom and despair are portrayed throughout the novel, a perspective is offered in *Shuggie Bain* where hope and bravery continue to exist even amid pain and suffering. It is depicted how trauma influences a person's identity, relationships, and community, but it is also conveyed that even during tough times, paths to survival are discovered and circumstances are attempted to be understood. Trauma has not been depicted by the writer, Douglas Stuart, as only a story of helpless victims. Instead, characters have been introduced who, even in tough times, try to stay connected, show care, and understand themselves.

The struggle between pain and human courage is made to deepen the story further. It is presented as proof of survival. Such a theme is recognised as a valuable contribution to trauma literature because it conveys that no matter how shattered conditions may be, humans carry the strength to fall, recover, and move ahead.

The Depiction of Trauma in *The Promise* by Damon Galgut

Apartheid Trauma and Political Change in South Africa

The history of apartheid in South Africa and the unfinished attempts at reconciliation that followed are very sensitively depicted in *The Promise* novel. How a system like apartheid damaged people for generations and how profound scars were caused by political violence are uncovered by Damon Galgut's story. The whole country is actually represented by the broken and troubled family in the novel. Just as fights and conflicts occur within a family, separation and clashes are seen in the country's history as well.

Metaphors and emblems are employed by Galgut in the story to illustrate how people's lives are filled with grief and betrayal due to the weight of broken promises — whether political or personal.

It is also demonstrated in the novel how pain is generally hidden within political systems, and how different parts of society are affected by it in different ways. How personal suffering can be understood within the larger context of colonial rule and violence by those in power is also presented.

Trauma and Silence: The Unspoken Wounds

In the novel *The Promise*, “silence” is a very important theme that appears again and again. Sometimes silence is a way people use to cope with their pain, but other times it becomes a big barrier to making peace. Silence in the novel is depicted as a vessel containing sadness, guilt, and wounds that have not been experienced or expressed, and these are passed down from one

generation to another.

This hidden silence stops people from facing the truth and keeps old wounds covered up. When the outside world speaks of progress but the inner pain remains concealed, it reflects how complex the process of healing is after a conflict. Galgut's writing emphasises how trauma is found not only in memories but also in the silence surrounding it. This silence shows how hard it is to speak about and face deep and old social wounds.

Trauma-Reflective Narrative Techniques

This novel employs a unique method of storytelling that reflects the fragmented and distressing nature of trauma. The story is not narrated in a straight or time-based order, but in a broken way that helps the reader feel the confusion and pain that come with memories.

Some parts of the story are unreliable, and many details remain incomplete. This makes the story more unstable and unclear, just like painful memories. These techniques enable the reader to engage deeply with the story and grasp how trauma influences the mind. Galgut tells the story in a way that shows how hard it is to put painful memories into words, and how broken the thoughts and lives of people living with such pain can be.

Magical Realism and Trauma in *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*

Historical Context of the Sri Lankan Civil War

The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida is a novel set during the Sri Lankan Civil War. Extensive hardship caused by ethnic strife, human rights abuses, and political violence is depicted. Both collective and individual suffering are mirrored by Karunatilaka's narrative. Not only the brutality of war but also its lasting psychological and social effects are revealed.

The involvement of international powers and NGOs, which contributed to exacerbating or extending the conflict, is criticised in the novel. The 1956 election and the subsequent passing of the Sinhala Only Act imposed the Sinhala language as the only official language, removing English and Tamil (DeVotta, "Promoting Covenantal Pluralism" 52–53) It is shown that behind the local suffering, larger political and strategic reasons exist. In this way, personal trauma is linked to widespread violence and systemic failures by the story, illustrating how historical events and human experiences are deeply connected.

Application of Magical Realism as a Narrative Strategy

Karunatilaka employs magical realism in his narrative to depict how suffering and memories shift and are often difficult to grasp. The story has ghosts and imaginary talks between dead people, creating a world where it is difficult to tell the scary truths of history in a normal way. In this way, pain and death are represented as symbols and allegories, making it complicated to comprehend time and history linearly. Magical realism helps to talk about pains that are not easy to explain in words. It offers readers a fresh perspective to think and feel, helping them better grasp the intensity of anguish. (Shaheen, Aamer, Salman, and Qamar)

Trauma and Human Rights Discourse in the Novel

Significant human rights concerns are addressed in *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*. Karunatilaka repeatedly points out "independence" of Sri Lanka in 1948 by raising the question, "[h]ow does 1948 sound to you? Auspicious or suspicious?" (Karunatilaka 139). The book is not limited to laws or politics, but awareness is raised and better thinking is encouraged

through it. The novel shows how language and narrative techniques were used during the war to dehumanize and vilify victims. It is illustrated how perception and understanding of suffering are influenced by words. Major human rights problems are included in a regular story by Karunatilaka, and a moral approach is adopted, which allows the voices of oppressed people to be heard and past mistakes to be understood. Historical details and cultural discourses regarding ethnicity, race, religion, and sexuality also become a part of the personal storytelling within the novel (Nayar, "Human Rights" 80–81). It is demonstrated that pain can be expressed and human rights advocated for through literature as a powerful medium (Sharma and Tripathi).

Comparative Socio-Historical Trauma Facets Across the Novels

Economic Downfall versus Political Unrest as Trauma Contexts

Trauma is depicted in varied social and historical contexts by the three novels, which significantly influence their narratives and themes. In *Shuggie Bain*, trauma is shown during Glasgow's industrial decline, where pain is caused to both individuals and the community by poverty and the breakdown of society.

In *The Promise*, trauma is situated amid South Africa's political transformation, with the enduring impacts of apartheid and the difficulties of post-colonial healing being emphasised. In *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*, trauma is presented amid the ethnic violence of Sri Lanka's civil war, with personal pain being connected to larger political and international issues.

It is demonstrated by these contexts how the origins, recurrence, and representation of trauma are shaped by major economic, political, and military upheavals, while the complex connections between history and personal lives are revealed.

Familial and Community Trauma: Microcosms of Larger Violence

In these novels, family break-ups represent small pictures of the larger pains in society. In Shuggie Bain, families break apart because of addiction and absence, which also shows the problem of a breaking society. Similarly, in *The Promise*, family fights and broken promises reflect political and racial violence. In these narratives, people withdraw from their communities and become emotionally detached. This leads to broken relationships and disrupts social stability. This demonstrates that internal family struggles and external political-social issues combine to produce complex sources of pain, which extend from individuals to the wider society.

Memory, Silence, and Narrative in Trauma Representation

In these novels, memories serve as the primary method to construct narratives about suffering. In each story, memories are fragmented and unclear, so the narrative is not presented in a direct or simple manner. Silence happens in two ways — one to protect from feeling the pain again, and the other to make the pain last longer. Because of this, there are many gaps and confusion in the story, which need careful reading to understand. The time of memories does not move straight, and the story is told in broken pieces, which feels like the pain is also broken. This creates a unique form of expression to portray the deep scars of the past.

Psychological and Emotional Dimensions of Trauma in the Texts

Childhood Trauma and Identity Formation

The impact of trauma on childhood identity is mirrored particularly in *Shuggie Bain* and *The Promise*. Stuart portrays the fragile child Shuggie and illustrates how loss and neglect in early life impair a person's development and psychological well-being. Galgut's novel also shows how trauma passes through generations, explaining how the pain of older family members can harm the identity development of younger children. Psychoanalytic theories reveal how trauma leads to mental disconnection and influences the ways individuals think and experience emotions, especially during critical periods when trauma occurs.

Symptoms and Coping Mechanisms of Trauma

Common signs of trauma, such as emotional numbness, addiction, and mental health challenges, are displayed by the characters in these novels. In *Shuggie Bain*, pain is coped with through Agnes's alcohol use, while psychological endurance is shown by Shuggie's withdrawal, particularly in a difficult setting.

In Karunatilaka's novel, pain is dealt with through supernatural experiences and magical elements, reflecting larger efforts to confront death and injustice. How individual suffering and systemic social injustices are intertwined, intensifying the experience of pain, is illustrated by these coping methods.

Trauma and Interpersonal Relationships

In these three novels, trauma damages relationships and destroys trust among people. It impacts family life as well as other social bonds. In *Shuggie Bain*, the complicated relationship between Shuggie and his mother, marked by both affection and separation, reflects this complexity.

In broken societies and families damaged by political violence, people become isolated from each other and lose mutual trust. All of this reveals how trauma weakens people's ability to form healthy relationships and undermines the strength and togetherness of a community.

Narrative Strategies and Literary Techniques Representing Trauma

Fragmentation and non-linearity

Sometimes the narrative remains silent and deliberately conceals certain details. This indicates that trauma is not always simple to express through language. When the storyteller can't be fully trusted, readers need to try harder to find out what really happened. The gaps in the story create opportunities for tension and thoughtful reflection, revealing the complexity of trauma. These ways of telling stories also make us think about what is right or wrong when showing trauma—how much should be told and how much should be kept secret.

Silence, Unreliable Narration, and Gaps in Memory

Silence is maintained in the narrative, and certain details are deliberately concealed. It is shown that pain and trauma are sometimes difficult to explain with words. When the narrator is considered unreliable, extra effort must be made by readers to uncover the truth. Opportunities for suspense and deeper reflection are created by the gaps in the narrative, helping the complexity of trauma to be understood. Ethical questions about what is right or wrong in showing trauma are also raised by these storytelling methods — how much should be shared and how much should be kept secret.

Critique of Socioeconomic Inequality and Marginalization and Political Commentary on

Trauma

Critique of Socioeconomic Inequality and Marginalisation

The novel **Shuggie Bain** offers a powerful reflection on the lives of the poor and socially excluded. Author **Douglas Stuart** illustrates how financial hardship influences a person's sense of self and the way they communicate their feelings. Through this, he explains how major failures of society — like unemployment, addiction, and social neglect — become the reasons for a person's pain and suffering. From this angle, the novel is not merely a story of one person's misery, but also shows how economic and social injustice shape people's difficulties and destinies.

Political Violence and Ethnic Conflict as Drivers of Trauma

In *The Promise* and *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*, political conflict is a significant source of pain and hardship. Damon Galgut reveals in his novel how the lasting influence of Apartheid (racial segregation in South Africa) leaves a deep mark on people's minds and the social structure. Meanwhile, Shehan Karunatilaka exposes the brutality and ethnic tensions of the Sri Lankan Civil War in his narrative. Both of these fictional novels explain how political violence and old wounds create deep divisions in society and make peace and reconciliation more difficult.

Challenging Historical Memory and Trauma Stories

In these novels, the issues of remembering, denying, and acknowledging the past form a key theme. They reveal how societies either hold on to or erase their painful histories. These stories also talk how communities try to balance between forgetting old wounds and demanding justice.

These novels also show that **literature and storytelling** have become strong tools for **re-examining and talking about past events.** It helps create understanding between different groups and supports the healing of social and cultural wounds.

Trauma, Healing, and the Possibility of Recovery

Representations of Resilience and Resistance

Although these novels depict significant hardship and distress, they also reveal how the characters strive to discover purpose and agency in their lives with bravery and optimism.

In Shuggie Bain, it is clear that trying to survive even in despair gives a chance for healing and recovery. These narratives also explore themes of defiance and perseverance, similar to postcolonial survivance—the methods by which communities persist and resist after colonial rule—where suffering and trauma coexist with the crucial pursuit of empowerment.

Trauma-Informed Narrative Ethics

These novels depict hardship and distress while also honoring the dignity and worth of the characters. They present the facts honestly but maintain respect for the people involved. Stories about trauma like this help raise awareness in society and bring about change. They fight against prejudice and stigma and encourage empathy towards others. These narratives reveal that pain and suffering are not only individual experiences but are linked to society and larger power structures. Recognising this is key to genuine healing and advancement.

Conclusion and Future Directions

Summary of Trauma Representations in the Three Novels

A detailed picture of pain and struggles connected to personal, family, and social-political situations is shown together by these three Booker Prize-winning novels. Special storytelling styles — such as broken stories, magical realism, silence, and symbols — are used to help readers understand how difficult it is to remember trauma. It is also explained by the novels that pain arises from past injustices and social issues, while human strength and hope for healing are also demonstrated.

Research Gaps and Critical Perspectives

Although these novels provide profound insights into pain and suffering, further interdisciplinary research is required to enhance comprehension of the psychological, cultural, and socio-political dimensions of trauma. Especially, paying more attention to the connections between trauma and identity, memory politics, and the ethics of storytelling can improve the critical understanding of today's trauma literature.

Impact on Readers and Broader Cultural Understanding

By depicting hardship and anguish through compelling narrative techniques, these novels help readers feel empathy and understand different cultures better. Receiving the Booker Prize exposes these stories to a broader audience, promoting public dialogue on trauma and paving the way for more detailed literary analysis in the future. In this way, the novels promise to play an important role in the study of trauma and in social conversations about healing and justice.

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