



Empathetic Narrative and Enigmatic Scarring Events in “The Color of Our Sky”: A Study of Cultural Concussion and Collective Identity

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ABSTRACT

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The Color of Our Sky by Amita Trasi is a striking piece of narrative empathy with enigmatic scarring events that shakes the reader. The societal trauma that has led to Indian outcasts, particularly Bagnios, seeing their traditions as a threat to their core collective identities, was clarified by this book. The horrifying and gloomy conditions that the Indian outcasts endure leave a lasting effect on the readers. The story fleshes out the people on both sides of the fight, bridging cultural divides and promoting empathy. The unsettling story of events portrays the terrible circumstances that the queen of India are enduring. In The Color of Our Sky, the idea of the caste system in India is examined, along with the extent to which it moulds people's lives. That is what gave rise to Mukta. Her caste was lower than others, and the women in it commit their lives to becoming the goddess' consort. The concepts of empathetic narrative, collective identity, cultural concussion and trauma will have been used to study this work of fiction. The theories of cultural concussion and collective identity will have been utilized to analyse the text under debate. The researcher will try to use critical analysis techniques to look into the distressed work of this fiction through the concept of narrative empathy.

Keywords: *Collective Identity; Cultural Concussion; Cultural Trauma; Empathy; Empathetic Narrative; Narrative Empathy; Trauma*

Background

This study explores how *The Colour of Our Sky* by Amita Trasi uses empathetic storytelling and traumatic events to shape collective identity. Focusing on the emotional experiences of the main characters, Tara and Mukta, it examines how trauma, cultural displacement, and resilience influence their sense of self and relationships. Central to the analysis is the concept of “cultural concussion”—a disruption in emotional and cultural continuity caused by trauma—which affects the characters’ sense of belonging and identity.

Set in India, the novel follows Tara and Mukta, whose lives are forever changed by a tragic event. Through their parallel journeys, Trasi addresses powerful themes such as friendship, endurance, human trafficking, and caste discrimination. The empathetic narrative style invites readers to deeply engage with the characters’ emotional struggles, creating a space for compassion and reflection on systemic injustice. The research highlights how Trasi’s portrayal of trauma—especially Mukta’s, who is sold under false pretences—reveals the long-lasting effects of societal oppression. Her story illustrates how outdated practices like caste hierarchy and gender violence cause deep emotional wounds. Trasi’s narrative humanises these issues, urging readers to recognise their own biases and the resilience of survivors.

Ultimately, the study argues that Trasi’s novel demonstrates how shared suffering can foster collective identity among marginalised individuals. Through its layered characters and emotionally rich storytelling, *The Colour of Our Sky* shows the transformative power of empathy in addressing cultural trauma. It underscores how storytelling can bridge cultural divides, raise awareness of social injustice, and support emotional healing and identity formation.

Statement of the Problem

This study investigates how empathetic storytelling in *The Colour of Our Sky* portrays trauma and cultural displacement as forces shaping collective identity, emotional healing, and resilience among marginalized individuals.

Research Objectives

To examine how *The Colour of Our Sky* by Amita Trasi employs empathetic storytelling and trauma to shape collective identity, explore cultural concussion, and highlight resilience amid systemic injustice.

Literature Review

The literature review provides an in-depth analysis of enigmatic scarring events in literature, investigating how these events are utilised to create emotional resonance and depth within the narrative. It discusses the ways in which authors craft enigmatic scarring events that transcend the immediate impact on the characters, delving into the lasting emotional and psychological effects that reverberate throughout the story. By examining a wide range of literary works, the literature review aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how empathy and enigmatic scarring events are intricately woven into the fabric of literature and the ways in which they contribute to the overall impact and resonance of a narrative (Spreng *et al.*, 2009). It explores the significance of empathy in literature, focusing on how authors use narrative techniques to evoke empathy in readers (Stepien & Baernstein, 2006). It delves into the ways in which empathetic narratives can be used to convey the impact of enigmatic scarring events on characters and the importance of these events in shaping the overall narrative. The review also examines the various narrative techniques employed by authors to create an emotive and empathetic connection between the reader and the characters, discussing the role of point of view, characterisation, and descriptive language in eliciting empathy. Authors have attempted to describe and give voice to the communal experiences of historical

atrocities through the medium of literature.

Research indicates that a country's or a person's tragic past might negatively impact subsequent generations. In this sense, a topic that is commonly covered in several novels is enigmatic scars. Character representation may change if the scars are known about. Each of the following works is a sophisticated meditation on scars and trauma; several of them use both structure and narrative to explore the theme. These books examine how pain survivors communicate and absorb their experiences, as well as how frequently their tales are ignored or conveniently forgotten. However, enigmatic scars and trauma never go away; they are ingrained in society's power structures as well as the circuits that govern every aspect of our lives. It is present all around and does not diminish just because it would rather not be seen. It lingers in the air, the land, the cities, and the water, just like in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. And the historical permeates the personal all the time, regardless of whether the ones who do the crimes or the ones who are harmed, the ones who gain or lose, the blind or the ones who see actual ghosts. Seeing is the first step towards bearing testimony. Inspired by the historical story of an escaped slave who kills her child rather than have her returned to the settlement, Toni Morrison's empathetic narrative masterpiece on the continuous brutalities of slavery blends reality with the supernatural. "Not a house in the country is packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief." (Morrison, 1987) *Sethe* and her family are haunted by a ghost in this enigmatic scarring novel and later by an enigmatic young lady who shows up at their door claiming to be *Beloved*. *Beloved* is eloquent, challenging, enticing, terrible, and the endless return of history—of what we believed to be dead.

The Small Backs of Children is an empathetic, fractured, disorganised, obsessive, and agitated narrative that challenges everything and refuses to take any one direction. "Every story is a wound. Some are sutured. Some are left open to the flies." (Yuknavitch, 2020) In a nation devastated by conflict, a photographer captures the moment a girl in an explosion tries to flee. This picture makes a writer feel traumatised again. It is decided by a group of artists to locate this girl. An artist girl has already been located. Some people are able to avoid violence, while others are stimulated by it, profit from it, or require it in order to create art. Lidia Yuknavitch demonstrates how these aspects are inscribed on the body by skilfully weaving together sex, violence, gender, art, and war. The meandering and scarring nature of the book makes you pay attention and jolts you out of your reverie.

A relentless account of a woman who is abducted, raped, and kept for ransom dominates the first half of Roxane Gay's debut novel, *An Untamed State*, making it difficult to read. "I counted the days, then I lost count. I counted the times I was hit, then I lost count. I counted the men, then I lost count." (Gay, 2014) Because her affluent father won't pay, Mireille is detained for thirteen days as she visits relatives in Haiti. However, the story shimmers with crossing layers of identity in the second half of the book, when Mireille returns to her home and wanders through American society as a stranger in a foreign world. In Gay's empathetic narrative, there are no simple solutions and no happily ever after since nobody comes out of it unhurt. "My father did not save me. My husband did not save me. I had to save myself, but I didn't know how." (Gay, 2014) Forgiveness is not anticipated, and the characters don't extend it. These three empathetic narratives in literature make the bibliomaniacs think that such scarring events lead to loss of collective identity and raise questions about the very culture where characters faced such scarring and traumatic conditions.

Methods

The wide term "empathy" describes how a person responds on an emotional and cognitive level to the experiences that they have witnessed in another person. Being empathetic makes one more likely to be kind and helpful to others. "Putting oneself in another person's shoes helps people follow the Golden Rule—empathy is a building block of morality," the Greater Good Science Centre, a research institute that

focuses on the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being, states. "It is also essential to healthy relationships because it makes it easier for us to comprehend the prerequisites, goals, and viewpoints of others (Spreng *et al.*, 2009).

Keen's framework emphasises the value of empathetic reactions to literature by implying that a reader's comprehension and emotional attachment to a story are influenced by their capacity to empathise with fictional characters. Through an analysis of empathy's functions within narrative context, Keen clarifies the complex interplay between literature and the reader's emotional and cognitive processes. Her theoretical paradigm highlights the critical role that empathy plays in influencing the interpretive experience and emotional impact of literature, providing insightful information about the mechanisms by which narratives elicit empathy and emotional resonance in readers. Furthermore, Keen's research highlights the wider consequences of an empathic encounter with stories, emphasising how it can promote empathy and comprehension in readers' relationships and interactions with others in the real world (Stiegler-Balfour *et al.*, 2020)

Suzanne Keen explores the function of empathy in narrative theory in her theoretical framework, highlighting the relationship between reading and the reader's capacity for empathy with fictitious characters. According to Keen, reading fiction improves a reader's emotional intelligence by allowing them to relate to and comprehend the feelings of the characters. She suggests that an empathic interaction with stories helps readers get a deeper grasp of human relationships and experiences in addition to evoking emotional reactions in them.

According to Jeffrey C. Alexander, a cultural concussion takes place when individuals within a collectivity believe they have experienced a horrific incident that permanently alters their memories and fundamentally alters their identity going forward. The harm a cultural concussion causes to one's identity is a crucial aspect of it. Cultural concussion is more of a "master" event that has the ability to alter collective identity and, in the process, alter society as a whole than it is a particular event or series of events. This explains why a certain group may appropriate an event and claim it as their own. The Holocaust, which Jews and Israel both regard as the pinnacle of Jewish identity in all its manifestations, is arguably the most famous example of this. Cultural concussion affects not just the present generation but also the generations to come. It has long-lasting effects and needs to be resolved by those who may not have been present for the original occurrence. Ultimately, a cultural concussion is an experience that modifies the existential positions and worldviews of a collectivity. It is a loss of innocence in which the general conviction that the world is good and fundamentally just is replaced with awe at the world's potential for evil and a realisation of how shaky and dependent security and the upholding of deeply held norms are. As a result of their traumatic and scarring experience, cognitive and symbolic frames are created that colour and shape this group's worldview for many generations to come, as well as speculate about how the outside world will treat them. These elements all work together to create novel modes of existence. A cultural concussion reorients a group's purpose and gives it a new focus.

The technique of elevating some memories while suppressing others is often associated with cultural concussion, and it can have a significant impact on how the event is remembered by society in the long run. Cultural concussion is also frequently disputed because various groups within the same community may have different collective recollections of the same incident. One of the things that continues to shape sociology as a field today is its continued focus on collective memory.

Discussion

The Colour of Our Sky ultimately offers a profound reflection on the complexities of cultural identity and the enduring power of human connection. As the plot unfolds, it invites readers to contemplate the lasting

impact of empathetic storytelling and the enigmatic scarring events depicted in the novel, shedding light on the resilience of the human spirit and the potential for healing and collective growth. The plot of this debut is divided between past and present, as it shifts between Tara's privileged upbringing in a wealthy home and Mukta's life as a young girl sold into prostitution by her family. The novel's narrative is a powerful exploration of the emotional and psychological scars left by these experiences and how they shape the characters' identities and relationships. Through the empathetic narrative, Trasi masterfully portrays the depth of human suffering and the capacity for hope and healing in the face of adversity. The novel's portrayal of enigmatic scarring events further emphasises the ways in which trauma can reverberate through generations and cultural boundaries, affecting not only individuals but entire communities. Through skilful character development and storytelling, this three-decker dispels myths and assumptions of Indian society and culture. By giving them a human face and shedding light on the subtleties of their lives, it aids readers in understanding and developing empathy for characters from diverse backgrounds.

“I was always feeling afraid I might say something that would remind her of my father, and at times when I did ask, her eyes would melt into that forlorn, heartbroken look. So I let her continue with her stories, never stopping her to ask if my father wanted to meet me. I’d wait, I told myself.” (p. 16).

Mukta's lineage remained a mystery for a long time because it was never established if she was the genuine daughter her mother had married or the daughter of a temple prostitute. She asked her mother, Amma, and her grandmother, Sakhubai, a lot of questions. Particularly when she saw families making purchases at the bazaar, she felt as though something was missing from her life. This greatly increases the novel's empathy. The lines that follow give a moving account of Mukta's emotional journey and her difficulty accepting her paternity. Mukta's hesitation to question her mother about her father is evident in the text since she knows it will hurt her. This unwillingness to delve more into her father's identity demonstrates Mukta's empathy.

“I sometimes forget that I was a child once, that everything was foolish and naïve in my eyes. It all seems like a dream—those serene mornings, waking up in the village when all you could see were clear skies and sunshine pouring in—it’s slanting rays so thick you would be convinced that was all life had to offer.” (p.16)

The aforementioned passage from *The Colour of Our Sky*, which reflects introspectively on Tara and other girls dealing with their common childhood memories, demonstrates empathy for Mukta, a devadasi. They deem how different the harsh reality of their current existence is from the purity and simplicity of their childhood. This introspection most frequently happens as the character struggles with recollections of the past and the striking contrasts between their current situation and their upbringing. This suggests that after becoming devadasis, they have to go through a transformation in their life, acknowledging that they were once children as well. Empathy is encouraged by this acknowledgement of our common humanity, which gives Mukta's early experiences legitimacy and significance. The character remembers calm mornings in the village, bringing back memories of earlier days and a sense of nostalgia for Mukta's village background. This sentimental thought shows that Mukta has a deep emotional connection to her past as well as a respect for the peace and beauty of her surroundings. By bringing up these pictures, the viewer is made to feel empathetic to Mukta's desire for a better future and a life unencumbered by her circumstances.

“I didn’t know any better. But sitting there, watching the moon as lonely as me, I would often notice the ache that crept in my heart.” (p.19)

Mukta appears to have comparable emotions to the protagonist based on her admittance of feeling lonely and sensing awe in her heart. Through her own vulnerability, Mukta makes it possible for the reader to identify with her feelings and experiences. Mukta's reflections on the moon reveal the depth of her emotions and her inner turmoil. Because of their common symbolism, the reader is able to relate to Mukta more deeply and understand her emotional journey. Overall, by letting the reader inside Mukta's inner world and letting them experience her feelings of vulnerability and loneliness, these sentences from her communicate a sense of emotional empathy. By means of her reflective introspection, Mukta establishes a rapport with the reader, prompting comprehension and empathy for her emotional travails and obstacles.

“He tipped my chin towards him with his hands, scrutinised my face with his drowsy eyes, and said this had to be done so the goddess could bless his family. Without another word the man began unbuttoning his shirt and loosening his belt, shedding his clothes one by one and flinging them onto the chair. I slid under the bed and hid there, trying unsuccessfully not to cry. Everything was quiet for a while until his large, hairy hands reached for me and dumped me on the bed. He said, “Look, don’t cry. You are unnecessarily making things difficult for yourself.” (p. 76)

When Mukta turns ten, her mother gets a sickness, and their financial situation also becomes problematic. They're starving and really destitute. Because of her mother's illness, Mukta receives constant reprimands from her grandmother Sakubai. Men avoid their home since her mother is ill. They therefore require money. Their line of work is under scrutiny. In order to turn Mukta into a temple prostitute, her grandmother sends her to the temple ceremony of God Yellamma. Mukta's grandmother makes her go to the event. Mukta becomes a temple prostitute after the ritual. Despite her extreme hunger, the ritual prevents her from receiving food. She receives the moniker of a prostitute following the ritual. They finally bring her to the palace of Zamindar. Grandma and Madame don't give a damn about her hunger. They want to force her into prostitution. They forward her Zamindar's chamber. Sitting silently on the chair, she observes the surroundings and the ceiling fan. Abruptly, a large man enters the room and closes the door. She is incredibly terrified after realising everything. The big man takes off his shirt and takes off his belt. He puts her on the bed, and she can smell the smoke. She attempts to get his hands off her, but she is unable to do so. She's having trouble breathing. The man leaves the room after two hours. She is bleeding profusely and in excruciating pain. She is dressed up and taken by her grandmother. She isn't fed anything even now. After receiving payment from the Zamindar, Madam, the leader of the prostitutes, departs from the palace. This is how she turns into a sex prostitute. What she felt at that traumatic and scarring event is expressed by her in the above following lines.

“I saw the man bash Sanjiv’s head with a bat, and blood began streaming from his forehead down the sides. “Please, I cried, let him go” Sanjiv fell to the ground; I watched them beat the life out of him until his body could take no more. They dragged me away while I looked at his lifeless eyes one last time..... I wondered if the pain was from seeing Sanjiv die, if the pain in my heart had extended in my body so that it physically hurt to be alive.” (p. 257-58)

When Mukta was nineteen, she first met Sanjiv. Mukta develops feelings for him. Numerous individuals seeking sexual pleasure visit this brothel. Sanjiv is a wealthy twenty-year-old man. He is devoted to Mukta. Sanjiv tells Madam he would want to take Mukta to the market. However, because he is the wealthy businessman's son, Madam easily grants his wish. She sends two goondas after them as well. Mukta and Sanjiv make deft use of the chance. The two goondas catch them as they attempt to flee. After killing Sanjiv, they abduct Mukta. She is a golden duck in their eyes. Her attempt turns out to be a complete failure. Readers can relate to Mukta since the words depict a tragic incident. Mukta's futile attempt to flee highlights how vulnerable and powerless the community's marginalised staff feel in the cultural concussion and search for their identity collectively. The normalisation of violence and the acceptance of oppressive societal standards contribute to sustaining entrenched power relations, mysterious wounds, and

trauma cycles, as well as an ingrained culture of fear and injustice. This episode serves as an example of how trauma is transmitted through generations within the society, as individuals such as Mukta and Amma navigate complex social structures and institutional oppression.

Conclusion

The researcher examines *The Colour of Our Sky* through the theoretical lens of cultural concussion and collective identity, focusing on narrative empathy and the lingering impact of trauma. This approach highlights how empathy can bridge between historically antagonistic groups. By analysing the characters' interactions, the study emphasises how shared emotional experiences—both painful and redemptive—foster reconciliation and understanding. The novel intricately explores identity, portraying it as fluid, multifaceted, and shaped by memory, culture, and personal history. Characters wrestle with reconciling their pasts and shaping their futures, revealing the complex process of self-discovery. This mirrors the novel's broader themes of trauma and healing, resonating with Tom Toremans' reflections on trauma theory. Toremans suggests that trauma destabilises traditional academic frameworks, demanding interdisciplinary approaches to comprehend its effects and limits. Within the novel, identity is portrayed as an ongoing negotiation between belonging and individuality, authenticity and assimilation. As characters delve into their inner conflicts and unresolved trauma, the narrative becomes a meditation on the human condition. The story invites readers to introspect, positioning itself as a mirror that reflects their own inner struggles and evolving sense of self. Through this deeply empathetic storytelling, *The Colour of Our Sky* not only exposes the fractures of identity but also gestures toward healing and personal growth.

Declarations

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate: This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. Since the research does not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data, formal ethical approval was not required. However, all necessary precautions were taken to ensure academic integrity and compliance with ethical guidelines.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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