



Cultural Trauma in the Inheritance of Loss

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ABSTRACT

Cultural trauma appears when a collectivity of human beings suffers sudden and rapid social change, touching the core of their inner sense. This paper analyzes cultural trauma in the precise time in that novel according to a classification of the Cultural Trauma theory and presents various strategies to cope with trauma. The whole process of cultural trauma reveals the complicated background then. Confronting ethic problems in displacement, tackling pertinent issues of the globalizing world and struggling with the lingering colonial effects of Britain in India, the novel depicts a special historical scene, implying the ways of living and enlightening today's loss during the period of inheritance.

I. Introduction

At the end the twentieth century, in the media, in political speeches, in everyday talk—a strange word “trauma” had come into being, no longer confined to hospitals and psychiatric wards, which symbolized the birth of a new discourse, the discourse of Trauma, entering the domain of social sciences and the humanities^[1]. In previous studies, enormous efforts have been made to borrow the concept of trauma from medicine and psychiatry and to introduce it into sociological theory^[11]. Rooted in rapid social change, culture, one significant part in society, is a susceptible branch, generating the concept of Cultural Trauma which is also what the paper intends to explore.

The coincidence is that the detailed story depicted in *the Inheritance of Loss* happened in the 1980s, matching

the era of preliminary initiation of the theory of Cultural Trauma. Cultural trauma in the book, if adapted to the four characteristics—present in conjunction, portrayed the historical background of that special time.

The first characteristic: the change itself is sudden and rapid. With globalization and industrialization developing, traditional ways of living in India, also affected by lingering British colonization, had changed rapidly. A tremendous colonial shock on Indians' convention, a radical western shake to inner ethic spirits, as well as a wide range of Indians dreaming of being rich after moving to America, showed it was consistent with the second characteristic—trauma is radical, deep and comprehensive, touching the core. While the characters were almost Indians, the origin of trauma is perceived as imposed, exogenous, coming from the outside, meeting the third characteristics. The characters in the novel were struggling with

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an identity dilemma which induced their inner-conflicts: double-consciousness, resistance and othering, due to the dominance of the caste and colonial systems. For them, the conflicts had been perceived mentally, encountering the fourth characteristics.

It seemed every character had their own cultural trauma attributed to their complicated individual background, even if they did share some common cultural trauma together. The paper focuses on cultural trauma in *the Loss of Inheritance*. However, differentiating from minutely explicating each character respectively, cultural trauma here has been tackled macroscopically and microscopically. Macroscopically, three main parts will be illustrated: spatial displacement, an alien culture in, and strategies. The first two concentrate more on symptoms to demonstrate the two causal perspectives for cultural trauma, while the last corresponds to the characters' methods and suggests more constructive strategies to confront with cultural trauma. Microscopically, every part will be illustrated delicately and subtly. According to Sztompka, depending on the number of concrete circumstances, cultural trauma may be a phase in the constructive morphogenesis of culture or in the destructive cycle of cultural decay^[5].

2. Cultural Trauma: Spatial Displacement

The process of globalization and industrialization simulates the development of economy. However, resources are not balanced. "The most fundamental reason for Indians to leave their hometown is the cross-border flow of population caused by the unequal economic structure in the world."^[13] Indians' urge to change their living triggered their inner desires to go to America or other western countries where they would live wealthier based on their wishful thinking.

The spatial mobility was prevalent accordingly. People in the poorer areas were disappointed at their country or just went outside for a better life. Biju was, so was Jemubhai. Hierarchical world order and western cultural hegemony, nevertheless, impacted tremendously and radically on the drifting emigrants. Worse still, as they could never be entitled to the right of speaking with a loud voice on the world stage, they might be desperate, dejected, and depressed by their underprivileged culture. emigrants move among various geographical space, but they do not inherit the various cultures in various space, thus they lose their own inheritance of cultures. The problem brought by spatial mobility tends to be the misunderstanding and inadaptability of cultural identities. This trauma, caused mainly by globalization, or to be more specific and direct, emigrants' spatial displacement.

Biju, the son of the cook, was one of the main victims

of cultural trauma by displacement. When his visa expired, he had to work illegally with other immigrants. The collision of different cultures and unfamiliar environments made him frustrated, though he stuck to refuse eating beef, which was the bottom line of his mother culture. Flooded by "Colombian, Tunisian, Ecuadorian, Gambian" culture not belonging to him, he felt a sense of alienation, solitude, emptiness and anguish. That was his cultural trauma. He moved to American with a wishful thinking. His father, the cook, treasured the letters from Biju for they both believed they could enjoy a better life in the future. "Eventually Biju would make enough and the cook would retire. He would receive a daughter-in law to serve him food, crick-crack his toes, grandchildren to swat like flies."^[5] The dream, nonetheless, could not be realized any more, as they can never be acknowledged the same identity as native American. Even little as beef, culture varies. Biju was hurt mentally and radically by exogenous culture. When he was applying for the green card, he found himself never integrated with other culture:

...felt a pang for village life.

Biju couldn't help but feel a flash of anger at his father for sending him alone to this country, but he knew he wouldn't have forgiven his father for not trying to send him, either^[5].

Differentiating with Biju struggling for a life, young Jemubhai, had experienced cultural trauma when he went to Cambridge for further study. However, the racial prejudice and imperial consciousness of British society made him aware of discrimination as soon as he set foot on the land of England. His color, accent, religion and eating habits all made him different from the white. Because he was an Indian, when he first arrived in London, no one was willing to rent him a house. After being rejected 26 times, a woman who was in urgent need of money promised to rent him a house. Things never ended easily. The landlord was unwilling to face him and would rather put lunch at the door of the house. Worse still, because of eating curry, people thought he had a bad smell and passed by covering noses with hands. He was certainly unwelcomed when he moved to such a new culture. For him, what he owned in his race was not recognized by the dominant culture in England. Thus, he suffered giant cultural trauma at that time. Such cultural trauma influenced him deep into his life:

"Don't work too hard."

"One must, Mrs. Rice."

He had learned to take refuge in the third person and to keep everyone at bay, to keep even himself away from himself like the Queen^[5].

The only way to transfer his dissatisfaction was to

study:

He worked twelve hours at a stretch, late into the night... He retreated into a solitude that grew in weight day by day. The solitude became a habit, the habit became the man, and it crushed him into a shadow^[5].

It was as if then he could find a peaceful place. After he was back home, his abomination and hatred for western culture, had been assimilated and formed a new type of culture trauma irritating others, which will be illustrated later.

If Jemubhai and Biju are on behalf of the type of cultural trauma by spatial mobility to external privileged cultures, Nepalese youngster Gyan and the Bangladesh sisters must be the victim by dominant culture in India. Their displacements are weak cultures in India.

Gyan, as a Nepalese who immigrated to India, resented the poor family environment and unequal job opportunities. When he was treated arrogantly by the old judge at Sai's home, he transferred his anger at India's social discrimination against Nepalese immigrants to Sai, and divulged the information that the judge's home had shotguns to Nepalese teenagers who supported the Gurkha national liberation movement. His cultural trauma stemmed from racial discrimination. In Indians' eyes, Nepalese were lazy, "these Neps can't be trusted. And they don't just rob. They think absolutely nothing of murdering, as well" and were allocated rather worse resources despite of a larger population.

In Kalimpong, high in the northeastern Himalayas where they lived—the retired judge and his cook, Sai, and Mutt—there was a report of new dissatisfaction in the hills, gathering insurgency, men and guns. It was the Indian-Nepalese this time, fed up with being treated like the minority in a place where they were the majority. They wanted their own country, or at least their own state, in which to manage their own affairs^[5].

Such unfairness gave rise to Nepalese's national liberation for their cultural trauma.

The Bangladesh sisters Lola and Noni. For the purpose of living, they lived on the houses, land and other properties left by Laura's deceased husband. According to Maslow's hierarchy of Needs Theory, these only met their physiological needs. As individuals, they also need to find security needs. In order to solve this problem, they chose Bahud, a Nepalese male, as their guard. Seeking for the balance of social status, Lola and Noni were full of admiration and longing for Britain, eating "strawberries and cream" and "Tikka masala". They filled their houses with British goods and at the same time, they read English as if roaming among books. All of their preferences were to build a fictitious civilized society for themselves, in which

they fantasized that their social status could be side by side with men. They, together with noble men and priests, took cars, read books, discussed issues and so on. They had not been described by the author about the inequality between the two sexes, which created a false image of equal social status of men and women for the readers. The two sisters were unwilling to confront the reality, but chose self-deception. Their cultural trauma was not manifested obviously, rather, their performance in dealing with trauma was overwhelmed by their love for English culture.

What these characters shared in common is that they had all suffered from cultural clash due to spatial mobility. They simply moved to different cultural areas and turned out to be maladjusted or ill-suited to the new environment. The wrong displacements, put them at a grueling position. No matter racial prejudice, cultural repression, or policy bias were pressured on them, factors together damaged their inner spirits and identity, giving rise to cultural trauma.

3. Cultural Trauma: An Alien Culture

The opposite variant of cultural trauma is seen when people are not mobile, but an alien culture comes to embrace them, as in foreign conquest, colonialism, or imperial domination^[3]. For India then, it must be called Westernization, Industrialization or Anglicization. The colonization of Britain struck the indigenous traditional culture and ethnic Indian spirits. Indians suddenly found themselves in a cultural world completely at odds with their indigenous cultures. Cultural trauma resulted here from a clash of indigenous with a foreign culture, culturally interpreted as pernicious. The surrounding environment, whatever economically, politically, or culturally, were all affected by the lingering colonial modes. People then had no choice but to follow and adapt to.

Nimi, wife of Jemubhai, was an indirect victim of cultural trauma. As a traditional woman, she had no way to ensure her right. All she was forced to do was to listen to her husband. She was totally under the control of her father and husband. She was "kept carefully locked up behind the high walls of the haveli". Having been given vent to her husband's anger, she was bullied by servants and despised by her maiden relatives, which led her the final tragedy—fell into extreme loneliness and lived in the dilemma. Her hidden cultural trauma was definitely, the tragedy of tradition as well as the most important and connective reason—the abuse and ignorance of her husband, who was also the victim of exogenous culture. But for Nimi, cultural trauma occurred certainly probably under the impact of Jemubhai. Her cultural trauma was an

indirect outcome of alien cultural trauma. At the end, she even “seems to have made up her mind not to learn. . . . She will not argue—that way one might respond and have a dialogue—she just goes limp”.^[5]

Jemubhai reacted anomalously after cultural trauma as a producer, or transferrer of cultural trauma, dispensing misery on others. He internalized the ideology of master of the Empire, and became the servant of British colonists and the master of low caste Indians like cooks^[13]. The old judge, unable to unload the colonial heritage, could only English himself: “he corrected his pronunciation, listened to Caruso and Geely’s operas, and read the brief history of Western art, philosophy and France”^[5]. In this way, he implanted the British culture into his Indian body, but he neither could integrate into the western culture, nor could he throw away the Indian characteristics, which excluded the possibility of becoming a genuine cultural successor. He could only by a hybridizer and control those weaker. He was a marginal person living in the region between England and his motherland. He liked Sai not because of the true love for a granddaughter, but she was like another himself:

he would wish to rid himself of her or treat her as he had her mother, her grandmother. But Sai, it had turned out, was more his kin than he had thought imaginable. There was something familiar about her; she had the same accent and manners. She was a westernized Indian brought up by English nuns, an estranged Indian living in India. The journey he had started so long ago had continued in his descendants...^[5]

What Jemubhai lost was his dignity and respect for his compatriots. His betrayal of the culture made him endure great suffering and become a lonely man who coveted the past and rejected the reality.

It was as if he was the control freak on others. The cook had no name in the novel. He represents the poorest. During the home invasion, the old judge was insulted and Sai was forced to make tea for the robber, while the cook, who was shivering under the table, was dragged out to prepare food for the robber with his master. After the robbery, the cook was regarded as a possible informer. The shabby hut he lived in was searched rudely by the police who came to investigate the case. When Sai was surprised how the police could treat the cook so cruelly, the cook took it for granted and had no indignation. His master, Jemubhai, conquered his minds. He had no assertive ideas himself, and listening to his master was all his pursuit. Though his cultural trauma was not evident. It seemed that he was also one of the victims of Jemubhai and British culture then.

This study observes that both of these hegemonic in-

fluences have created the privileged and less-privileged status of the Indian individuals, which have concealed their true natures. Thus, these Indian individuals are confined and recognized through their essentialized identity, as connoted by the caste and colonial systems. Therefore, de-contextualizing the selected characters from their essentialized identity, exposing their true nature without the influence of their privileged and less-privileged status will reveal their inner cultural trauma.

4. Cultural Trauma: Strategies

For dealing with cultural trauma, there are distinct strategies, modes of actively adapting, and a repertoire of reactions undertaken by affected groups. According to the theory of Merton, classical treatment of anomie and social adaptations to anomic condition are adopted.

Four typical adaptations are mainly used to resolve anomie: innovation, rebellion, ritualism and retreatism^[10]. The first pair are active, constructive adaptations, the second pair are passive adaptations.

Innovation acquires all efforts aimed at improving the position of individuals or groups within incongruent and stressful cultural conditions. For instance, to raise legitimate and illegitimate ways. In *the Inheritance of Loss*, who positively fought against cultural trauma must be the GNLF. The Gorkha Liberation Army worked hard to improving their living levels. Though the process was bloody and violent, it has to be admitted great efforts had been made to liberate Gorkha.

Cultural rebellion would indicate a more radical effort aimed at changing the stressful cultural incongruence, through spontaneous or purposeful “cultural production”, aiming towards piecemeal modifications of a given culture, or even the total transformation of culture in order to replace the traumatic condition with a completely new cultural setup. This strategy was used by Jemubhai when he made a rule of his daily life. New sets as “the very concept of teatime” and rigid habits helped him to overcome his cultural trauma, as if he was acknowledged by the exogenous culture. Sai also generated cultural production. She was brought up in Dehra Dun, but moved to the house after her parents’ death. She loved to read and learn. She read “National Geography” and literature, influenced by the western culture, even her grandfather regarded her as a “westernized Indian”. It is hard to define whether she belonged to western culture or Indian culture. It seemed that she herself was the production of cultural trauma. As for the bloody identity, she was Indian influenced by western culture. While for the cultural identity, she was outsider influenced by Indian culture, like she can only make British tea. Her strategy for cultural trauma is complicated

and dynamic.

A passive, ritualistic reaction would mean turning to established traditions and routines, and cultivating them as safe hideouts to deflect cultural trauma. Biju obeyed this strategy so he rejected to eat beef. Sticking to the tradition not eating beef was his deflection to cure cultural trauma. When he could not tolerate the assault of other cultures, he chose to return to home, which also proved his cultivation of established traditions as a way of opposing.

Retreatism in this connection would mean ignoring trauma, repressing it, striving to forget it, and acting as if trauma did not exist. The representative must be Lola and Noni. Though they lived on what her husband left, and suffered the cultural trauma. They cured it by highly praising English culture, their ignorance was permanent, totally overwhelming the trauma.

Each character dealt with cultural trauma by various strategies, decided by their experiences, characteristics, and objective environments. One statement was that the higher their level of education, the more perceptive and more sensitive to cultural traumas people become. And at the same time, they are better equipped to express trauma... Usually more educated groups also have better skills for actively coping with cultural traumas^[11]. Characters had totally different reaction and strategies towards cultural trauma. Jemubhai was sensitive to the trauma, which contributed hugely to his arrogance at others when he came back to India. Sai was educated, so when she suffered from cultural trauma, she chose to read every day, tackling positively. Nimi had been shut at home since she was young, when she was abused by cultural trauma, she had no way to express or realize. That was why she became dull later.

Everyone is affected by cultural trauma in specific times. "Cultural trauma affects culture. Of course any trauma is by definition a cultural phenomenon, as it involves cultural interpretation of potentially traumatizing events or situations... cultural trauma is the culturally interpreted wound to cultural tissue itself."^[11] Cultural trauma did not only hurt people, but also hit the Indian culture and other weak culture in India. We have to acknowledge the function of cultural trauma rises from people and influences people. It then is affected by people and influences culture vice versa. Culture is human's culture. We should not lose the inheritance of culture, nor should we lose the inheritance of strategies for culture trauma.

5. Conclusion

The paper discloses the phenomena of characters' symptoms and strategies, interweaving transnational identities, the consequent sense of loss due to displacement and lin-

gering British colonial effects upon the Indian people, to unveil the disguised nature of the privileged members and the hidden nature of the less-privileged members, conveying their cultural trauma which fails their assimilation in their own homeland and foreign land. This is to detach the Indian individuals from their identity which is defined and structured by the caste system which segregates them under the formation of social hierarchy, as well as detaching them from their post-colonial condition.

In the *Boast of Quietness*, Borges wrote, "They speak of humanity. My humanity is in feeling we are all voices of the same poverty." What the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss* were suffering, honestly, were also suffered by the whole generation at that time, or to be crueler, experienced by current generations who were under abnormal psychological states, decided by the background mixed with globalization, race, tradition, caste, and gender, etc.

Cultural Trauma, based on the theory proposed by Jeffrey C. Alexander, "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways." Therefore, it is no longer some trauma suffered by someone, but a whole group, here referring to collectivity, shares common feelings on their experience.

Cultural trauma has been tackled macroscopically and microscopically in this paper. It was not simply owned by people inside the books, nor the generations then. However, it was for all human beings and human's culture. Strategies adopted by characters should be an inspiration of contemporary society and the inheritance of strategies for culture trauma should also be maintained.

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