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ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

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# INTERSECTING HISTORIES AND LIVES: THE HOLOCAUST TRAUMA AND DISPLACEMENT IN MIGRATION NOVELS *BAUMGARTNER'S BOMBAY AND TWO LIVES*

**Abstract:** *This article focuses on “multidirectional memories” and trauma theory in Indian English Literature written after the 1980s, depicting the Jewish migrant as a displaced and a deterritorialised protagonist. It engages with intersecting histories, hybrid memories and traumas arising from horrendous events as well as border crossing of the Jewish migrant/refugee. It illustrates the consequences of forced dislocation i.e. how has the horrific event of the Holocaust fashioned the German Jewish psyche across the globe. This essay will not only elicit the consequences of staggering violent memories on diasporic mobility and but also the politics of belonging. Hence, the essay will move on to adopt a wider stance beyond the postcolonial dichotomies to depict the changing scenario. Taking examples from Anita Desai’s Baumgartner’s Bombay and Vikram Seth’s Two Lives, which have focused on the victimisation and alienation of the migrant protagonists, the essay investigates how do these deterritorialised characters grapple with the holocaust, the colonial and the dislocation trauma in Indian English Fictions. The article also analyses the role of literary imagination in delineating the Holocaust trauma. It will focus on how does the act of writing become a site of redemption or wish fulfillment or expressing the “unspeakable” for the author and how does the trauma arising from the Holocaust mark the beginning of the dislocation of their migrant protagonists. The aim of this paper is also to examine the connections between the Holocaust narratives, the involuntary displacement patterns of the migrants/ refugees in the second half of the twentieth century and Indian English Literature.*

**Keywords:** *Holocaust, Migration, Trauma, Indian English Literature.*

Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw’s assertion that «If every age has its symptoms, ours appears to be the age of trauma» (2002: 1) seems relevant when one charts the trajectories of those innumerable people who were dislocated as a consequence of the violent events of the twentieth century. The acute sense of deterritorialising memories, of these un-

stinting tales of man’s degradation and fragmentation, continues to haunt displaced individuals as a living specter of terror from the past. This leads to their increasing sense of homelessness and dislocation more than ever. One of the most important events in this respect is the Holocaust, which still haunts the Jewish refugees’ psyche and continues to structure

their fractured identities in the present. Recent scholarly studies such as *Jews in British India: Identity in a Colonial Era, Enlightenment in the Colony: The Jewish Question and the Crisis of Postcolonial Culture*, *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* elicit the effect of the Holocaust in an Indian context. Whereas these books engage with the Holocaust in the broader sense, i.e. either by sociological analysis or by studying together African and Black British literature, this essay focuses primarily on Indian English Migration Literature. The two Indian English Fictions written after the 1980s, *Baumgartner's Bombay* and *Two Lives*, delve deep into the relational understanding of dislocation and the Holocaust trauma, either by fictional re-construction or by being an after-witness to it. Taking examples from these two aforementioned novels, this essay elucidates the relevance of Indian English Literature in examining the connections between the Holocaust and migration patterns in the second half of the Twentieth Century.

Various critics have engaged with the concept of trauma. Cathy Caruth (1995: 153), for example, defines trauma as «the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge» and the event «continually returns, in its exactness, at a later time». She observes that the event «not having been fully integrated as it occurred» refuses to be «integrated into a completed story of the past.» Such a conception of trauma as a lingering presence, which cannot be integrated into the self, complicates the autonomous Cartesian subject. It does so by exposing the mind to menace of pre-existing “psychic reality” as well as to the sudden violent intrusion by something unexpected. Hence, the Cartesian subject gets “othered” even within himself. But the question arises as to why the past continues to haunt the

present? A possible response may be found in Ann E. Kaplan's (2005) assertion that «in trauma the event has affect only», which produces the emotions of terror, shock and fear, but “not meaning”, and it is because the traumatic experience has not been attributed any comprehensive and rational sense at the time of the mishap that the subject continues to be threatened by it. The suffering of the subject is further compounded by «the unrepresentable» (Kaplan 2005: 37), «the unspeakable» (Lloyd 2000, 214) and «the incomprehensible» (Caruth 1995: 154) nature of it.

Theodor Adorno (1981: 34) asserted, «To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric» in reference to the Holocaust. Similarly, the Indian English Literature published in the aftermath of the Holocaust preferred to ignore the issue. However, after a long silence, one can witness the intensification of public interest in this past event in the last few decades. Post-1980 Indian English Literature began to undertake the challenging task of restituting the untold, the silent, the unrepresentable historical realities and the traumatic experiences of the characters with a dual spatial and temporal consciousness. *Two Lives* and *Baumgartner's Bombay* depict and remember isolated, forgotten, traumatised and marginalised individuals and their histories in the chaos of globalisation, as will be seen in this essay.

The disciplinary distinction between Jewish and postcolonial studies, in spite of many shared concerns, is a matter of contention for critics and researchers working in the field of the Holocaust and the postcolonial studies. Scholarly works of Bryan Cheyette (2009), Paul Gilroy (2004) and Michael Rothberg's “multidirectional memory” (2009) have suggested the possibility of interaction between these two fields, grappling with the legacies of violence and oppression. Continuing with this research, this article underscores the relevance of Indian English migration lit-

erature in the study of the Holocaust, trauma theory and the Jewish diaspora. This article, hence, engages with intersecting histories, hybrid memories and traumas arising from horrendous events.

Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay* grapples with the voice of difference and an alternate history of the Jewish refugee or the "other" in postcolonial India, opening new possibilities to study postcolonial migration literature. Vikram Seth's *Two Lives* deconstructs the conventional notion of the Jewish diaspora, based on historical experience of exile and dislocation, and depicts its diachronic nature in the later part of the twentieth century. The main focus of these two novels is on the Jewish migrant protagonist and his/her grappling with the Holocaust and dislocation. The next section analyses these two novels to elucidate how postcolonial Indian novels serve as a suitable medium to depict the Jewish Diasporic as well as the Holocaust experiences.

Critically examining *Baumgartner's Bombay*, Stef Craps in an article "Entangled Memories in Anita Desai's *Baumgartner's Bombay*" asserts: «Just as India seems like an unlikely setting for a Holocaust novel, so a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany seems like an unlikely protagonist for a novel by an Indian Writer» (2013: 103). His assertion that this novel has an "unlikely" setting and protagonist reiterates the concerns of the critics on the lack of interaction between Jewish and postcolonial writing. This essay aims to defy the assumption, that postcolonial Indian English literature is only limited to the study of the aftereffects of the colonial experience on Indian subjects, by exploring the trauma of German Jewish and Indian migrant protagonists, as will be seen in the next section.

### **Unrepresentable and Recurring Trauma**

During the Second World War, some German Jews escaped Nazi tortures in Europe to take refuge in India. *Baumgartner's Bombay* demonstrates how the traumatic events of the Holocaust and forced migration fashioned the deterritorialised identity of a fictional German Jewish protagonist, Hugo Baumgartner, in India.

Cathy Caruth and David Lloyd proclaim that trauma is "incomprehensible" and "unspeakable" respectively. Likewise, Baumgartner is unable to express his past oppression at the hands of the Nazis. His trauma aggravates when he fails to communicate the bestiality of his past in the alien language of the host country, India:

He found he had to build a new language to suit these new conditions - German no longer sufficed, and English was elusive. Language sprouted around him like tropical foliage and he picked words from it without knowing....What was this language he was wrestling out of the air, wrenching around to his own purposes? He suspected it was not Indian, but India's, the India he was marking out for himself. (1987: 92)

The alien language fails to communicate the bestiality of his past as well as his present alienating experiences in India. With optimism, Hugo still desires to connect with Indians, «to build a new language» for «the India he was marking out for himself», but his yearning remains unfulfilled. The only recluse in this lonely diasporic space is his nostalgic memories. The only connection to his original home, Germany, is his mother, Mutti, who is in the concentration camp. Hugo eagerly awaits her letters only to find them «strangely empty, repetitive and cryptic» (164). The letters are «stamped with the number: J 673/1» (230) and bear a message «Answers on postcards only, in German» inciting Hugo's anxiety about the meaning behind their elisions and he wonders: «What officialdom had they passed

through, giving them this chilling aspect?» (164) Postal correspondence has enabled Baumgartner to overcome his loneliness brought about by his involuntary exile. Appallingly, even the letters stop after February 1941. Thus, Hugo's only connection with his native land is finally lost in the pandemonium of the Holocaust. The trauma intensifies over time when he is inflicted with the agony of displacement and alienation in a foreign land:

Accepting – but not accepted; that was the story of his life, the one thread that ran through it all. In Germany, he had been dark – his darkness had marked him the Jew, *der Jude*. In India he was fair – and that marked him the *firanghi*. In both lands, the unacceptable. (20)

Hugo is tagged as dark and “Jew, der Jude” (20) in Germany and a “firangi” or a foreigner in India. He becomes a perennial victim of what Paul Gilroy calls “camp mentalities” (2004). As a doomed wanderer, he finds no emotional succour in the harsh, chaotic and alien world. The Holocaust trauma and ongoing bitter experiences in the diasporic present constantly haunt him. From his agonising childhood in Germany to his life in India, he remains an outsider and a marginalised character.

Ironically, even when the historical catastrophic events are elided due to language hurdles, the memories of the Holocaust and forced exile remain encoded in the form of “traumatic real” on Hugo's body. Anita Desai depicts Hugo's body as fractal and a dissociated space. In the words of Marianne Hirsch (2002: 72), corporeal self or the body is an agency that communicates “a visual discourse of trauma”. Linking Freud's theory of psychoanalysis to the corporeal self, Hirsch asserts that trauma, notably in the Holocaust context, «often gets expressed through the figure of bodily mark, wound, or tattoo» (2002: 72). The scarred body, hence, narrates the tale of untold trauma. In Baumgartner's case, scars and wounds on his

body become the only testimony of his pain, both corporeal and psychological. The body accesses the violent past in the present, the past that exceeds the semiotic ability of articulation of experiences of violent extremities. In an incident, Baumgartner is amazed to see Kurt's scar-less body: «But you have no scars? No wounds?» And Kurt replies: «No. I am whole. I make myself whole again and again» (Desai 1987: 159). Kurt embodies wholeness and by contrast, Baumgartner's body is fragmented. Kurt's body is scarless, whereas that of Baumgartner is full of scars and marks signifying the violence inflicted by modern civilisation on the sensitive being. The violent past perpetually haunts Baumgartner's diasporic present in a painful way. Unlike Kurt, who survives and confronts the atrocities of life, Baumgartner remains encapsulated by traumatic suffering. He continues to feel guilty for having survived the Holocaust. The contrast between Hugo's fractured body and the wholeness of Kurt's body demonstrates how Holocaust trauma renders Hugo incapable of any active life.

Cathy Caruth asserts that the traumatised person is afflicted by recurring memories of the horrendous event. Quoting Lacan, Cowie (2003: 33) identifies trauma as a «symptom of the real» as «the experience you are awaiting» and a «possible future wound». The appearance of Kurt at the climax of the novel symbolises something Baumgartner was unconsciously waiting for long, as in the words of Cowie. When Baumgartner sees Kurt at the corner of Farrokh's café, he envisions marching boots and hears the songs of the Nazi youth groups, the “Wandervogels Lied”:

The campfire and the beer. The beer and the yodeling. The yodeling and the marching. The marching and the shooting. The shooting and the killing. The killing and the killing and the killing. (Desai 1987: 21)

Kurt is the personification of the German past Baumgartner believes to have



evaded, but it reappears in the diasporic present. Baumgartner's shock at seeing Kurt signifies that his self is being perpetually haunted by intrusive violent recollections of the Nazi regime, as suggested by Cathy Caruth. The projected fractured body and the presence of Kurt together immerse the novel in the narration of trauma in belatedness. The fictional transfiguration of the historical catastrophe, the narrative tension following the shocking event, the powerful cognitive and affective processes that come into play, together contribute to depict the tragic intensity of the suffering refugee in *Baumgartner's Bombay*.

Baumgartner affronts different forms of cruelty: from the Nazi Regime in Germany, the internment camps in British India, to the outbreak of communal violence followed by the partition of India. Apart from the Holocaust, the trauma imposed by the overwhelming power of national and imperial regimes on Baumgartner is equally distressing in this novel.

Baumgartner has hoped to escape brutal persecution in concentration camps by exiling himself in British India. However, the situation becomes all the more complex and tense when Baumgartner is imprisoned due to his German passport in an internment camp by British authorities. The scene is affective laden: «Yet the exasperated man at the folding table in another, larger tent, refused absolutely to see them as different, separated individuals ... 'German, born in Germany,' 'Yes, but of Jewish origin, therefore a refugee» (104). The crucial persuasive statement, here, is left unfinished by Baumgartner. Aposiopesis- that is leaving an idea or a sentence unfinished- in this phrase connotes Baumgartner's fear and dilemma on his arrest, being a Jew and a Nazi victim. The refusal of British soldiers to distinguish his Jewish identity from other Germans heightens the horror and utter confusion of the scene. Baumgartner is regarded by prison guards

as part of the "enemy alien" (103) and "hostile alien" (106). These unsympathetic images evoked by scesis onomatopoeia- that is, a successive series of words or phrases whose meanings are generally equivalent- designate Baumgartner as an enemy (who is in opposition, but could be passive), and soon he is turned into a hostile (in certain active opposition) being. These remarks are also reminiscent of Nazi treatment of the German Jews.

Michael Rothberg's "multidirectional memory" concept suggests that memory is «subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative» (2009: 3). This is implicit in the scenes of Baumgartner's arrest and his life in the detainment camp, when the narrator borrows vocabulary from the deportation scenes of the Holocaust Literature. Baumgartner is «caught up by his sleeve», «heaved into...overcrowded vehicle (truck)» and poured like «ants from a closed fist into a bowl of dust... in a kind of frenzy» (Desai 1987: 105). In the detainment camp, he is depicted as milling around like "a herd of cattle". The imagery of vermin recalls Nazi propaganda, which often compared Jews to vermins and germs. The cattle as a metaphor is often employed in Jewish Literature for European Jews who were deported in the crammed cattle cars like animals. These cross-references are further supplemented by the commentary of the omniscient narrator on the barbarities inflicted in the detainment camp: «Every stain, every hole seemed to be studied and noted as he bent and bowed and performed all the actions expected of him before the guard... » (Desai 1987: 107) and:

Whereas the British commandant had only half-heartedly carried out what was a mere formality, almost a mockery of a true ceremony the Nazis seized upon it with an authority that was awesome....In no time, the men were lined up, the lines straightened, the men straightened, mouths opened, and a sound drawn out of them that seemed to answer the force of the summer

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sun, the force of the dust winds, with an equal force. (108, 115)

The plight of the German Jewish protagonist Baumgartner and his psychological as well as physical captivity in the detainment camp, hence, is perceived as an extension of the crisis in Nazi Germany.

The detainment camp is seen as torturous as any Nazi concentration camp. A remark by one of the Jews: «what shall we call our new home? ... 'Auschwitz or Theresienstadt?」 (117) demonstrates that detainment camp is only a colonial variation of the Holocaust. The parallel between the two regimes is made explicit by the narrator, when he repeatedly comments on the experiences of incarceration, calling the prison in which he is kept as “Auschwitz” and referring to the keepers running the detainment camp as «The Nazis on behalf of or in collaboration with the British... forcing Jews to do menial jobs» (117). These lines reiterate cruelty perpetrated by the British colonial regime similar to those of the Nazi regime. In other words, one can state that both these regimes threw Jews to die in cloistered camps and treated them as a menace, hostile and an enemy alien. Aamir Mufti endorses a similar viewpoint on the tyranny suffered by Jews in the British colonial project as in the Nazi regime, when he quotes Sartre to assert that,

The [British state] wishes to destroy him as a man and leave nothing in him but the Jew, the pariah, the untouchable; the [Third Reich] wishes to destroy him as a Jew and leave nothing in him but the man, the abstract and universal subject of the rights of man and the rights of the citizen. (Mufti quoted by Lies: 62)

Both colonial and totalitarian Nazi regimes impose “traumatogenic effects” (Brown 1995: 107) on the “soul and spirit” of innocent and marginalised populations.

Moreover, in *Baumgartner's Bombay*, the erupted violence during the Partition of India too tortures Baumgartner in the host country. When the Second World War

finishes and Baumgartner is released from detainment camp, he witnesses other wars: The Partition of India and the Communal War between Hindus and Muslims:

War within war. Everyone engaged in a separate war, and each war opposed to another war. If they could be kept separate, chaos would be averted. Or so they seemed to think, ignoring the fact that chaos was already upon them, and lunacy... A great web in which each one was trapped, a nightmare from which one could not emerge. (Desai 1987: 173)

As the threat of the partition looms, communal riots erupt. Desai depicts “a world in crises” wreaked by ceaseless wars. The narrative draws a picture of a wasteland: empty, chaotic and withering. The native inhabitants are reduced to mere shadows indicating intense fragmentation and chaos. Consequently, the detached refugee, Baumgartner, too, undergoes a crisis after witnessing such turmoil. Engrossing scenes of death, decay and destruction pervade everywhere: «the street was like a tunnel, it was dark... Baumgartner peered to see but nothing was visible through the thick choking smoke except the mottled walls, the gaping windows and darkened doorways in which beggars slept» (1987: 166). Darkness, fear, death, confusion and chaos prevail everywhere like a “tunnel....dark”, “darkened doorways” and “thick choking smoke”. An alien megalopolis with its overpowering obscurity becomes an anthropoid that inflicts a malevolent power on Baumgartner.

When the partition of India becomes a reality, Baumgartner as a diasporic gazer witnesses the other side of victory, that of defeat and destruction, while the inhabitants of the newly-born Indian nation smiled and celebrated:

(He) watched the fires that burnt in the city, their hot glow reflected in the smoldering mass of fog and smoke that buried them all and did not allow the flames to escape. ....Processions wound endlessly through the city, chanting slogans like dirges slipping into sudden outbreaks

of activity, to overturn buses and set trams on fire. (Desai 1987: 172)

Communal riots turn the land into a cursed place, with flares lighting in the night and death lying everywhere. The alien landscape illustrates confusion, destruction, decay and death predating on human vulnerability. It is a world of "sacrificial crisis,"<sup>1</sup> in which all forms of order are lost, triggering the disintegration of society. The narrative depicts the utter violence as the outward manifestation of Baumgartner's inner void and trauma. Earlier Baumgartner was forced to be a victim of oppression at the hands of western totalitarian forces and now he is victimised by the violence and horror of the host society.

The Holocaust and Partition of India are two exclusive events and yet one event incites the memory of the other in *Baumgartner's Bombay*. After his release from the internment camp, Baumgartner imagines if the blood being split in the Partition riot is the blood of his mother, murdered in the concentration camps: «Yet his mother – so small, weak – could not have spilt so much blood. Or had she? The blood, ran, ran over the floor and down the stairs, soaking his feet which stood in it helplessly» (Desai 1987: 179). The indirect and circumspect approach to the unrepresentable violence of the Holocaust, through "mother's blood spilling", draws a parallel between the two tragedies, by preserving the difference and the distance between them and yet showing a continuity. This convergence of the two distinct traumatic experiences in the memories defies the exclusionary blockage that constructs the Eurocentric trauma model of the Holocaust as unique and superior in relation to other genocides. Stef Craps rightly points out that:

<sup>1</sup> Cited in Maillart, Olivier. "Francis Ford Coppola, T. S. Eliot and Joseph Conrad", In: *Images of War and War of Images*, Gérard Hugues and Karine Hildenbrand (eds.), New Castle: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 2008. pp. 143–158.

Desai's novel... resists the myopic logic that can comprehend the sufferings of different victim groups only in particularistic terms. It links multiple historical traumas together, making them resonate with and echo one another... (It) dislodges the Holocaust from its spatial and temporal moorings, and connect it to worldwide instance of violence and intolerance against "other" peoples who are denied a sense of belonging to the national community. (2013: 106)

The multiple violent extremities, such as the Holocaust followed by the Partition of India, impose a sense of dislocation and terror in Baumgartner. He struggles persistently to overcome nihilism, guilt and shame and to survive in the alien circumstances, and yet he is reduced to a position of a traumatised and subjugated victim.

Crossing the borders, Anita Desai and many other Indian English writers present multi-layered stories, entangled histories and polyphonic viewpoints on the Holocaust and displacement to narrate the experiences of dislocation, flux and cultural hybridity in the contemporary times. These writers pierce deep into personal, communal and national traumas to «provide the very link between cultures» (1995: 107), as Cathy Caruth suggests. *Baumgartner's Bombay* hence emerges as a novel that forges the continuities, overlapping and connections between the distinct disciplines of knowledge, disrupting the fixed categories and boundaries. This novel replaces narrow narratives with a broader, transnational and diasporic culture.

### Testimony and Redemption

*Baumgartner's Bombay* was Desai's first-time attempt to write about a non-Indian character and in doing so she «seems to have taken a step outside her own area of experience» (Craps quoting Pandit, 105). It was written with a «desire to tell her (Anita Desai) mother's stories of life in pre-war Germany» (Fielding 2000: 143), and to depict the lives of her German acquaintances from the detainment camps and an old



German from a concentration camp whom she «used to see shuffling around [Bombay] and feeding cats» (quoted from da Silva by Lies: 143). While *Baumgartner's Bombay* is a fictional reconstitution of history, *Two Lives* depicts the Holocaust facts by using personal archives of Vikram Seth's (the author) aunt of German Jewish origin. As a diasporic Indian writer, the latter embraces "transnationalism", whilst defying the traditional and confining boundaries of nation and nationalism, and "insider" and "outsider". *Two Lives* moves beyond the familiar reflections on Indian society, culture, and politics towards a foreign setting in London, delineating refugee experience of the German Jewish "other". Frontier or border eventually emerges as a flexible concept that integrates the other into the self and diverts the attention from the self to the other. *Two Lives* depicts the intersecting biographies forged in the background of the Holocaust and the Second World War. This novel interweaves the lives and histories of transnational migrants of different race, gender and religion.

The protagonist Shanti Seth is an Indian male who voluntarily migrates to Germany as a student. Later, he moves to the United Kingdom to pursue his professional career as a dentist. During World War II, he serves the British army in Egypt and Italy in extremely difficult conditions, whilst suffering from intense pain and still working under the influence of Morphine injections (Seth 2005: 118). Hence he is to be seen as a highly skilled migrant. Vikram Seth, the intradiegetic narrator, is another important character in this novel.

Unlike the other two Indian characters in the novel, Hennercle Caro (Henny), a German Jewish female, involuntarily migrates to England in 1939 to escape persecution. Henny's sister Lola and her mother remain stranded in hostile Nazi Germany to meet their tragic end in Theresienstadt and Auschwitz respectively. The same fate is also met by Baumgartner's mother in

*Baumgartner's Bombay*. Similar to Baumgartner, Henny too restarts her life in the alien country from the shreds and pieces of her tormenting past. Alternating between first person and third person narrative, Vikram Seth maps her life trajectory from a working German Jewish woman in the pre-Second World period to a Jewish Diasporan in Britain. However, even when excessive trauma is imposed on both Baumgartner and Henny due to separation, negation, denial and exclusion in their past, it has different consequences on their diasporic present. Baumgartner remains encapsulated in the past and memories. On the contrary, even when the past tortures Henny, she emerges as an exemplary hard-working and dignified migrant woman. She does not embrace the traditional Jewish myth of autochthony and even refuses to discuss her Jewish past and her family members. While Baumgartner's link to his homeland, stimulated by his memories, remains only at a mental level, Henny maintains strong ties with her German friends through post-war correspondence. Both Henny and Baumgartner belong to the «scene of dual territoriality» (Mishra 2006, 16). The dilemma of straddling between past and present, and native country and adopted country, fashions their diasporic consciousness. Unlike Baumgartner, Henny adjusts successfully in the diasporic present, by accepting the new codes of the host country, England. She builds intercultural ties by marrying Shanti, a handicapped war veteran, and by having a convivial relationship with her British colleagues. Hence, she makes her diasporic space a «contact zone» (Pratt 1992: 6) of encounters. The foreign language proves no hurdle for Henny, unlike Baumgartner's broken Indian language. This helps her in becoming professionally successful and self-reliant. Moreover, she also tries to help her distressed German friends in kind. *Two Lives*, therefore, becomes an interesting example for the study of intersecting

histories of Jewish and Indian diaspora, and the Holocaust and World War Two.

Initially, the character – narrator Vikram Seth begins his novel by primarily focusing on his Uncle Shanti with an aim of mapping the complex migration pattern (India- Germany- Egypt- Italy- Britain, Colonised India- Nazi Germany- postcolonial Britain) of an Indian diasporic subject. Soon, Vikram Seth discloses the Jewish life of his dead Aunt Henny through extra-textual material such as personal letters, photos, a machzor (a prayer book specifically for the High Holidays) and a Torah (189). Vikram Seth particularly talks about the last postcards sent by Henny's sister and her mother from Nazi Germany through the Red Cross in 1942, dated 20.01, 6.03, 21.04. 1942, 20.7.42, 26.11.42 (139) and a common friend in 1943. These personal documents from Nazi Germany, of the early 1940s, are evocative of the Jewish Holocaust narratives. Silence and unspeakability, which are characteristics of the Holocaust narratives are seen in the first part of *Two Lives*, when the author deliberately conceals Henny's background to depict her covert character. Initially, only a few facts are mentioned about her such as Aunt Henny is German, her family «had all been killed in Germany» (Seth 2005: 22), and that «the prospect of visiting Berlin is traumatic for her» (29). This limited knowledge, imposed omissions and narrative deferment in the earlier pages of the novel serve the purpose of building suspense, maintaining geographical and temporal distance between past events of traumatic repercussions and the present. Together, all these elements gradually prepare the reader for what Lacapra (2001: 40) calls «empathic unsettlement» in which emotional response comes with the realisation that the experience of the other is not one's own.

In *Baumgartner's Bombay*, the personal archives from the Holocaust period in the form of letters remain with the protagonist Baumgartner till his death, only to

be found later by his close friend Lotte. Similarly, Henny's letters and her photographic collection too are discovered by her family after her death. Whereas Baumgartner's letters are full of silences and voids, Henny's letters provide an accurate historical and private account of the Holocaust. In addition to the letters, photographs from the pre-Holocaust days supplement the personal archive in *Two Lives*.

Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* argues that the essence or «noeme» (1981: 77) of photography is indeed a «certificate of presence» (87) attesting that the subject «has indeed existed» (82) and that «the necessarily real thing... has been placed before the lens» (76), hence there is a certainty of its reality. Marianne Hirsh also asserts that photograph «[...] is the index par excellence, pointing to the presence, the having-been-there, of the past-» (2001: 14). So, the photos testify to the past, one that is long dead and yet living, creating an absent presence effect. The insertion of the pictures of the dead in the novel also points to the necessity «to live responsibly with the loss they carry» (Rose 2007: 46). Thus the photographs provide a link between what is there and what has been there. The photos of Henny's friends and family from pre-Holocaust times in *Two Lives* could be seen as a sort of «memorial», a tribute to the past.

Given that the readers and the writer can neither access the original traumatic moments nor can they precisely discern the emotional turmoil of the victims during the Holocaust, the affective laden letters, the cognitive reactions and commentaries on the events by the narrator, the personal photographs along with the Deportation papers and other official Nazi documents that Vikram Seth collects from Yved Vashem Archives attempt to decipher the shocking and inassimilable nature of the traumatic historical event of Shoah. The narrator equally endeavours to delve deep into the hidden layers of the unset-

ting Jewish migrant's psyche (Henny) so as to demonstrate the enormity of the crime and the precariousness of life in post-Holocaust times.

The migrants share intense ties with the homeland. Their love and concern for their family and friends back home strengthen these bonds. The personal correspondence between Henny and her German friends explores these interpersonal relations at various levels. Henny's letters to her friends, Mahnert and Froschlein, demonstrate her concern for her family and the fatherland. She appreciates Froschlein for helping her family in Germany during the Holocaust, and despises those friends who have sided with the Nazis for their personal gains. Hence a strong and ethical character of Henny emerges from these letters. Moreover, the epistolary narrative has the peculiarity of the indirect treatment of trauma, as Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw suggest «the term 'trauma' describes the experiences of both victims- those who have suffered directly – and those who suffer with them, or through them, or for them» (2002: 2). Henny was far away in England when her family members were killed in the Concentration Camps. She tries to get news of the well being of her family during the post-war times. Her letters describe how trauma is inscribed on the survived family member of the deceased. These letters are evidence of Henny's private mourning. They are also an individual reflection on the Holocaust and are reminiscent of Henny's close association with her roots and past. Repetitive remembering through writing about her loved ones becomes an act of «idealisation of absence» (Mishra 2007, 8) resulting in aggravating the experiences of dislocation and loss of the original home. Detachment from the past does not seem to be easy for her. Myriad memories of her home, family and friends, therefore, becomes a manifestation of true mourning which bequest hidden grief and desire for all that is lost.

These letters are Henny's testimony. They ascribe agency to the victim Henny and promote remembrance, witnessing and resistance to erasure. They narrate the untold tale of personal loss, which provides her with an opportunity to share her grief, and to articulate her personal tragedy to a certain extent. In contrast, Baumgartner is unable to express his tumultuous experiences and he also fails to protest the injustices of the host society. The unrepresentability leads to recurring trauma in him. However, Henny fights the source of trauma by protesting Nazi ideology and demanding war indemnities from German Government in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and in this endeavour she gains support from her friends. Hence, her redemption becomes easier than Baumgartner's. Moreover, in extremities and uncertainty like this, Henny's letters exalt powerful bonds of love, intimacy and friendship across races and countries like that of Shanti and Henny. In a letter dated 17.09.40 from Shanti to Henny, Shanti narrates his first-hand traumatic experiences of World War II: «again in the shelter... and the air raid is over... the guns are going very hard. I am a little restless today.. » and talks about the comfort these letters bring to him in times of utter despair and loneliness, «it gives me more pleasure to read and reread your so loving letter...I am feeling now so lonely...The more I write to you the more I miss you» (Seth 2005: 128-129). Shanti mutually engages with the trauma of Henny and also shares his own intense corporeal suffering after being severely injured at the war front. These letters are an evidence of the developing love and respect between two diasporic characters Shanti and Henny in the extremely hostile circumstances of the Second World War and the Holocaust.

The shift from third person to first person narration, in the intermediary part of the novel, brings multiple perspectives on the Holocaust and the Second World

War to the fore. The epistolary narrative provides personal, direct and intimate accounts of the complex realities in a simple and comprehensive style. The fragmented structure in the second and third part of the novel narrates the past of Henny and Shanti. Switching viewpoints and shifting focalisation in the novel enable the transcription of traumatic experiences through multi-perspectives. The compulsive return to the Holocaust and the Second World War time period through the letters not only circumscribes trauma, but also expounds the diasporic condition through homelessness, dispossession and deterritorialisation of the characters. Hence, this novel not only brings out the Holocaust and the Second World War trauma, but also the intricacies of Jewish and Indian migrant lives through cross-cultural encounters and exchanges.

*Two Lives* is a fictional production of private history that elucidates the significance of traumatic omissions, blind spots and spaces of enunciation. Trauma is depicted with imaginative recreation and cognitive narration to bridge the gap between common understanding and the trauma theory. Vikram Seth's literary art, like that of Anita Desai, attempts to understand the meaning of silences of the marginalised and deterritorialised individuals across the world. *Baumgartner's Bombay* and *Two Lives*, hence, foreground the traumatic events in a complex, dynamic and interwoven tale of migration and homelessness.

### **From the Holocaust to Universal Suffering**

The two novels examine intersecting histories and entangled memories. They entail the politics of responsibility, memory and ethics at the crossroads of postcolonial diasporic studies. They investigate how an already displaced Jewish identity grapples with memories, displacement and the politics of national belonging in an alien world. At a macro level, the op-

pressed, marginalised and traumatised Jew only becomes incidental to depict the suffering humanity at large as Anita Desai proclaims in her interview:

I've simply fed the myth of the passive Jew who walked willingly into the internment camps, a willing victim of Hitlerism. In defense, I can only say that Hugo is not a representative of the Jewish race for me but of the human race, of displaced and dispossessed people and tribes all over the world..... In India, this happened to Muslims, in Pakistan to Hindus, and it is still happening – people are being victimized because of their religion, or caste, because of war and history. In literature, you can construct ....the frantic scurrying and fleeing of the people who are like ants in its way. (Bliss 1988: 523)

The confining boundaries of race, colour and creed are disavowed to depict global migrants and their sufferings. Desai depicts migrant cosmopolitan subject in various cultural milieus be it in Venice or India. Similarly, the specificity of Jewishness merges in the universality at the end of *Two Lives*. When Vikram Seth walks through the memorial garden, he sees the signs written in «English, Urdu, Chinese, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi and Arabic». «Jewish Holocaust» is written on a sign «so small as to be almost illegible», and «in the context of more recent events in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, it goes on to explain the single word above the arch: *Lezikaron*» (Seth 2005: 499). The Hebrew word *Lezikaron* stresses the importance of looking forward as well as remembering the past. Hence this novel emphasises the past to understand and articulate the present catastrophic events. The novel concludes with the authorial statement «May we not be as foolish,» that «let us eschew group hatred» and «May we, believe in humane logic» and «in love» (499) reiterating the universal need to take lessons from world history and not to repeat the same fatal mistakes in the future. The use of the first person and collective “we” denotes the entire global com-



munity by relating the self with the other (collective whole).

As transnational literature, these two novels delineate contemporary times when the postcolonial binary division and Jewish concerns merge in the global rainbow. These novels enmesh the history of British India, Third Reich Germany and the Second World War, with the post-World War times and the present global scenario. They endorse the blurring of the boundaries between global and local, Jewish and postcolonial studies, dominant and minority cultures, and national and migration cultures and re-emphasise it in a new way.

### Conclusion

This essay elucidates the events of forced dislocation i.e. the Holocaust to lay emphasis on the German Jewish dislocation consciousness. Baumgartner and Henny, the two Jewish migrants, are dislocated from Nazi Germany. The staggering violent memories of the Holocaust and displacement affect them and their sense of belonging. Both displaced individuals grapple with this calamity differently. Baumgartner's life is marked by helplessness, isolation, unacceptability by the locals and ongoing trauma in India. His trauma is unrepresentable and incomprehensible through language. In contrast, Henny transforms her pain into a weapon to defy Nazi ideology. She not only communicates her suffering and but also obtains acceptance from her friends. Moreover, the better circumstances in the host country favour her integration, and her strong will and sheer dedication make her an exemplary diasporic female figure. The analysis of these two novels in this essay enriches understanding of intersecting histories and entangled themes of trauma, diaspora and migration. The two novels, hence, transcend postcolonial dichotomies and an exclusionary Jewish trauma model.

The postcolonial Indian Migration literature emerges as a suitable medium to

depict not only the Indian diaspora but also the Holocaust and Jewish diaspora in the global scenario. The dislocating experiences brought about by xenophobia, antisemitism and the horrific memories (personal and collective), lead to a constant transformation, negotiation and re-fashioning of Jewish migrant identity and these emerged as the central concern in this essay. The essay elucidated that the two aforementioned postcolonial migration novels depict the complex and dynamic cross-cultural Jewish experiences, transnational spaces and multiple migration patterns in a complex relation with Nazi history. Hence, this article advocated the relevance of Indian English postcolonial literature in the depiction of Jewish and Indian migrants' concerns by engaging with intersecting histories, hybrid memories and traumas.

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**СУСРЕТ ИСТОРИЈА И ЖИВОТА:  
ТРАУМА ХОЛОКАУСТА И ПОМЈЕРЕНОСТ У  
РОМАНИМА О СЕОБИ *БАУМГАРТНЕРОВ БОМБАЈ*  
И *ДВА ЖИВОТА***

Резиме

Овај рад се фокусира на „сјећања из више смјерова“ и теорију трауме у индијској књижевности на енглеском језику, писаној након осамдесетих година двадесетог вијека, која приказује јеврејског емигранта као личност која је премјештена и која нема своју територију. Укључује сусрет историја, комбинована сјећања јеврејског емигранта/избјеглице и трауме које настају након страшних догађаја, као и након преласка граница. Илуструје посљедице присилног премјештања, тј. начин на који је ужасни догађај Холокауста обликовао психу њемачких Јевреја широм свијета. Овај рад неће само открити посљедице запањујуће насилних сјећања о покретности дијаспоре него и политике припадања. Због тога овај рад иде корак даље ка томе да усвоји шири став, изнад постколонијалних подјела, како би се приказао промјенљиви сценарио. Узимајући као примјер роман Аните Десаи *Баумгартнеров Бомбај* и роман Викрама Сета *Два живота*, који се базирају на приказу жртвовања и отуђења ликова емиграната, рад истражује како се ликови који немају своју територију боре с Холокаустом, колонијалном траумом и траумом премјештености у индијским романима на енглеском језику. Овај рад такође анализира улогу књижевне маште у скицирању трауме Холокауста. Фокус је на проналажењу одговора на питање како чин писања постаје начин искупљења, испуњења жеља или изражавања оног што је „неизрециво“ за аутора, те како траума која је настала у Холокаусту означава почетак помјерања њених про-тагониста емиграната. Циљ овог рада је и да испита везе између наратива о Холокаусту, те шаблона (не)добровољног премјештања емиграната/избјеглица у другој половини двадесетог вијека и индијској књижевности на енглеском језику.

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