Abstract

Since its genesis, literature has aimed to replicate the essence of an entity within the psyche of the reader. The earliest interpretive debates inaugurated by Plato and Aristotle revolved around the truth of these recast images and the conflicting moral and intellectual codes that such an enterprise entails. The continued relevance of this question is reflected in its regular resurrection in different avatars during the course of literary and intellectual history.

This eternal question gains further dimensions when issued to the field of trauma literature. Literatures of trauma deal with the recreation and representation of human suffering – one of literatures favourite themes -- while balancing precariously on the vagaries of memory. The delicacy of its subject makes the creation of a trauma text proportionately fraught with representational potholes. The authenticity of the account and the aesthetic dimension of the text work against each other, creating a dilemma of empathy; the “created” aspect of the text leaves one questioning the sincerity of the representation and the subject matter obliterates any attempt at feigned objectivity. Furthermore, language itself becomes problematized because of the overreaching aspect of the traumatic and its inaccessibility both in linguistic as well as mnemonic terms. Plato’s allegorical cave with its doubly-reflected images looms large in the face of a trauma-based text, since no representation could ideally capture the experience of trauma in its fullness. Given an inaccessible subject the general idea of authenticity and reality are warped into an alien shape which requires alternate paradigms of analysis.

This thesis analyses the representational act keeping in mind these crucial issues. It hopes to study the means by which a text of trauma may be represented in literary texts and the factors colouring its reception, within the framework of Trauma Theory. To this end the
thesis examines different definitions of trauma influenced by social and therapeutic practices and the reflection of the same in literary representation. Furthermore, the thesis explores factors that facilitate the partial reclamation of the traumatic into the sphere of expression without creating an amnesiac rhetoric.

Literary texts rely on the lens of language which is simultaneously precise and ambiguous. It attempts to make the unimaginable and available through a deferred signification which does not claim accuracy but on the contrary indulges in ambivalence; rather, it attempts to bridge the gap so as to bring the ineffable within and consequently open space for the diverse possibilities of interpretation. This attempts to be an episode in an interminable dialogue throwing light on the complex nature of trauma.