Fear and Disillusionment: Cultural Memory and Trauma of the Indian Emergency in M. Mukundan's *Delhi: A Soliloquy*

Nikhitha Mary Mathew
Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India

Smita Jha
Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India

Abstract

Due to the dearth of official records and historical narratives, the Indian emergency is often counted as one of the 'deleted moments' of Indian history. The role of Indian emergency fiction in producing counter-history of the time by recording cultural memory is a point of discussion in the circles of memory studies. This paper attempts to bring to light how M. Mukundan's JCB Prize-winning novel *Delhi: A Soliloquy* presents a cultural counter-memory of the period, with a special focus on how the Malayali minority in Delhi faced political tumult. Reading through the lens of memory and trauma, this paper analyses how the novel adds to the existing corpus of Indian emergency fiction, which lacked regional representation. The ideas of theorists Jenny Edkins, Alieda Assmann, Birgit Neumann, Linda Shortt, Piotr Sztompka, and Astrid Erll are used to analyse the representation of cultural memory and trauma within the work.

Keywords: Betrayal, Counter-history, Cultural Memory, Cultural Trauma, Indian Emergency Fiction, Political Trauma

Introduction

With the rise of memory studies, there has been a renewed interest in the politics of remembering. What is remembered and how it is remembered began taking up centre stage in discussions about the past along with the role of power structures in obliterating and preserving narratives of their choice. The past began to be revisited to unearth silenced voices and narratives, to make sure that no singular truth prevailed. As Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt (2011) assert in their Introduction to *Memory and Political Change*, "the historical truth about the political crimes of the past – uncovered from archival sources or oral testimonies of victims – is today considered to have great ethical and transformative power. Memory has become a

central issue in our discussions about transition…it is a medium of a new shared narrative of the past that integrates formerly divided perspectives" (1).

Falling in line with this trend, moments of Indian history like the partition of 1947 and the internal emergency of 1975 are now under the critical microscope. This paper attempts to understand how literature serves as a medium for preserving counter-narratives and counter-history through the analysis of the representation of the Indian Emergency in M. Mukundan's *Delhi: A Soliloquy*. The portrayal of cultural memory and cultural trauma is focused to understand how this novel adds to the wide spectrum of literary counter-narratives of Indian emergency. With the aid of Emma Tarlo's ethnographic study and *India's First Dictatorship*, to paint the factual background of the times, Raita Merivirta and O.P. Mathur are quoted to bring in parallels with other Indian Emergency novels. Theorists Aleida Assmann, Linda Shortt, Jenny Edkins, and Astrid Erll are employed in close analysis of the text.

The Emergency and incidents surrounding it acquired a special position in the history of Independent India as it brought down India's democratic spirit and shook the nation with months of autocratic rule. As Emma Tarlo writes in her book, *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of Emergency in Delhi*, it was a period that threatened the precarious image of India as an essentially non-violent nation. Its impact was disturbing to the extent that the state and state-aided machinery tried to wipe it away from popular memory. Tarlo aptly counts this period of twenty-one months from 25th June 1975 to 21st March 1977 among the "deleted moments" of Indian history. On the 25th of June 1975, the then President of India, Fakrudhin Ali Ahamed, declared emergency owing to 'internal disturbances' within the nation, granting Prime Minister Indira Gandhi the right to 'rule by decree'. And what followed was a period that is often counted among the dark days of Independent India. Infamous for slum demolitions and sterilization camps, this period also witnessed political arrests and censorship.

In the following section, emergency narratives and the forces that shaped them are analysed. The following section addresses examples of Indian Emergency fiction and how they act as archives of counter-history, fighting the state-aided process of forgetting. Further on, the focus shifts to M. Mukundan's *Delhi: A Soliloquy*, which is analysed through the lens of cultural memory and trauma to understand how this 2020 translation places itself within the corpus of Indian emergency fiction.

Emergency Narratives

The censorship of the press during those twenty-one months has impacted the current understanding of emergency. During this period, the state began to monitor newspapers for any possible criticism of the government. Article 19 (1) of the Indian Constitution guarantees every Indian citizen the Right to Free Speech and Expression, which applies to the press as well. But calling to aid Article 19 (2), "security of the state" and "promotion of disaffection", the state-imposed severe restrictions on the press. As Ghosh (2017) writes in his article, "Indira Gandhi's Call of Emergency and Press Censorship in India: The Ethical Parameters Revisited", "The government invoked Press censorship along with the imposition of Emergency as it wanted to control and manipulate the Press to suppress public opinion. The Press was the only independent mass media in India during that time as the radio and television were controlled by the government" (2). Further in the article, Ghosh (2017) consolidates the findings of the Shah Commission and numbers out the steps that the government took to prevent voices of dissent: "(1) allocation of government advertising; (2) shotgun merger of the news agencies; and (3) use of fear-arousal techniques on newspaper publishers, journalists and individual shareholders" (10).

Narratives of the period are distorted due to censorship, as it produced a time when all newspapers looked alike, lacking constructive criticism. In her ethnographic study on

Emergency, Tarlo (2003) groups emergency narratives into three categories; the first one is the official narrative of the state which was in circulation through newspapers and media. The second one includes all the opposing narratives that came up as soon as the censorship was repealed. This includes autobiographies and prison memoirs by the ones who opposed the ruling party. The third narrative is a culmination of both these narratives, a product of state-aided forgetting. Providing a detailed analysis of emergency narratives, Emma Tarlo concludes that popular memories of the emergency today appear neither entirely resistant to the power nor dominated by it, but are rather "pragmatic in character, expressing a collective critique even if not self-consciously articulating it" (22).

Indian Emergency Fiction

When history and popular culture fail to record events, literature takes up the function. By serving as a site of counter-memory, literature produces counter-history. Coincidentally, Indian English novelists of the second half of the twentieth century developed an interest in the contemporary political climate. They made it a point to inculcate the political climate of the times in their works, sometimes as a passive backdrop, and very often as an active factor that shapes the structure of the novel. They archived experiences of emergency, thus producing a counter-history. This trend, aptly termed by Harish Trivedi as 'Rushdie-Stephanian international Indian novel-as-history', refers to the Indian English novels since *Midnight's Children* that had a particular interest in the events of the time. Most of these novels portrayed the Indian Emergency and the trauma of the common man. *Midnight's Children* (Salman Rushdie), *A Fine Balance* (Rohinton Mistry), *Rich Like Us* (Nayantara Sahgal), and *The Great Indian Novel* (Shashi Tharoor) all fall into the broad spectrum of Indian Emergency novels.

Each of these novels differs in their focus, choice of characters, and mode of narration, creating a rich archive of counternarratives that shape the period's counter-history. Using the

technique of magical realism, Rushdie paints Indian history, intertwined with the personal life and struggles of his protagonist. Presenting Indira Gandhi as "the widow", Rushdie portrays the traumas of censorship, sterilization, and slum demolition through the lens of magical realism. In *The Great Indian Novel*, Tharoor presents Indian history in a wider and grand setting, drawing parallels with the epic Mahabharata. Referring to Indira Gandhi as Draupadi, he narrates the incidents of the period in epic dimensions. *Rich Like Us* provides an elitist version of emergency. With characters from the business class and high-paid government employees, the novel narrates how power helped some flourish and pulled others into the gutters. Mistry goes for a realistic approach in narrating the lives of four dispossessed people, living in Mumbai during the emergency. He speaks of the underprivileged and how the period shattered their hopes of survival. Most of these narratives bagged prestigious awards (*Midnight's Children* – Booker Prize of 1981 and Booker of Bookers; *A Fine Balance* – Giller Prize of 1995 and Shortlisted for Booker; *Rich Like Us* – Sahitya Academy Award of 1986) and were successful in grabbing international attention, bringing to light narratives of emergency that were suppressed till then.

But as scholars like Raita Merivirta and O P Mathur point out, novels from other parts of India on the topic were rare. As Mathur (2004) writes, "Even in Hindi, the principal language of North India, the chief crucible of Indian politics, very few significant novels on or around this theme were written" (14). In 2020, when M Mukundan's 2011 Malayalam novel *Delhi Gadhakal* was translated into English by Fathima E.V. and Nandakumar K., it marked a new addition to the corpus of Indian Emergency literature. With the JCB prize of 2020, the novel acquired popularity and is reaching out to a wider audience.

M Mukundan, popular for his novels on Mayyazhi or Mahi, is a Malayalam writer who has bagged prestigious awards like the Sahitya Academy Award. Since he served a

considerable period in Delhi, the novel is inspired mainly by Mukundan's own experiences of witnessing the evolution of Delhi from an overgrown provincial city to the nation's capital. It offers the readers a sprawling portrait of Delhi and narrates the lives of a group of Malayali migrants who came there in search of jobs and prosperity. It is through the eyes of Sahadevan, the protagonist, and his ruminations that the reader gets to know the city. Sahadevan reaches Delhi in the 1960s in his twenties and then spends forty years struggling to make a living. Political turbulences like the Chinese invasion, Indo-Pak wars, and the Emergency all add to the misery of poverty. Mukundan has devoted a whole section titled "Blackholes" to the events of the Indian Emergency and its impact on his characters. *Delhi: A Soliloquy*, gives its reader a vivid insight into what the immigrant Malayali (people native to Kerala, whose mother tongue is Malayalam) population of Delhi faced during the emergency.

Cultural Memory and Sahadevan's Malayaliness

Drawing on ideas from Maurice Halbwachs' postulations on Collective memory (which can be found in *La Mémoire Collective,* translated as *On Collective Memory*), Jan Assmann posits that cultural memory is an "exterior dimension of human memory" (Assmann 2011). The exterior dimension acquires prominence here as external factors, "imposed by social and cultural contexts", influence its contents, composition, and means of propagation. Assmann distinguishes between four areas of exterior memory in his work *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Early Civilization*. They are: "mimetic memory" (customs, rituals, reading, writing, etc), "memory of things" (objects as a reflection of existence), "communicative memory" (language and interactions with the external world), and "cultural memory". Assmann uses the term cultural memory as an area where all the other three concepts merge into, as he terms it, "hand-down memory". He defines the term as "the characteristic store of repeatedly used texts, images and rituals in the cultivation of which each society and epoch stabilizes and imports its self-image; a collectively shared knowledge of

preferably (yet not exclusively) the past, on which a group bases its awareness of unity and character" (15). In her work "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction", Astrid Erll describes cultural memory as "the interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" (2). She brings in dimensions of culture to elaborate on this transdisciplinary concept:

> According to anthropological and semiotic theories, culture can be seen as a three-dimensional framework, comprising social (people, social relations, institutions), material (artifacts and media), and mental aspects (culturally defined ways of thinking, mentalities). Understood in this way, "cultural memory" can serve as an umbrella term which comprises "social memory" (the starting point for memory research in the social sciences), "material or medial memory" (the focus of interest in literary and media studies), and "mental or cognitive memory" (the field of expertise in psychology and the neurosciences). (4)

Literature plays a pivotal role in the process of creating and disseminating cultural memory and the formation of "collective identity". Literature can have effects on both levels of cultural memory; the individual and the collective. Literature usually allows its readers both a first- and a second-order observation. It gives the reader a glimpse into the past, the past that the author has constructed. On the other hand, it also provides the reader with ample space and distance to look into and understand the complex process of selection that goes into the construction of narratives. Literature is a medium that simultaneously builds and observes memory. Elaborating on the role of literature, novels in particular, in the formation of cultural memory, Birgit Neumann writes:

> Narrative psychologists have pointed out that novels, with their conventionalized plot-lines and highly suggestive myths, provide powerful, often normative models for our own self-narration and interpretation of the past. Apparently, when interpreting our own experience, we constantly, and often unconsciously, draw on pre-existing narrative patterns as supplied by literature. Thus, by disseminating new interpretations of the past and new models of identity, fictions of memory may also influence how we, as readers, narrate our pasts and ourselves into existence. (341)

In this process of meaning-making, literature produces and propagates a shared identity among different social groups. Neumann lists out "time structure", "perspective structure" and "narrative mediation" as the key attributes of a narrative text in the process of what she terms "memory creation". *Delhi: A Soliloquy* is Mukundan's memories of Delhi, fictionalized.

The first attribute in the process of memory creation, as listed by Neumann, is "time structure". As Mukundan (2020) confesses: "Almost everything narrated in this book comes from my experience" (DC Books 2020). The novel is about the trauma of a group of Malayalis in Delhi. When asked about the main motivation behind the novel, he identified three reasons: the urge to document tragic events, to portray the experiences of the migrant Malayali population, and to illuminate the dark and somber image of Delhi. The cultural memory of the migrant Malayali community and their experiences of a turbulent time is the prime focus of this novel. Shashi Tharoor thinks that "in many ways, it is a book without equals as a portrait of Delhi and of the diaspora Malayali community within it. A compelling read by a master storyteller at the height of his powers" (DC Books 2020). The time frame of the text coincides with the politically tumultuous years of Indian history, creating a space for articulating the experiences of a group of Malayali migrants in Delhi during the time. Mukundan's urge to narrate tragic events placed within the time frame of the Indian Emergency, narrated in a realistic linear form, paints the pages of *Delhi*.

The second feature in Neumann's observation is "perspective structure". There are about twenty-five to thirty major characters within this novel with a proper function. Most of them are Malayalis, and almost all of them are from the lower middle-class. Tharoor points out that Mukundan has focussed on the unfortunate. He rarely brings up the names of Malayalis who made a successful life in Delhi, let alone fictionalizes them. This is true as we find within

the novel; "Malayalis of every type lived in Delhi. He had seen the Malayali roadside vegetable seller in Munirka; the fish seller in Bengali Market, who spoke Bengali as fluently as his customers did; the balloon seller at India Gate; the keychain seller at the zoo…. There were Malayali goondas. There were Malayali policemen who collected hafta from them…. They, like Dasappan, got to go home only once in five or six years" (Mukundan 258). It is the desperate and unfortunate section of Malayali migrants in Delhi that populate the pages of *Delhi*.

The third feature that Neumann lists is "narrative perspective", elaborating on which she writes, "characteristically, fictions of memory are presented by a reminiscing narrator or figure who looks back on his or her past, trying to impose meaning on the surfacing memories from a present point of view. Thus, the typical pattern for the literary representation of memories is retrospection or analepsis" (333). Mukundan uses the technique of soliloquy, as the very title of the novel suggests, to narrate the whole story. It is through Sahadevan's thoughts and reflections that the reader gets to know about Delhi, the time period, and its lived-in experiences. Applying Neumann's terminology, Mukundan uses a "reminiscing narrator", one who keeps journaling his experiences and thoughts, to create this document of memory. The Malayaliness of Sahadevan is presented as the essence of his whole identity. Mukundan succeeds in this by carefully reminding the readers of Sahadevan's cultural identity now and then through his thoughts on his homeland and also through the choice of characters whom he interacts with. Sahadevan, the protagonist is someone who avoids crowds and likes to spend his time thinking and writing. "But he did go to places where Malayalis congregated. He had forsaken his religion and his caste. But he was not prepared to forfeit his Malayaliness. He believed that Malayaliness itself should be given the protection of reservation" (Mukundan 256).

Through his careful choice of characters and mode of narration, Mukundan presents the reader with the experiences of a section of the migrant Malayali community in Delhi during the 1970s. Documenting the experiences of an underprivileged section during a time that was later silenced, Mukundan creates an addition to the cultural memory of the Indian Emergency. The depiction of trauma within the work acquires importance as that adds clarity and deeply embeds the literary images into the reader's mind, and makes memory-making more fruitful.

Trauma- Cultural and Political

Derived from the ancient Greek word for 'wound', trauma generally refers to physical injury. Current developments in the field of trauma studies incorporate psychological wounds into this broad category. Studies in trauma began with nineteenth-century theorists like Sigmund Freud, Joseph Breuer, Pierre Janet, and Abram Kardiner, and their studies on shock and hysteria. Of all the theorists, Sigmund Freud and his ideas are most often quoted to explain the genesis of trauma theories. It is in *Studies in Hysteria*, published in 1895 (co-authored with Joseph Breuer), and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, published in 1920, that Freud explains his theories on trauma. He describes trauma as experiences that cannot be comprehended by the individual who is affected by it. He goes on to explain how the inability to comprehend traumatic experiences creates the 'compulsion to repeat'. The human mind produces 'pathological reminiscences', to help the individual come to terms with the shock that the event created. It was Freud who introduced the concept of 'latency' to explain the time gap between the traumatic experience and the first appearance of its reminiscences.

The 1990s witnessed tremendous growth in the field of trauma studies, with theorists like Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman. Cathy Caruth in her 1996 work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* writes, "trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur,

but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth 104). She elaborates on Freud's concept of latency and introduced the term "belatedness", to explain the effect of trauma: "Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness" (Caruth 105). Trauma affects an individual's conception of time and produces a discontinuity as the shock and inability to comprehend produced by the event cannot be integrated into everyday experiences. The 'Freudian-Caruthian' concept of trauma focuses upon the incomprehensible nature of trauma and the discontinuity that it creates. While mass deaths, wars, and unexpected events are counted as possible trauma stimulators, social changes can be traumatic too.

Traumatogenic Changes and the Indian Emergency

In the Introduction to their anthology, *Memory and Political Change*, Alieda Assmann and Linda Shortt assert the importance of political changes in shaping future societies. They dwell upon the link between memories of past atrocities to the foundations of subsequent societies to understand the pivotal role that memory plays in the process of transformation. Establishing the ability of memory to change its status from "private to public; unofficial to official; normative to counter-memory; local to global; national to transnational" (Assmann 9), Assmann and Shortt assert the ability of memories of social changes to shape societies that follow. Certain changes that shape society come with "social costs". They either affect a particular section of people or inflict harm upon them. Piotr Sztompka in his essay "The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies", identifies four traits for 'traumatogenic changes'. The following section attempts to read the representation of the Indian Emergency in *Delhi: A Soliloquy* along with the four traits that Sztompka lists.

The first trait is speed. Traumatogenic changes are rapid and most often appear as a shock to the affected population, providing them with very little or no time to comprehend the change and adapt to it. Indian Emergency, when it was announced in 1975, came as a shock, giving the citizens no time to prepare for the radical social change around them. We find representations of this shock in *Delhi: A Soliloquy* too. The protagonist, Sahadevan, wakes up from a nightmare only to realize that he and everyone around him have lost the rights to free speech and free press. Getting to know the news of the emergency from his friend, Sahadevan stands by the window shocked to realize that the nightmare is his new reality.

The second trait of traumatogenic change is its scope. By scope, Sztompka means the aspects of life that the particular change acts upon. With slum demolitions, censorships and political arrests, the Indian emergency distorted the personal and cultural spaces that the common man inhabited. City beautification and sterilization were the twin aspects that the emergency is infamous for. Tarlo writes; “within a mere 21 months, an estimated 700,000 people were displaced from slums and commercial properties, including large areas of the Old City” (38).

“For, of all Emergency tales, the story of Turkman Gate contains the most dramatic elements for a tragedy. It begins as the state versus innocent women who fight for the basic right to retain their homes and reproduce. The fact that they are veiled highlights their sanctity and emphasizes the state's violation of it, whilst the fact that they are accompanied by children reinforces the image of innocent lambs to the slaughter” (Tarlo 43). Mukundan also brings in this incident in his story of emergency. Sahadevan witnesses the demolition of the houses at Turkman gate. By the time he reaches there, the bulldozers have already arrived. He jumps in front of the bulldozer and speaks on behalf of the inhabitants. Authorities pushed him away

and continued with the demolition. Mukundan focuses on aspects that made these houses homes, by explaining the emotional attachment that these people shared with them:

> The demolition squad, with their crowbars and pickaxes, and the CRPF soldiers, fully armed and trigger-happy, lined up on both sides of the road. In front of them, men and women blocked the path of the bulldozers which were moving to demolish the buildings in which they had been born and where they had frolicked, married, made love and bounced their babies on their knees. The women and children wailed loudly. They could not stop the heartless, steel-limbed bulldozers. One of the bulldozers drove over a burqa. There were shrieks and howls of protests from all sides. (Mukundan 325)

Mukundan's selection of situations and narrative style enhances the impact of the story. He brings in the imagery of birth, growth, and starting a new family to show how the buildings being demolished were silent witnesses to cycles of life. These demolitions left thousands homeless and many were left with no hope of survival. Mukundan's careful positioning of Sahadevan as a helpless witness to these atrocities adds meaning at two levels: first, it helps the reader sympathize with Sahadevan and feel his helplessness. On a secondary level, Sahadevan can be equated with Mukundan himself. It's the memories of the troubled period and the helpless situation that the writer was stuck in finding a voice in these pages. The whole narrative can be read as Mukundan's attempt to document the memories and fight the singular state narrative.

The massive sterilization camps and associated cruelties were one of the major markers of the Emergency. Mukundan portrays multiple aspects of the same event in the novel. The poor who were dragged to the camps, the government officials who were forced to fill in the numbers and the cruelties associated with the nasbandi camp all find a space in the novel. Mukundan brings in the sterilization drive as follows: "the virulent disease of nasbandi spread quickly, all over the city" (296). As Emma Tarlo writes; "People were rounded up at random, from the streets, the tea shop, and the bazaars, and taken to the family planning camps to be

sterilized. No distinction whatsoever was made between old men and young boys, between married and unmarried men—the forced sterilization just went on and on!" (Tarlo 9). The fear of being dragged into the camp, the pain of the procedure, and the humiliation troubled the victims severely.

Government schools, municipality complexes, and big hospitals all acted as camping sites. The image of men being dragged to the camp turns more disturbing as Mukundan brings their poverty to light. "The hapless men were bleating like lambs being taken for the slaughter. They didn't have the strength to resist, having lived on half-empty stomachs all their lives. The little strength they had, fear drained them" (Mukundan 297). He then explains the tragic case of sixty-two-year-old Kanwari, who did not have the will and strength to resist. After the vasectomy, he was left on the streets. "Kanwari fell on the road, drained by the cough in his chest and the pain in his lower abdomen. As he lay coughing, blood leaked out between his legs and seeped into his torn dhoti" (Mukundan 298). Mukundan goes on to make the image vivid and more disturbing when he says; 'the Emergency had given the consumptive old man the gift of menstruation" (299). It was the poor and underprivileged who suffered as the affluent could easily get away while the poor had no means of escape.

The lack of proper medical care associated with the sterilization camps is also presented within the novel. To bring the reader close to the horrifying reality, Mukundan makes Satyanathan a victim of vasectomy. Satyanathan had gone to the slums as a part of the protest. He was not able to escape the 'octopus-like grip of the volunteers', and he was sterilized against his consent. This leaves him disillusioned and Satyanathan refuses to meet or interact with people. While Mukundan places Sahadevan as a silent witness of slum demolition, he subjects Satyanathan, a major character in the novel, to the physical trauma of sterilization. This can been seen as a deliberate attempt from the writer to bring in the physical trauma associated

with the event in close quarters, giving vivid pictures and ample space to physical pain and mental agony.

The third trait that Sztompka outlines is "content/ substance", by which he means, "either in the sense that it is radical, deep, fundamental—that is, it touches the core aspects of social life or personal fate" (159). With the examples of Dasappan, the roadside barber, who was deprived of his livelihood as a part of the city beautification, and the case of Vidya going missing, Mukundan establishes the radical change that months of dictatorship bought upon the common man. While Dasappan's case is a classic case of how roadside vendors, who had nowhere to go, were abandoned by the state, leaving them with bleak chances of survival, Vidya's case shows how the common man was deprived of his fundamental rights during the Emergency. Mukundan engraves the horror of this situation when the police officer threatens Sathyanathan (Sahadevan's friend, who went in search of his missing sister): "Don't talk to other policemen the way you talked to me. Don't forget that it's the Emergency now. We can kill and string you up. No one is going to ask" (Mukundan 266). These instances clearly establish the fact that Indian Emergency was a change in social setup that affected the fundamental rights of a human, distorting his/her personal and social rights.

The fourth trait that Sztompka lists is the mental frame with which the affected individuals look at the event. Despair and fear are the major emotional responses that Emergency bought about. Despair as a response to Emergency will be elaborated in the upcoming section.

Mukundan uses powerful images to convey the environment of fear that the political change bought about. One of the major factors that contributed to the terror is mass sterilizations. Sterilization camps created an environment of fear, as anyone could be taken in at any time. In *Unsettling Memories*, Emma Tarlo (2003) writes "in the northern states of Uttar

Pradesh and Haryana, located in the so called 'vasectomy belt', there were tales of entire populations of village men hiding in the fields to escape police raids in the night. There were also instances of police firings and innocent protesters killed" (11). Instances echoing these can be found in the novel. When Sahadevan and Satyanathan go in search of Dasappan, people in the slum go into hiding. Women peep out of their homes with anxiety-filled eyes, children run away crying 'nasbandiwale aaye hain. Bhaag jao, bhaa jao' (Run, people have come to take us for sterilization). When Sahadevan asks Sathyanathan why people are running away, the reply that Sathyanathan gives captures the spirit of the time: "in such political climate, each one is afraid, and they ignite more fear. Fear would soon be the only emotion left" (Mukundan 273).

In his essay, Sztompka also explains the role that traumatogenic changes play in producing cultural trauma. He uses two major postulations to explain his argument:

> First, the cultural tissue is most sensitive to the impact of traumatogenic changes, precisely because culture is a depository of continuity, heritage, tradition, and identity of human communities. Change, by definition, undermines or destroys all these. Second, wounds inflicted by culture are most difficult to heal. Culture obtains a particular inertia, and once the cultural equilibrium is broken, it is most difficult to restore it. (162)

The following section will look into the cultural trauma that the Indian Emergency produced and its depiction in *Delhi: A Soliloquy*.

Cultural Trauma

The concept of cultural trauma was developed by a group of sociologists (which includes Ron Eyerman, Jeffrey C Alexander, and Neil Smelser) at the Centre for the Advanced Study in the Behavioural Sciences (CASBS), Stanford University as a result of their efforts to develop a 'sociological theory' of trauma. In his book, *Trauma: A Social Theory*, Jeffrey C. Alexander explains that "cultural trauma 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" (6). Alexander explains how events that shatter the existence of a community or its collectivity affects the social setup and thus cause trauma at a social level. Defining cultural trauma as, "an invasive and overwhelming event that is believed to undermine or overwhelm one or several essential ingredients of a culture or the culture as a whole"(38), Smelser distinguishes between psychological and cultural trauma in his essay, "Cultural and Psychological Trauma". He contends that the primary difference between psychological trauma and cultural trauma lies in the 'mechanisms that establish and sustain them'. While psychological trauma uses "intrapsychic dynamics of defence, adaptation and coping" for perpetuation, the mechanisms that cultural trauma employs are social agents and infected groups. (39)

Alexander uses the term, 'carrier groups' to explain the section of each culture that plays a pivotal role in the 'meaning-making' process and documents/transfers memories of cultural trauma to future generations. This can be read along with the idea of traumatic openness that Jenny Edkins explains in her work "Remembering Relationality; Trauma Time and Politics", "some people want to try to hold on to the openness that trauma produces. They do not want to forget, or to express the trauma in standard narratives that entail a form of forgetting. They see trauma as something that unsettles authority, and that should make settled stories impossible in the future" (Edkins 107).

Writers like Mukundan fall into this category and play a pivotal role in the documentation of cultural trauma. Smelser argues that cultural trauma creates a disruption in society and threatens the foundations on which a cultural group shares a collective identity. Based on this idea, Smelser explains cultural trauma as "a memory accepted and publicly given

credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is a) laden with negative affect, b) represented as indelible, and c) regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions" (Smelser 44).

The Indian emergency and associated events disrupted the notion of democracy that the common man believed in. When the slums were demolished and people sterilized against their wishes, their hopes of a developing nation shattered. Mukundan aptly represents this by portraying the initial hopes of the common man that were boosted through the notion of discipline that came with Emergency:

> The buses ran to schedule. Not just that – the conductor patiently ensured that everyone got on board before blowing onto the whistle…. People didn't have to repeatedly pat their pockets to make sure their wallets and cash were safe. The pickpockets disappeared. There were orderly queues at post offices, milk booths, and ration shops. And no power cuts. If the power failed, a phone call was enough; the lineman came running…. The usual eve teasers disappeared from parks and theatres and colleges. The Janata Express and the Grand Trunk Express, which typically ran five or six hours late, started arriving on the dot. There was one hundred percentage attendance in the Secretariat. (Mukundan 251)

Mukundan compares the nation to a lower primary school where Madam Indira was teaching discipline with her cane. Even restaurants stopped adding colouring to their foods and the overall atmosphere was one of order and discipline. Along with this order came the repeal of fundamental rights, which shattered the lives of many. Mukundan compares the emergency to typhoid. "The Emergency was similar. Those who caught it died; those who didn't die were rendered unrecognizably infirm" (Mukundan 271). Gradually despair set in and people began to lose all hope. Left homeless and hopeless, the common man lost not just his voice, but also his right to survive.

Along with the trauma of abandonment and revelation, which we count under betrayal, comes the disillusionment of the intelligentsia too. The democratic ideals that pre-Independence India promised to uphold were stamped to the ground when the constitutional monarchy ruled the state. Mukundan expresses this disillusionment through the thoughts of Sahadevan, Satyanathan, and Jananikutty. The inability to speak and protest greatly troubles them and all they can afford to do is drink and worry. The utmost helplessness and disillusionment that they experience are evident when Satyanathan says "We are sitting here and drinking so that we don't worry about anything" (Mukundan 287). The inability to act, as well as distrust in the progressive, all-embracing nature of the nation, deeply impacts the characters, who are left with no hope. By the end of the section, all the main characters are left traumatized, some psychologically (disillusioned) and others physically (eg. Satyanathan, Kunhikannan Mashu). Subjecting his major characters to all the known traumas of the Emergency, Mukundan paints the cultural trauma of the migrant Malayali population in *Delhi*'s pages. This deeply echoes the understanding of the trauma that Edkins brings forth in her essay:

> It seems that trauma is more than a shock encounter with brutality or death; in an important sense, trauma is the betrayal of a promise or an expectation. Trauma can be seen as an encounter that betrays our faith in previously established personal and social worlds and calls into question the resolutions of impossible questions that people have arrived at in order to continue with day-to-day life: 'what we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turns against us or when our family is no longer a source of refuge but a site of danger'. (Edkins 124)

The betrayal of the state and the trauma of the inability to respond are all vividly explained in the pages of *Delhi*. Through careful selection of characters and situations, Mukundan succeeds in documenting the cultural trauma and memory of a group of Malayali migrants in Delhi during the Indian Emergency.

Conclusion

Critics are still debating the need to preserve and document traumatic experiences of the past. Theorists like Christian Meier (in his book *The Imperative to Forget and the Inescapability of Remembering*, 2010) assert the need to forget. According to him, the only possible solution for a political tumult is to help things settle in and wipe away memories, as memories destabilize social relations. The group of scholars who support remembering the traumatic events of the past opines that reconciliation and understanding of the events are necessary for strengthening social ties. As Assmann and Shortt (2011) write,

> In order to achieve reconciliation and social integration, the often oppositional generational and cultural memories also need to be respected, and/or adapted and/or contained. For this reason, it is important to study how citizens of various ethnic, social, and political groups or generations remember or refer to their experiences of violence and repression or to their experiences of a non-democratic regime so that we can extend our knowledge on the relations between individual, social and political memory in transitional processes and change. (4)

While both sides hold strong points, wiping away traumatic memories is not a plausible option. Silencing narratives only adds to the effect of trauma. Cultural memories and counter histories are to be respected and given space.

Literary narratives of emergency fulfil this function and give life to a period of Indian history that was silenced by brutal forces. While each of the novels has its own focus and points of narration, Mukundan picks up an easy linear narrative. With his craft in storytelling and character-building, Mukundan creates a picture of Delhi that is nostalgic and savage at the same time. This makes a compelling addition to the list of Indian Emergency novels, which earlier lacked regional representations. The major trope that he employs is his protagonist Sahadevan. His ruminations can be considered as Mukundan's own comments on the period. With sharp

eyes and an empathetic mind, he witnesses all of the traumatic experiences of the period, painting a vivid picture for the reader. With the assertion of cultural identity and constant reference to middle-class Malayali population, the novel documents the cultural memory and trauma of a set of middle-class Malayalis in Delhi during the Emergency.

Works cited

Alexander, Jeffrey C. *Trauma: A Social Theory*, Polity Press, 2012, Cambridge.

Anil, Pratinav, and Jafferlot Christophe. *India's First Dictatorship: The Emergency, 1975-77*. HarperCollins, 2020, London.

Assmann, Alieda and Linda Shortt. "Memory and Political Change: Introduction." *Memory and Political Change*, 1-14. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, Hampshire.

Assmann, Jan. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance and Political Imagination*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, New York.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, The John Hopkins University Press, 1996, Baltimore.

Davis, Colin and Hanna Meretoja. "Introduction to Literary Trauma Studies." *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, 1-8. Abington: Routledge, 2020, Abington.

DC Books. "Delhi: A Soliloquy; M. Mukundan." 29 Oct 2020, Interview, 56:52 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bfZ1zz2zVAE .

Edkins, Jenny. "Remembering Relationality: Trauma Time and Politics." *Memory, Trauma and World Politics*, edited by Duncan Bell, 99-115. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, New York.

Erll, Astrid. "Cultural Memory Studies: An Introduction". *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, 1-15, Walter de Gruyter, 2008, Berlin.

_____. "Media and Memory". *Memory in Culture Palgrave Macmillan Memory Studies*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, New York.

_____ and Ann Rigney. "Literature and the Production of Cultural Memory: Introduction." *European Journal of English Studies*, 10(2),111–115, Routledge, 2006, New York. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230321670_5

Eyerman, Ron. *Memory, Trauma and Identity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, 6330 Cham.

Ghosh, Jhumur. 2017. "Indira Gandhi's Call of Emergency and Press Censorship in India: The Ethical Parameters Revisited."*Global Media Journal*- Indian Edition.8(1), 17-28, .

JLF Lit Fest. "Delhi: A Soliloquy; M Mukundan, Fathima E V and Nandakumar in conversation with A J Thomas". 29 July 2021. Interview, 54;55. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bok6ROv5E8Y .

Mathur, O.P. *Indira Gandhi and the Emergency as Viewed in the Indian Novel*. Swarup and Sons, 2004 , New Delhi.

Merivitra, Raita. *The Emergency and The Indian English Novel*. Routledge, 2019, Abington.

Mistry, Rohinton. *A Fine Balance*. Faber and Faber, 1997, London.

Mukundan, M., 2020. *Delhi: A Soliloquy*. Trans by Fathima E.V. and Nandakumar K., Chennai: Westland Publications.

Neumann, Birgit. "The Literary Representation of Memory." In *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, 333-343, Walter de Gruyter, 2008, Berlin.

Rege, J. E. "Victim into Protagonist? Midnight's Children and the Post-Rushdie National Narratives of the Eighties." *Studies in the Novel*, 29(3), 342–75, John Hopkins University Press, 1997, Baltimore, www.jstor.org/stable/29533221.

Smelser, Neil J. "Psychological Trauma and Cultural Trauma." In *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*,31-59, University of California Press, 2004, Berkely.

Sztompka, Piotr. "The Trauma of Social Change: A Case of Postcommunist Societies." *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, 155-195, University of California Press, 2004, Berkley.

Tarlo, Emma. *Unsettling Memories: Narratives of the Emergency in Delhi*. Hurst and Company, 2003, London.

Trivedi, Harish. "Epilogue/Epitaph." In *The Fiction of St Stephen's*, edited by Aditya Bhattacharjee and Lola Chattarjee. Ravi Dayal, 2002, New Delhi.