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Topic of Research: Identity and Trauma: The Study of Select Narratives of South Asian Diaspora Cinema

Findings

This PhD thesis investigates the intersections of identity, trauma, and migration through a close reading of select South Asian Diaspora films. Rooted in postcolonial trauma theory, the study examines how the cinematic narratives of South Asian diasporic communities in the West encode, represent, and process a diverse range of traumatic experiences. The research has three core objectives: to ascertain a definition of trauma theory and its relevance to diaspora studies; to connect trauma and diaspora theory through the medium of film; and to uncover new categories of South Asian migrant trauma arising from the postcolonial context.

The first chapter builds a theoretical framework drawing on the foundational work of Charcot, Freud, Breuer, Lacan, Caruth, LaCapra, Whitehead, Leys, Balaev, and Irene Visser. From Caruth's postulation of the unrepresentability of trauma and its literary processing, to Visser's expanded postcolonial model encompassing 'quiet trauma' and individual migrant experience, the study traces the trajectory of trauma theory from its clinical origins to its application in diaspora and film studies. Visser's inclusion of everyday, familial, and culturally-situated forms of trauma proves particularly generative for the South Asian diasporic context. The second chapter analyses *What Will People Say* and *Provoked*, grouping them under the category of domestic abuse and dependent migrant status. The third chapter examines undocumented migration through *Dheepan*, *Surkhab*, and *The Illegal*. Each film captures the urgency of flight, the constant threat of detection, and the entrapment of illegal status. The fourth chapter engages with intergenerational trauma across *The Hundred Foot Journey*, *The Namesake*, *Definition Please*, *Pagg*, and *Five O'Clock Shadow*. For first-generation migrants, trauma manifests through acculturation pressures, sacrifice, and bereavement from the homeland. For second and third-generation characters, it surfaces as depression, anxiety, fractured family dynamics, and the burden of inherited expectations. Across all chapters, the study identifies recurring cinematic patterns in the representation of trauma: facial expressions of shock, shame, and numbness; close-ups of clasped or tense hands; colour grading to differentiate homeland from migrated land and past from present; and the deployment of flashbacks and cross-cuts as memory devices. The role of community emerges as a significant variable in the representation of resilience versus victimhood. The thesis maps these distinctions to understand how narrative agency is distributed across the spectrum of South Asian diasporic film.

The study concludes by establishing that South Asian Diaspora cinema constitutes a dynamic and evolving genre capable of carrying trauma within its narrative and visual grammar. Films that were not explicitly framed as trauma narratives reveal, upon close reading through postcolonial trauma theory, significant sites of historical, cultural, familial, and individual trauma. The research thus expands the boundaries of trauma studies to include the quiet, everyday traumas embedded within the South Asian migrant experience, and argues for the South Asian Diasporic film as a legitimate and fertile object of trauma discourse.

Keywords: *South Asian Diaspora Cinema, Trauma Theory, Postcolonial Trauma, Diasporic Identity, Migration, Intergenerational Trauma, Mise-en-scène, Resilience, Victimhood*