

## **Inherited Painscapes : A Literary Exploration of Manreet Sodhi Someshwar's Lahore**

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### **Abstract**

Manreet Sodhi Someshwar's novel "Lahore" (2007) brings the painscape of Partition literature live and throbbing in the minds of readers. The novel has weaved the social history along with the trauma faced by the common man in a close knitted manner. An intimate glimpse into the psychological cartography of loss and displacement provides deep meditations towards the narratives of 1947 and its immediate aftermath, Someshwar by providing Lahore as the setting of the novel suggests how cities live on the collective unconscious plane of displaced communities. The title of the novel suggests the ways in which the cartography gets transformed into emotional territory, carrying the weight of cultural memory across generations. The present paper examines Someshwar's distinctive approach to document inherited trauma and the reconstruction of literary imagination of lost homelands. The novel structures different narratives to reveal the damaging impact of colonialism and political manipulations had on the common individuals.

**Keywords:** Painscape, Loss, Displacement, Unconscious, Inherited, Cultural

### **Introduction**

When partition literature is read, it is not just the human emotions and displacements that are considered, the entire cosmos involving certain cities emerge as more than mere backdrop "they become characters wrestling with their own fractured identities". Lahore occupies a particular haunting position in this narrative landscape, representing what scholar Urvashi Butalia might call a "site of impossible return." For countless families who fled across newly drawn borders in 1947, Lahore transformed overnight from home to memory then to inherited story.

Manreet Sodhi Someshwar in her novel approaches this subject from the perspective of someone who has not seen the pre-Partition streets yet carries the memory in her cultural consciousness. Her novel attempts to recreate historical events with reconstructed documentary precision. An emotional journey emerges along with displacement, excavating the fact how the places are imagined where one has never lived. Lahore is troupe of loss and still lives in the imagination of the second and the third generation of partition survivors. "The mapping of the events of 1947 on the forgotten cartographies and land marks of pre-Partitioned cities, towns and villages provides a glimpse into the socio- cultural history of these spaces that are either overlooked or erased in historians' histories" (Gera,33)

Someshwar belongs to the successive generation of Partition for whom 1947 exists primarily through family stories, faded photographs, and persistent cultural echoes. This positioning grants

her both freedom and burden. Unlike writers who lived through the events, she can approach Lahore in a mediated manner. Yet she carries the responsibility of translating inherited pain into literary artifact. The methodology used in writing the paper is thematic and analytical. Her characters struggle not merely with geographical displacement but with the loss that threatens the existence and faith.

### **Lahore: a Mnemonic Text**

The novel *Lahore* is not only the journey of pain in which the readers relive the inhuman and tragic times of history but the one remembered as ugly face of humanity. This novel is first in the segment of partition trilogy. The work falls in the category of historical fiction that provides insight into the fictional historical events starting from Laur (Lahore) February 1947 to Delhi September 1947.

Displaying a unique craft the story moves at three levels, first at the level of Mountbatten, second at the level of political leaders namely Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Jinnah and third level is of the common man which eventually became the victims of colonial and political games. The three levels lay bare the whole narrative of Indian Partition and its aftermath. At the level of British, Mountbatten presents the colonial viewpoint and their political stand. The sections involving Indian and Pakistani leaders put forth the political scenario, the manipulations and the strategies that went behind the scenes. The impact of the partition has been painfully depicted through the turn that came in the lives of insignificant common man, the residents of Lahore. Structured around parallel plots the storyline gives heart touching account of characters namely Belli Ram, Mehmood, Sepoy Maalik, Tara, Billo, the mad woman, Kishan Singh and his three daughters. The tragic deaths that center on partition violence create a panorama of desolation and despair. The Pre-Partition Lahore represents more than a hometown; it embodies a multicultural sensibility that political division attempted to erase.

As the plot of the novel moves, a fractured city is witnessed oozing blood and confused migration. Lahore thus is a dynamic character rather than a static setting. The city that is created exists simultaneously in multiple time periods and states of being. It appears as the vibrant center it once was, the divided city it became, and the mythological space it has grown into through decades of storytelling. The employment of multiple narrative serves as the function of several perspectives. The novel's temporal structure reflects its thematic preoccupations with memory and inheritance as the narrative moves fluidly between different time periods, allowing past and present to combine in psychologically realistic ways.

The beginning is dated February 1947, Laur(Lahore). Laur for Lahore is intentionally written by the writer to emphasise on the dialect used by Punjabi community. In her dedication the author has dedicated her work to her uncle and has written that his Laur is hers too. The statement reveals the flow of memory that continues from one generation to the other. The story grips the reader by depiction of tension that is high in the air as news of Independent India may soon be a reality, along with a separate Pakistan, and the fate of Panjab, Bengal still uncertain and same is for the residents of Lahore . The narrative carefully weaves the electric atmosphere of a nation on the brink of unmindful division. India stands at the threshold of independence as well as of

partition of the divided territories of Punjab and Bengal, and in the novel for the people calling Lahore their home. Lahorians can feel the bloody winds of change sweeping through their streets, accompanied by disturbing reports of communal violence and deadly riots erupting across the city. The once a beautiful tapestry of diverse faiths living side by side is now unraveling into something far more sinister and violent.

Meanwhile, the story has another thread: Mountbatten, Britain's final representative in India, touches down in Delhi with his family with a clear mission—to accelerate the transfer of power to Indian leaders. As the political wheels gain the momentum, Vallabhbhai Patel watches with growing uneasiness and trouble at the British blueprint for partition. As a true patriot and son of soil he is shown worried and in introspection over the ways to avoid the division of the country into multiple parts. At the same time, Jawaharlal Nehru is discussing and sharing his fears and reservations with Patel on the proposed partition plan.

The scene then shifts to Lahore where Beli Ram is targeted by local goons who are now moving without fear under the communal umbrella of impending division of countries. Beli Ram and Mehmood have lived like brothers. Mehmood's father had adopted Beli Ram when later was a kid. With the impending change that is knocking the doors, both of them can feel the fires of partition that are ready to burn their relationship. Kishan Singh, a clerk in railways lives in Lahore with his three daughters in the area that is dominated by Muslim Community. They have a cordial relationship with their neighbors. His daughter Pammi is enrolled in the same institution as Asad and they share good bond of friendship. Sepoy Malik is back home after the World War II has ended with a hope to reunite with his ladylove, Tara. This scenario changes completely as the action moves from pre-Partition to Partition and eventually to its aftermath. Most of the female characters of the novel suffer tragic end, Pammi is abducted by a truck driver and is found in a shattered state in one of the refugee camps of Delhi by the daughter of Mountbatten. Both the girls have similar name with different accent, this highlights the bond women share and the unsaid familiarity in spite of different backgrounds. By the end of story Pammi is safe in the custody of her uncle. Beli Ram and Mehmood get separated and the madwoman who talks about the 'blood rains' is shown perched on the tree symbolizing that land is no more safe to live.

The story runs on two parallel grounds, one in Lahore with fictional characters and one in Delhi with real life characters who are the leaders and politicians of contemporary times. The combination of reel and real provides authenticity as well as the creativity to the craft. The author clearly shows the politics that was played out with vested interests by the policy makers and its cruel impact on the people of Lahore.

The tone of the book is serious and tense all through. As a postmemory text it shows the immense research done by the author in giving the close detailing of the events. The story provides a balanced view of narration involving different classes of people who were affected by the partition. This structural choice depicts how memory actually functions in human consciousness. Traumatic or emotionally significant events don't remain safely contained in the past; they intrude into present experience, shaping current decisions and relationships. The layered timeline also suggests that historical events like Partition don't have clear endings. Their consequences

continue unfolding across generations, creating new forms of loss and possibility that couldn't have been predicted at the time of the original trauma. One of Someshwar's most emotionally effective techniques involves her meticulous attention to sensory detail in recreating Lahore's atmosphere. She understands that places live in human memory through specific textures, sounds, and smells that can trigger powerful emotional responses. This approach allows her to explore how places continue existing in human consciousness long after their physical or cultural transformation. Her Lahore survives in fragments, reconstructed through countless small acts of cultural preservation. The technique also highlights how memory itself becomes a form of resistance. By keeping particular versions of Lahore alive in imagination and story, displaced communities refuse to accept the finality of their loss. They maintain alternative visions of what was possible, what might still be possible. Within the broader context of Partition literature, Lahore functions as what geographer Yi-Fu Tuan might call a "topophilic space" a place that generates intense emotional attachment and identification. Someshwar engages with this symbolic weight while grounding her exploration in specific human experiences that resist easy generalization.

Her treatment contributes to ongoing scholarly debates about the nature of cultural identity in South Asia and the possibility of maintaining connections across political boundaries. By presenting Lahore as a space as a part of inherited pain rather than simply lost property, she engages with larger questions about the human cost of political division. The city in her novel becomes a laboratory for exploring whether cultural unity can survive political fragmentation. Through the title and the story, author's Lahore suggest that emotional and cultural connections can persist even when physical return becomes impossible

### **Inherited Narratives and Pain**

Contemporary Partition literature has evolved far beyond the testimonial urgency that characterized earlier works. While first generation writers like Khushwant Singh, Bhasham Sahni, Saadat Hasan Manto, Attia Hosain and Amrita Pritam captured the immediate brutality of division, writers like Someshwar, Meena Arora Nayak and Amit Majumdar investigated its lingering psychological residue. Their works participate in what critic Alok Bhalla terms "the literature of aftermath" that examines how historical trauma continues to shape identity decades later. The evolution of the partition literature from memory to postmemory doesn't diminish the importance of earlier documentation. Instead, it expands our understanding of how catastrophic events ripple through time, affecting people who never directly experienced them. Someshwar's generation brings different questions to familiar material: How do we own the places we never knew? What obligations do we have to memories that aren't technically ours? Why do we have to write about the pain that our ancestors felt?

The inherited trauma manifests in subtle ways: an inexplicable uneasiness around certain reactions to particular political developments, or deep attachments to cultural practices whose original contexts have been lost. The work demonstrates how family stories create internal landscapes that can feel more real than immediate surroundings. Kavita Punjabi in her article 'A Unique Grace' says, ' a homeland left behind forever remains as a powerful memory of loss, handed down from generation to generation.'

## **Contemporary**

## **Echoes**

Scholars of South Asian literature have recognized Someshwar's novel as a significant contribution to contemporary understanding of Partition's ongoing impact. Critics particularly praise her sophisticated treatment of inherited trauma and her innovative approach to representing place and memory. Literary geographers have found her work valuable for its exploration of how places continue existing in human consciousness after physical or cultural transformation. Her treatment of space and place offers insights relevant beyond the specific context of Partition to broader questions about the relationship between geography and identity.

Trauma studies scholars have noted her nuanced exploration of how historical events affect subsequent generations. Rather than simple victimization narratives, she offers complex portraits of how inherited pain can coexist with resilience and creativity. When examined alongside other significant works of Partition literature, Someshwar's novel distinguishes itself through its focus on psychological rather than physical geography. While earlier works documented the immediate violence and displacement of 1947, her exploration centers on the emotional and cultural reverberations of these events. This approach aligns her work with other contemporary authors exploring inherited trauma and cultural memory.

## **Conclusion**

Manreet Sodhi Someshwar's "Lahore" accomplishes something remarkable: it transforms inherited pain into creative insight without diminishing the reality of loss and trauma. Her novel demonstrates that literature can serve as both memorial and laboratory, preserving important cultural memory while exploring new possibilities for understanding identity and belonging. Her treatment of inherited trauma proves particularly valuable for its recognition that historical events don't end when they officially conclude. They continue shaping human experience across generations, creating both burdens and opportunities that couldn't have been predicted at the time of their occurrence. Perhaps most importantly, Someshwar's novel demonstrates literature's capacity to transform loss into understanding. While acknowledging the genuine pain of displacement and cultural fragmentation, her work also reveals the creative possibilities that emerge when people refuse to accept the finality of their losses. The Lahore that exists in her novel may never have existed in historical reality, but it serves essential psychological and cultural functions for characters struggling to maintain coherence across historical disruption. This suggests that the truth literature offers may sometimes prove more sustaining than the facts history provides.

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