



The Echoes of Inner Conflicts and Resilience: War, Partition, and the Representation of Trauma in Aanchal Malhotra's *The Book of Everlasting Things*

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Abstract

Violence, assault, and war wreak havoc on peaceful communities while inflicting deep and lasting injuries on their victims, and the 1947 Partition of India remains the most traumatic such rupture the subcontinent has ever undergone. As a medium of discourse, literature portrays the multidimensional aspects of human life under such catastrophe, exploring its psychological, cultural, and socio-political wounds. This paper examines how Aanchal Malhotra memorialises the Partition and the First World War in her debut novel *The Book of Everlasting Things* (2022). It argues that the novel represents trauma not as a single catastrophic event but as an inheritance transmitted across generations through material and sensory media such as journals, photographs, letters, and above all scent and that it locates resilience in the disciplined labour of perfumery, through which the protagonist, Samir Vij, converts an inherited wound into a livable narrative of self. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's account of trauma's belatedness, Judith Herman's stages of recovery, Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, and Dominick LaCapra's distinction between acting out and working through, the paper contends that Malhotra's principal contribution to Partition fiction is an olfactory archive: an aesthetic in which smell functions simultaneously as the trigger of traumatic return and as the medium of repair.

Keywords:- Conflict, Cultural Memory, Historical Trauma, Intergenerational Trauma, Memory, Olfactory Memory, Partition, Postmemory, Resilience, War.

Introduction

There can be no doubt that one of the most insidious effects of trauma is a deep and pervasive silence. Pain of this order is stubbornly subjective; no verbal description can quantify it. It cuts through surface-level comprehension and burrows into the psyche, where it becomes a riddle that few survivors ever fully solve, rising again and again into consciousness and doing damage that feels irreversible. Urvashi Butalia's oral histories of 1947 record precisely this muteness: survivors who, for half a century, folded the worst of what they had seen and suffered into the unspoken routines of family life (Butalia). Trauma of this kind is familiar from histories

of crime, war, and genocide; years later the pain persists, even when especially when no one speaks of it.

In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth argues that trauma must be understood as a wound of the mind rather than of the body an injury that, unlike a physical wound, “is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (Caruth 4). Trauma, in her account, “is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature the way it was precisely not known in the first instance returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). Literature matters to trauma studies, then, not because the literary text tames the wound into a symbolic and ordered narrative but for nearly the opposite reason: literary language is the mode of telling best able to register an experience that resists assimilation in Caruth’s phrase, “a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (4). The stakes of such telling are political as much as psychological. As Kali Tal argues in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, “If survivors retain control over the interpretation of their trauma, they can sometimes force a shift in the social and political structure. If the dominant culture manages to appropriate the trauma and can codify it in its own terms, the status quo will remain unchanged” (Tal 7). On a social as well as an individual psychological level, she adds, “the penalty for repression is repetition” (7).

A pivotal point in South Asian history, the 1947 Partition of India redefined political borders and profoundly damaged the collective psyche of those it displaced; its historical weight is taken up in detail later in this essay. What matters at the outset is the task that fell to literature. While historical scholarship has documented the geopolitical and administrative dimensions of the division, literature took on the more intimate and emotionally exacting work of portraying its human ramifications. As the generation that experienced Partition passes away and younger generations become the custodians of collective memory, writers in Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Bengali, English, and other languages have continued to examine Partition as a site of suffering, memory, and moral assessment.

Indian English writing has also had to reckon with the two world wars, in which more than a million soldiers of undivided India served far from home. As Santanu Das has shown, the sepoy’s war survives less in official histories than in letters, photographs, songs, and objects fragile media through which men fighting in distant lands remained bound to villages that could scarcely imagine the trenches (Das). Fiction that returns to this experience must therefore work against a double distance: the geographical distance of the battlefields of France and Flanders from Punjab, and the archival distance of lives that left few written traces. No single account can fully comprehend a survivor’s life; every trauma carries its own distinct incidents, registered in both conscious and unconscious ways. It is precisely this granularity one man’s war, one family’s Partition that fiction is uniquely equipped to honour.

The Book of Everlasting Things (2022), the debut novel of the Indian writer and oral historian Aanchal Malhotra, braids these two catastrophes the First World War and the Partition of India into a single family’s story. Malhotra is best known for her Partition oral histories, *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory* (2017) and *In the Language of Remembering: The Inheritance of Partition* (2022), works built from the objects that refugees carried across the new border and the stories their descendants tell about them. This essay argues that the novel translates that archival method into fiction: it represents trauma not as a single catastrophic event but as an inheritance, transmitted across generations through material and sensory media journals, photographs, letters, and above all scent and it locates resilience in the disciplined labour of perfumery, through which the protagonist, Samir Vij, converts an inherited wound into a livable narrative of self. Reading the novel through

Cathy Caruth's account of trauma's belatedness, Judith Herman's stages of recovery, Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, and Dominick LaCapra's distinction between acting out and working through, the essay contends that Malhotra's principal contribution to Partition fiction is what may be called an olfactory archive: an aesthetic in which smell functions simultaneously as the trigger of traumatic return and as the medium of repair.

Trauma, Postmemory, and Working Through: A Critical Framework

Trauma theory offers a precise vocabulary for the psychological devastation this novel narrates. In *Trauma and Recovery*, the psychiatrist Judith Herman observes that "traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life" (Herman 33). Unlike commonplace misfortune, such events confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and their aftermath follows a recognisable dialectic: the event returns as intrusion nightmares, flashbacks, unbidden images and is managed by numbing and constriction, a narrowing of life that cuts the survivor off from the community of the living (Herman). Herman's clinical account gives precision to Caruth's literary one: the traumatic event is not over when it is over; it is, in Caruth's terms, unclaimed, and it returns to claim its subject.

The Vij family's story, however, cannot be told with a theory of first-person trauma alone, because its central wound is inherited. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory names "the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before to experiences they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (Hirsch 5). Crucially, these inherited memories are transmitted so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right, even though the connection to the past is "mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (5). Hirsch developed the concept in relation to the children of Holocaust survivors, but it has proved indispensable to Partition studies Malhotra's own *In the Language of Remembering* is explicitly a study of Partition's postmemory and it describes with uncanny exactness the structure of Malhotra's novel: a nephew who "remembers" a war he never saw, through journals, photographs, and bottled scent.

Finally, Dominick LaCapra's distinction between acting out and working through supplies the terms in which the novel's movement from wound to resilience can be described. In acting out, LaCapra writes, "tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene" (LaCapra 21). Working through, by contrast, is "an articulatory practice": the survivor gains critical distance, comes to distinguish between past, present, and future, and is able to recall that something happened back then while recognising that one is living here and now, with openings to the future (21–22). Herman's account of recovery complements this distinction: recovery unfolds in three stages the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life (Herman 155). Read together, these theorists convert this essay's title into an argument. The "echoes" are trauma's belated returns and postmemorial transmissions; "resilience" is not the absence of wounds but the work in this novel, literally a craft by which they are made survivable.

Trauma and Its Ordeals in War

Especially in the context of industrialised combat, trauma theory offers a framework for comprehending the psychological effects of war. An overpowering incident destroys a person's sense of reality and of self and frequently results in long-lasting emotional wounds; in war, trauma arises not only from the brutality and death of the front lines but from the displacement of identity and of time itself. The breakdown of the secure self is reflected in the dissolution of the timeline in war literature: soldiers and civilians alike find themselves caught in repeating, circular feelings and recollections as they attempt to make sense of what they have

endured. Literary form in warfare literature is therefore never merely an aesthetic decision; it registers psychic disintegration, and war writing becomes an essential lens for understanding the human toll of combat not only on the battlefield but in the minds and hearts of those who survive it.

The novel revolves around the Vij family of Lahore in the decades before Partition; Samir Vij, the family's sole survivor, ultimately escapes the burning city for India. The novel opens: "His nose woke up. It shook Samir from his slumber..." (Malhotra). The sentence is a manifesto in miniature. Before Samir is conscious, his body remembers; the organ of smell precedes and outruns the thinking self. From its first line, the novel announces that memory here will be somatic carried in the senses rather than composed by the will which is precisely the structure Caruth attributes to trauma, an experience "not available to consciousness" until it imposes itself unbidden (Caruth 4). Everything that follows the inherited journals, the bottled ittars, the odour of a burning city elaborates this founding premise.

Samir does not remain long in the newly established India. Almost at once he begins rebuilding: he decides to go to France, with minimal reference to his past, taking direction from what his uncle Vivek had learned of the perfume industry there. His guides are the notebooks Vivek left behind, which Samir saved from the fire journals detailing Vivek's memories of serving with the Indian Army in France during the First World War. Samir diligently charts every location Vivek visited in Paris and every position to which he was assigned. In an archive, Samir finds:

...the heavy-bound volume on the wooden surface. With a thud, he opened it to the back and then made his way to the front, idly flipping through photographs ...Rows of men with dark skin marching in the streets, setting up camps, working guns and other arms... Samir found that their turbans were all tied differently... These were his people. And then someone caught his eye... With a trembling finger, Samir pointed to a man in the centre of the image. (Malhotra)

The scene condenses the predicament of the second generation. Samir does not remember the war; he encounters it as an image and must find his way into it through recognition "These were his people" and through the trembling finger that singles one man out of the anonymous rows. Hirsch argues that photographs are privileged media of postmemory precisely because they promise an unmediated access to the past that they cannot deliver, soliciting instead the viewer's "imaginative investment, projection, and creation" (Hirsch 5). Malhotra stages exactly this: the turbans "all tied differently" remain an ethnographic detail only until the moment of recognition converts archive into inheritance.

Samir then follows Vivek's journals to Grasse, where Vivek had first discovered the world of scent that Samir would later inherit. In Grasse, Vivek too had once rebuilt a life a household, a craft and processed the traumas of the First World War. Samir passionately immerses himself in every stage of Vivek's life that he encounters in the journals, as though living Vivek's life in order to comprehend himself and forge a connection with his uncle. This doubling is the novel's postmemorial engine, and it carries a risk the novel understands: to relive another's past as if it were one's own is, in LaCapra's terms, to act out to let the tenses implode (LaCapra 21). Whether Samir's pilgrimage will remain compulsive repetition or become something more deliberate is, as the later sections of this essay argue, the true plot of the novel's second half.

Malhotra's portrayal of the horrors of the First World War, the depravity of trench warfare, and, by contrast, the tranquillity of Grasse is vivid, comprehensive, and precise. Vivek's journal entry of 27 October 1914 records the terror of the front:

My regiment charged across a rain-soaked field, under a darkening sky, and after a short bombardment, attacked the Jarman trench¹. I remember blood, and the sound, I cannot forget the sound. Shell after shell, burying men, blowing up others. A whole body exploding within mere seconds. There are no words in any language to describe it. Here, I have seen a dead man for the first time. Subedar Mansoor Khan was slain by a bomb before my eyes. So close was he that my uniform bears the remains of his blood and body, along with mud, trench water, and my own vomit. (Malhotra)

The entry performs trauma's assault on language even as it testifies. The syntax is paratactic and additive, refusing subordination "I remember blood, and the sound, I cannot forget the sound" and at its centre stands the explicit admission of unspeakability: "There are no words in any language to describe it." Even the misspelling "Jarman" matters: Malhotra preserves the sepoy's phonetic rendering of "German," keeping the war inside Vivek's own linguistic world rather than translating it into the idiom of official history a fidelity to the texture of testimony that recalls Das's account of the sepoy's fragmentary archive (Das). And what the entry cannot say directly, it says materially: the uniform that "bears the remains" of Subedar Mansoor Khan's blood and body is the first of the novel's many objects that carry what consciousness cannot.

Lea, the Frenchwoman Samir marries, carries a kindred wound. She lost her fiancé, Michel, to the same war, and as a hospital worker she witnessed its terrors at close range:

Lea remained awake as the darkness of the night gave way to the brightness of dawn, for each time she closed her eyes, she saw Michel's face... And then again, on the day he was brought into the hospital tent, when all life had left his body. Unable to move, unable to speak, Lea had watched in horror as the doctors declared her betrothed dead long before he'd been brought in. His face was undisfigured but covered in mud, as if it had been trampled on; his body was badly wounded, with bullets in both his legs and shrapnel through his arms. (Malhotra)

This is a textbook rendering of what Herman calls intrusion: the traumatic image returns "each time she closed her eyes," unbidden and exact, and sleep the boundary between past and present dissolves (Herman). The detail Malhotra selects is significant: Michel's face is "undisfigured but covered in mud, as if it had been trampled on." The horror is displaced from the face to its covering, from the body to its surface the same metonymic logic by which Vivek's uniform holds Mansoor Khan's death. Grief in this novel adheres to surfaces, textures, and smells; that is what makes it transmissible, and what allows Lea to recognise in Samir a sorrow shaped like her own.

It is true that the novel is less elaborate in depicting how Samir processes the extreme violence he has witnessed: the brief build-up to his short-lived marriage, his feelings about fatherhood, and his daily negotiations with loss are rendered with a reticence that borders on omission. Yet that reticence is legible within the novel's own theory of trauma: Samir's silence is the silence with which this essay began, and Malhotra declines to violate it with explanation. Trauma matters in this narrative because it touches fundamental themes the relationship between life and death, the purpose and standard of existence, psychological as well as physical survival and Malhotra invites readers to consider the effects of war on ethical standards and mental health not by telling us what Samir feels, but by showing us what he does with his hands.

Wounds and Trauma in Partition

After the end of British colonial rule in the subcontinent, the most catastrophic moment was the Partition of India in August 1947. The division of the subcontinent into two sovereign states, India and Pakistan, was drawn primarily along lines of religious demography, and it did not merely revise political boundaries: it set in motion one of the bloodiest and most agonising mass migrations in human history, displacing some fifteen million people and causing more than a million deaths through communal massacres, ethnic purges, and gender-specific violence. As the historian Yasmin Khan insists, none of this was foreordained by difference itself: the leap from a sense of communal difference, or a lack of social cohesion, to mass slaughter and rape was a very long one, and what forced it was politics decisions engineered and accelerated within months (Khan). The catastrophe was memorably rendered by the first generation of Partition writers, Khushwant Singh in *Train to Pakistan* and Saadat Hasan Manto in stories such as “Khol Do” (translated by Khalid Hasan as “The Return”), whose idiom was immediate, documentary, and often brutal. Malhotra, an oral historian and the author of two Partition archives, writes from a different position: at two generations’ remove, where the event arrives already mediated by memory, objects, and silence.

In the terrifying setting of Lahore during the Partition era, Malhotra deftly examines the themes of memory and identity, providing a nuanced depiction of how historical tragedy penetrates individual and communal life. By focusing on the growing bond between the central characters, Samir and Firdaus, the novel illustrates how brittle memories become when they are soldered to displacement, bereavement, and political turmoil. Significantly, the novel does not let the violence begin in Lahore. It registers the gathering storm from the east, in the Great Calcutta Killings of August 1946, when “the city on the banks of the river Hooghly was littered with corpses and blanketed with the noxious odour of death” (Malhotra). The geography is exact: the Hooghly is Calcutta’s river, as the Ravi is Lahore’s and the sequence matters: by the time the carnage reaches the banks of the Ravi a year later, the reader, like the subcontinent itself, has already smelled it coming. Note, too, how the sentence works: the corpses are seen, but it is the odour that “blankets” the city. Even atrocity, in Malhotra’s prose, is olfactory.

As the novel opens, the Vij family lives contentedly in Lahore alongside the family of Altaf Khan. On the banks of the Ravi, Vivek gives Samir a bottle of ittar he has prepared with tuberose essence from his atelier and ittar shop; Samir is moved to tears the moment he unscrews the bottle and inhales, feeling the tuberose in his heart as much as in his nose. Across the old city, in a calligraphy studio in the courtyard of the Wazir Khan Mosque, sits nine-year-old Firdaus Khan, daughter of the classically trained calligrapher Altaf Khan. The pairing is deliberate: scent and script, the Vij ittar shop and the Khan calligraphy studio, are the novel’s two artisanal archives breath and hand, Hindu and Muslim and Partition will cut through both.

Until the book approaches Partition, it builds its world with deliberate, patient detail; the description of Partition itself is brief and proceeds swiftly. The impact of British colonial control is barely mentioned, and the political rivalry between the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress is only briefly touched upon; the attention falls on mob violence as it is lived at street level. The asymmetry is itself mimetic: a world assembled over decades and over hundreds of pages is unmade within a few chapters, exactly as Lahore’s composite culture was unmade within a season. Against the mob’s momentum Malhotra sets the voice of denial: “We do not accept Partition! We will not give up Lahore! We will not give up Lahore!” (Malhotra). The slogan’s repetition is the crowd’s incantation against reality and, formally, one more instance of traumatic repetition, the same sentence returning because it cannot be made true.

In *The Book of Everlasting Things*, readers are asked to consider whether fleeing Lahore’s devastated landscape results in genuine existential emancipation. Even after escaping the dangers of Partition, the characters must contend with what they carry; physical freedom

does not close the wounds to memory, identity, and belonging. Samir's own anatomy of the event is the novel's most direct statement of its theme: "Partition was no ordinary wound. It cut deeper, far deeper than all the layers of skin, deeper even than muscle and farther still, to the bone... but Partition the riots, the violence, the exodus remains dark... It is difficult to forget, but it is even harder to keep remembering" (Malhotra). The metaphor is surgical and graded skin, muscle, bone as though trauma could be staged like a burn; and the closing antithesis states, more compactly than any theory, the double bind that Butalia's interviewees lived with for fifty years: forgetting is impossible, remembering unbearable. The novel's answer to that bind remembering by other means, through the nose and the hand is the subject of the sections that follow.

The immediate consequences of Partition forced migration on a scale with few parallels in human history, the ordeals of resettlement and rehabilitation, border disputes and property loss, and a psychological and generational aftermath that includes profound crises of identity frame everything the surviving characters do. As Khan's history documents, the movement of populations across the newly drawn borders was marked by immense suffering: families were torn apart, and communities were uprooted from their ancestral lands (Khan).

The Olfactory Archive: Scent as Memory and Testimony

The device that distinguishes *The Book of Everlasting Things* within Partition fiction is its organising conceit: smell as the medium of memory. The tuberose ittar on the banks of the Ravi is the novel's primal scene a child weeping at a scent he cannot yet name, discovering that he possesses "the nose." The scene is Proustian in structure, an involuntary sensory event releasing an entire affective world; but Malhotra revises the Proustian model in a crucial way. In Proust, the madeleine ambushes a passive rememberer. In Malhotra, smell is also a discipline: Vivek and Samir are perfumers, men who train the nose, name its findings, and fix them in bottles. The novel is explicit about this immediacy: "Fragrance possessed the power to provide instant, pure pleasure. Quicker than even sight or sound, it penetrated Samir's senses, transporting him simultaneously to multiple places with each whiff" (Malhotra). Memory in this novel is therefore both involuntary and curated, both wound and work and it is this doubleness that allows the same sense to serve as the trigger of traumatic return and as the instrument of recovery. The child Samir's question to his uncle "can we recreate something we have smelled before? Or someone, the smell of a person?" (Malhotra) is the question the entire novel labours to answer.

The choice of smell is theoretically astute. Olfaction is the sense least mediated by language the lexicon of smell is famously poor, forever borrowing ("sweet," "sharp," "like tuberose") and it is the sense most directly wired to emotion and involuntary recall. It is, in other words, the bodily channel closest to Caruth's account of trauma: a signal that bypasses ordered narrative and imposes itself unbidden (Caruth 4). When the novel's first sentence wakes Samir's nose before it wakes Samir, and when Calcutta's dead are registered as an odour that blankets a city, Malhotra is routing love and atrocity through the same channel. The olfactory archive is double-edged, like Partition itself.

Behind the conceit stands Malhotra's own scholarly practice. Remnants of a Separation reconstructs Partition through the objects refugees carried across the border, treating each as a material memory in which the catastrophe is stored and from which testimony can be coaxed (Malhotra, *Remnants*). In *The Language of Remembering* extends the method to the second and third generations, asking what the inheritors of Partition remember of events they never saw (Malhotra, *In the Language*). The novel translates this archival method into fictional form: the ittar bottle and the war journal are exactly such remnants, and Samir is their designated reader. What Hirsch would call the testimonial object the thing that carries the past bodily into the present and demands imaginative labour of its inheritor is here elevated from evidence to plot

(Hirsch). Vivek states the poetics outright: “a perfume without memory is a body without soul,” and memories, histories, desires, and fears are to be used “like any other ingredient a prized flower, a rare spice, a fine herb” (Malhotra). Recent criticism has begun to register this centrality: Deepti Prajapati, reading the novel alongside Proust and Barthes, describes fragrance as an “invisible yet ... gripping voice that echoes the legacy of suffering and survival” (Prajapati 249). This essay extends that insight from the register of emotion to that of trauma: the perfume is not merely evocative but testimonial an archive of what cannot be spoken.

Scent, finally, is the novel’s answer to the problem of unspeakability with which this essay began. Vivek cannot say the war “there are no words in any language” but he can compose it; the perfumer’s organ becomes a keyboard on which the inexpressible is scored. When Samir, decades later, smells what his uncle fixed in oil, testimony passes between them without a sentence being spoken. Malhotra has, in effect, devised a formal solution to trauma theory’s oldest paradox: a testimony that does not require words, and therefore cannot be silenced.

Resilience: Craft, Transmission, and Working Through

If the novel’s first movement anatomises wounds, its second dramatises what the title of this essay calls resilience not a temperament but a labour. Herman describes recovery as unfolding in three stages: the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life (Herman 155). The novel’s geography maps onto these stages with striking fidelity. Grasse is safety: for Vivek after 1918 as for Samir after 1947, the town’s distance from the sites of violence is what makes living possible at all. The journals and the perfume organ are remembrance and mourning: Samir reads his uncle’s war day by day, retraces it on foot, and grieves a family and a city through the scents that survive them. And the novel’s final movement marriage, parenthood, the transmission of a craft, and at last the return of an elderly Samir to Lahore is reconnection.

LaCapra’s distinction allows us to locate the turning point with precision. Samir’s early pilgrimage living Vivek’s life stage by stage, as though it were his own has the structure of acting out: the tenses of nephew and uncle implode into one another (LaCapra 21). But perfumery converts repetition into articulation. To compose a perfume is to impose sequence top note, heart, base upon what arrives all at once; it is, in the strictest sense, “an articulatory practice” (LaCapra 21–22). Each accord Samir builds distinguishes then from now: tuberose is Lahore and is no longer Lahore; the past is present in the bottle precisely because it is past. This is working through rendered as craft the survivor able to say that it happened then while existing here and now and it is the vocation that Vivek’s journals, perhaps, were always meant to teach. The novel names this function of the craft directly: “This is what art did, what music did, what perfume did, it elevated human life during crisis. We were the transporters; we took people somewhere else” (Malhotra). Nor does the working-through erase the beloved dead and the beloved left behind: Samir’s most profound creation, the perfume *Khazin-e-Firdaus*, “the keeper of paradise,” preserves in scent the woman lost to the border (Prajapati 251) mourning fixed in a bottle, grief given form rather than repression.

Transmission completes the work. Trauma travels down the generations, but so does craft, and the novel deliberately sets the second inheritance against the first: Vivek taught Samir the nose; Samir, in turn, will teach those who come after him. The exchange with the child Anouk shows what an integrated inheritance sounds like. “You are from Pakistan? We are Pakistani?” she asks, and Samir replies: “No, my darling, I am Indian... Well, I only lived in India, this present India... Actually, in a way, I am from both India and Pakistan, from a time when they were one, an undivided Hindustan. But above all, I am from a city called Lahore” (Malhotra). The answer refuses every simplification the question offers. It is layered,

chronological, and calm; it distinguishes past from present (“this present India,” “a time when they were one”) exactly as LaCapra’s recovered rememberer must; and it ends not in a nation but in a city an identity scaled to lived memory rather than to the border that destroyed it. Where trauma’s speech is repetition (“We will not give up Lahore!”), resilience’s speech is this: patient, plural, and precise.

Malhotra does not offer redemption. Samir’s marriage is short-lived; his silences persist; and the return to Lahore late in life confirms loss as much as it heals it. “It is difficult to forget, but it is even harder to keep remembering” remains true at the novel’s end but by then the emphasis has shifted from the difficulty to the keeping. Resilience, as this novel understands it, is not the closing of the wound; it is the strength, and the technique, to carry it.

Conclusion

Analysing Aanchal Malhotra’s narration in the context of war and Partition trauma, it is evident that the author not only describes the external repulsiveness of historical violence but also delves into the deeper psychological and emotional trauma of soldiers, their families, and the people scattered by Partition. This novel depicts the physical horrors of war and Partition and gives voice to the inner wounds and lasting trauma they leave behind. But this essay has argued for a more specific set of findings. First, trauma in *The Book of Everlasting Things* is somatic before it is narrative: it enters through the senses a nose that wakes before its owner, an odour that blankets a city in exact accordance with Caruth’s claim that the wound is “not available to consciousness” until it returns unbidden (Caruth 4). Second, the novel’s true subject is transmission: structured by Hirsch’s postmemory, it follows an inheritor who “remembers” a war he never lived through by means of journals, photographs, and bottled scent, and who must learn, in LaCapra’s terms, to work through what he first could only act out. Third, and most distinctively, Malhotra locates that working-through in craft: perfumery functions as testimony without words, as mourning with a method, and transmitted across generations as the counter-inheritance that answers trauma’s own. Taken together, these findings identify the novel’s contribution to Partition fiction: after the documentary witness of Singh and Manto, and alongside the oral-historical recovery projects of Butalia and of Malhotra herself, *The Book of Everlasting Things* proposes an olfactory archive a way of keeping faith with the unspeakable that neither falsifies it into order nor abandons it to silence. The echoes of inner conflict do not fade in this novel; they are, instead, composed and in that composition lies its account of resilience.

Note

1. “Jarman”: Vivek’s phonetic rendering of “German” in his journal, preserved by Malhotra to retain the sepoy’s own linguistic register; the reference is to the German trenches of the First World War.

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