

Trauma and Silence: Exploring Hidden Wounds in *Cut Like Wound* by Anita Nair

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Abstract

This article examines the themes of trauma and silence in Anita Nair's *Cut Like Wound*, focusing on the hidden psychological wounds experienced by marginalized individuals. The study explores how emotional suffering is silenced due to fear, shame, and social pressure. Through character analysis and thematic interpretation, the article reveals how trauma functions as an invisible force shaping identity and behaviour. Anita Nair exposes the harsh reality of suppressed pain and emphasizes the need for empathy, voice, and social awareness to confront the hidden.

Keywords: Trauma, Silence, Psychological Violence, Hidden Wounds, Marginalization, Emotional Pain, Anita Nair, Social Injustice, Identity, *Cut Like Wound*.

Introduction

Anita Nair's *Cut Like Wound* is a compelling crime novel that moves beyond the conventions of detective fiction to explore the psychological trauma and silent suffering of marginalized individuals. While the narrative is structured around the investigation of a brutal murder, the novel's deeper focus lies in uncovering the emotional and psychological wounds inflicted by social neglect, discrimination, and systemic violence. Nair uses the crime narrative not merely to solve a mystery but to interrogate the cultural silence that surrounds trauma. In doing so, she exposes how suffering is often hidden, normalized, or ignored because acknowledging it would require society to confront uncomfortable truths.

Trauma as an Invisible Wound

Trauma in *Cut Like Wound* is not always visible or immediately identifiable. It exists in suppressed memories, fractured identities, and unspoken pain. The novel

suggests that trauma “cuts” deeply into the human psyche, leaving scars that resist verbal expression. Silence becomes both a survival strategy and a prison for victims, reflecting the broader social tendency to suppress painful realities rather than address them. Through Inspector Gowda’s morally sensitive investigation, Nair critiques not only individual acts of violence but also the social structures that enable and perpetuate trauma. One of the most significant contributions of *Cut Like Wound* is its portrayal of trauma as an invisible yet enduring wound. Unlike physical injuries, psychological trauma does not always manifest outwardly. Instead, it remains embedded in the mind, shaping emotions, behaviours, and self-perception. Nair’s characters carry the weight of past violence and neglect in silence, often unable to articulate their suffering. This representation aligns with Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory, which emphasizes the difficulty of narrating traumatic experience. Caruth argues that trauma is characterized by its resistance to direct representation, stating that “silence is the language of trauma” (Caruth 4). In *Cut Like Wound*, many characters struggle to express their pain because it exists beyond the limits of conventional language.

Silence as Survival and Entrapment

Silence plays a central role in the novel, functioning both as a coping mechanism and a form of entrapment. Many characters choose silence as a way to protect themselves from further harm. Speaking out could invite social stigma, rejection, or retaliation, especially for individuals already positioned on the margins of society. Silence, therefore, becomes a means of survival. Judith Herman explains that “the ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness” (Herman 1). This repression allows victims to continue functioning in everyday life, even as unresolved trauma persists beneath the surface. In *Cut Like Wound*, characters often suppress their memories and emotions as a way to endure ongoing social and personal hardship. However, silence also perpetuates trauma. The inability to speak or be heard prevents emotional processing and healing. Nair portrays silence as a paradox: while it shields victims from immediate danger, it simultaneously isolates them and reinforces their suffering.

Trauma and Social Structures

Nair situates trauma within a broader framework of social power relations. The novel exposes how structures such as patriarchy, class hierarchy, and institutional authority contribute to the production and maintenance of trauma. Marginalized individuals, particularly those disadvantaged by gender, class, or social status, are

more vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Dominick LaCapra observes that “trauma disrupts the very order of language and memory” (LaCapra 41). When trauma is socially produced and institutionally ignored, victims lose not only safety but also the ability to narrate their experiences coherently. Their stories are erased or distorted, reinforcing their marginalization.

Inspector Gowda as an Ethical Witness

Inspector Gowda, the novel’s protagonist, differs from the traditional detective figure. Rather than approaching the crime with emotional detachment, he exhibits empathy and moral sensitivity toward the individuals affected by violence. His investigation becomes an act of ethical witnessing rather than mere fact-finding. Peter A. Levine argues that “trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness” (Levine 9). Gowda’s attentive listening challenges the culture of silence that sustains trauma and affirms the victims’ humanity.

Fragmented Identities and Traumatic Memory

Trauma in *Cut Like Wound* also manifests through fragmented identities. Characters struggle with a fractured sense of self shaped by abuse, neglect, and social exclusion. Their identities are often defined by what has been done to them rather than by personal agency. Nair’s narrative structure mirrors this psychological fragmentation. The story unfolds gradually, revealing truth in fragments rather than through linear narration. This technique reflects the disjointed nature of traumatic memory, reinforcing the idea that trauma disrupts both narrative and identity.

Conclusion

Anita Nair’s *Cut Like Wound* is a powerful exploration of trauma, silence, and marginalization. By depicting trauma as an invisible yet deeply damaging force, the novel exposes how emotional wounds are ignored in a society that prioritizes silence over truth. Through Inspector Gowda’s empathetic presence and the novel’s engagement with trauma theory, the narrative underscores the importance of acknowledgment and witnessing. As scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, Peter A. Levine, and Dominick LaCapra suggest, trauma persists when it remains unspoken and unseen. Nair’s novel ultimately asserts that healing begins only when silence is challenged and suffering is given a voice.

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