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Voices of the Trail: Trauma, Memory, Identity, and Resilience in Robert J. Conley's *Mountain Windsong*

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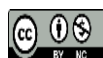
Abstract

Robert J. Conley's *Mountain Windsong: A Novel of the Trail of Tears* gives voice to the marginalized Cherokee people, spotlighting their trauma, resistance, and cultural identity during the forced relocation known as the Trail of Tears. Blending historical fiction with a modern frame narrative, the novel uses oral storytelling through a grandfather passing tales to his grandson to preserve memory, resist dominant historiography, and reinforce indigenous identity. It reclaims the forgotten history of Native Americans by incorporating legends, songs, anecdotes, and historical documents that reflect the Cherokee oral tradition. Set between 1835 and 1838, the novel recounts the brutal displacement of nineteen thousand Cherokees from North Carolina to Indian Territory in Oklahoma, where over four thousand died from hunger, illness, and violence. Among these tragic events, the painful separation of lovers Oconeechee and Waguli highlights the personal cost of this collective trauma. Through fragmentation and narrative layering, Conley deconstructs grand historical narratives and reveals the deep psychological and cultural wounds inflicted by white American policies. This study, using a qualitative, text-based analytical method, examines themes of trauma, memory, resistance, and cultural survival in the face of genocidal violence. Theoretical frameworks include insights from Trauma Studies (Caruth, LaCapra, Kaplan), Genocidalism (Huttenbach, Mosham), Postcolonialism (Said, Bhabha), Subaltern Studies, and narrative theory (Elias, White). *Mountain Windsong* emerges as a powerful literary testimony to Cherokee resilience and a reclamation of silenced history, exploring how collective memory and storytelling sustain identity through generations.

Keywords: Alternative History, Memory, Narration, Resistance, Storytelling, Trail of Tears, Trauma

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Introduction

Mountain Windsong: A Novel of the Trail of Tears by Robert J. Conley published in 1992 is a poignant and real exploration of the Cherokee experience during their forced removal by American government known as the Trail of Tears in the 1830s. As an oral tale told by a grandfather to his grandson, the novel represents the Native American Cherokee history of removal through the perspective of the victims. It also portrays the act of forceful removal as genocidal violence perpetrated by the US government upon the Cherokee tribe. Set against the tragic events of the Cherokee's removal from their original lands in North Carolina to Indian Territory in Oklahoma between 1835 and 1838, the novel is a grotesque and tragic tale of both the Georgian history and American heritage that pushed the Cherokees to the west along a route popularly known as "The Trail of Tears" (Sharma 1). The novel links historical events with a deeply personal love story between Waguli and Oconeechee, blending Cherokee oral traditions with a narrative of Grandfather to grandson that reflects the resilience and suffering of the Cherokee people.

This paper explores three central themes: memory, identity, and resilience. Memory, as preserved through oral storytelling, is not only a means of keeping history alive but also a tool for healing and solidarity. Identity, framed through the Cherokee characters' struggles to maintain their traditions, underscores the tension between assimilation and cultural preservation. Resilience is portrayed in both the endurance of love and the Cherokee people's determination to survive despite the trauma of displacement. Through this analysis, this study aims to shed light on how Conley's narrative bridges history by offering an analysis on the enduring impact of the Trail of Tears on Cherokee identity, collective memory, and resistance.

The story follows two young Cherokee lovers, Walela and Oconeechee, whose lives are torn apart by the U.S. government's policy of Indian removal. As their community is forcibly relocated from their ancestral lands in the Southeast to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma), the couple is separated, and their journey becomes a metaphor for the broader displacement and cultural devastation faced by the Cherokee Nation.

Conley's novel is structured as a story-within-a-story, with an elder Cherokee man recounting the tale to a young boy, weaving together history, myth, and personal memory. This narrative technique emphasizes the importance of storytelling in preserving Cherokee culture and history. The title, *Mountain Windsong*, refers to the haunting and beautiful melodies of the Cherokee people, symbolizing their enduring spirit and connection to their homeland.

Through vivid prose and rich cultural detail, Conley captures the emotional and physical toll of the Trail of Tears while celebrating the strength and resilience of the Cherokee people. The novel serves as both a historical tribute and a timeless love story, offering a deeply human perspective on a tragic chapter in American history. The prime focus of this research is to expose the Conley's attempt to reconstruct the Cherokee history through the memory and storytelling along with cultural and natural life of native American Cherokee tribes.

Objectives

Mountain Windsong is an innovative novel in narrative technique completely eschewing conventional omniscient narrative point of view. Conley voices nearly the entire plot through the participants of The Trail of Tears, who speak their parts individually. This research aims to shed light on the following mentioned issues.

- To analyse the representation of historical trauma in *Mountain Windsong*, particularly in relation to the Cherokee experience of the Trail of Tears.
- To examine how memory functions as a narrative device in the novel, shaping personal and collective identity among Cherokee characters.
- To explore the themes of resilience and cultural survival in *Mountain Windsong*, investigating how Conley portrays Cherokee resistance to historical erasure.

- Attempting to reclaim the narrative and experiences of those often overlooked in mainstream historiography.

Review of Related Literature

Many critics have commented on Robert J. Conley's *Mountain Windsong* since its publication in 1992 focusing on different issues and ideas from different theoretical perspectives. Their writings have significantly contributed to shape the novel with new issues and perspectives. The novel brings the significant historical events and exposes their effect on native American life with songs, legend and historical documents to weave the rich textures that bring to life the suffering of Cherokee people. Conser Jr. and Walter H. pay attention to the tragic events of the Cherokee removal from their traditional lands in North Carolina to Indian territory between 1835 and 1838. They examine how the novel "focuses on the documents which argue the Cherokees perspectives on the 19th century debate over Indian affair" (54). Walter and Conser focus on the natural rights of Cherokee and sense of loss which they experienced. Their study emphasizes on federal government's treaty with native American and its effect on the concept of the democratic integration. They further state:

In *Mountain Windsong* the author has carefully examined government documents, manuscript collections, editorials of contemporary journals and articles and published speeches of leading figures of the day. His analysis of the discussion of race by the expansionists of the late 19th century offers remarkably fresh and original focus to stories that have been told and retold many times by several generations. (55)

The author of *Mountain Windsong* has conducted a thorough investigation using historical records, including government documents, manuscripts, and contemporary publications. His analysis of late 19th-century expansionist discourse on race presents a fresh and original perspective on well-known historical narratives, offering new insights into frequently retold stories.

Hahn Stevens interprets *Mountain Windsong* as an investigation of 19th century Cherokee political thought as expressed in public memorials, petitions, and appeals. He comments:

Cherokee adopted the republican rhetoric of virtue, steeped in nostalgic reverence for the founding fathers. This was especially the case for the great Washington, whom they help up as an example of selflessness in hopes of curbing American materialism. Moreover, the Cherokees lauded their recent civilizing advancements to counter the myth of the disappearing Indian. (188)

Mountain Windsong thus delivers a very accessible and moving account of the Trail of Tears, told by a grandfather sharing ancient culture with his young grandson. It focuses on two individuals caught up in this monumental event shortly after their betrothal.

The novel serves as a critique of settler colonialism, exposing how the Euro-American pursuit of land was rooted in racial and economic exploitation, leading to devastating consequences for indigenous communities. The "inhuman excesses", the brutalities committed during the Cherokee removal, including death, starvation, disease, and destruction of communities. Colonial violence operates not just through physical force but also through legal instruments like treaties, which were often fraudulent and coercive, ensuring the colonizers' control over indigenous lands. This reflects Edward Said's theory of colonial power, where the colonized are denied agency and subjected to systemic oppression. European settlers as bearers of civilization while depicting Native Americans as "savages" in need of displacement or assimilation. This ideological justification mirrors Frantz Fanon's critique of colonialism, where the colonizer imposes a hierarchy of cultures to legitimize oppression. The Cherokees had a developed society with legal, political, and educational structures, which the colonial mindset deliberately ignored.

While commenting on the thematic content of Conley's novel, Beerendra Pandey asserts that:

Conley, however, wants to keep it as much near the factual truth as he can by inserting the historical data. The

interruption mars the narrative flow, but it lends an air of dense specificity and particularity to the fictional truth. The truth that *Mountain Windsong* seeks to unravel is the inhuman excesses committed upon the Cherokees by the so-called civilized Euro-Americans in their ever-burgeoning greed for more and more land” (65).

In this regard, *Mountain Windsong* reveals how colonialism, under the guise of civilization, perpetuated systemic violence, dispossession, and cultural destruction against the Cherokee people. The novel, thus, depicts the history of Trails of Tears both in an imaginative as well as factual manner. Since history is a literary artefact, the mix of history and literature in the novel. It creates an intertext that yields a much more truthful history than documented in textbooks. Tony Hillerman writes that the book “deserves to become an American classic. Conley takes the grim facts out of ‘manifest destiny’ and makes them come alive in the novel, which is beautiful and heart warming as well as tragic” (1). The “ever-burgeoning greed for more and more land” underscores the economic motives behind colonial expansion. The Cherokee lands, rich in resources, became targets for settlers and the U.S. government, leading to forced removals justified by Manifest Destiny—a colonial belief that expansion was both inevitable and divinely sanctioned. This economic and ideological greed resulted in genocide, cultural suppression, and displacement, as seen in the novel as a pathetic and violent event.

Methodology

Since, it is qualitative and interpretative research, it brings theoretical insights from Trauma Theory, especially the ideas of Dominick LaCapra and Cathy Caruth, as well as the concepts of postcolonial discourses/theory such as - othering, stereotyping, hybridity, and representation as propounded by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha will be used for the textual analysis. To attain the objectives, related books, published journals, unpublished reports and library resources will be used.

Trauma theory is an interdisciplinary field of study that explores the psychological, emotional, and cultural effects of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities. It examines how trauma disrupts memory, identity, and representation, particularly in literature, history, psychology, and social studies. Trauma theory emerged from the fields of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, and literary criticism, drawing from thinkers like Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, and Dominick LaCapra. Trauma is often described as an overwhelming event that the mind cannot process at the time of occurrence. Trauma is not fully grasped in the moment but returns in flashbacks, nightmares, and repetitions.

Trauma often resurfaces later in life in unexpected ways. Victims unconsciously repeat aspects of their trauma, either through behaviour or narrative reconstruction. Trauma theory extends beyond individual experiences to collective and cultural trauma. The genocide, the holocaust, slavery, colonial violence, and wars have been central subjects in trauma studies. In regard of Cultural Trauma, Jeffrey C. Alexander views “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectively 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” (1). Historical atrocities like the Holocaust, slavery, colonial oppression, and genocides have led to cultural trauma in the affected communities. Such events are not merely historical but actively shape identity, social behaviours, and even policy decisions for generations. The trauma becomes part of cultural discourse, often influencing literature, art, and political movements.

The critics such as Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman turn from work on the undecidability of interpretation in literature to publish work on holocaust memory and witness in the early 1990s. Cathy Caruth signalled that trauma as the limit of knowledge is a continuation of the Yale project. In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of “sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the after delayed and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (181). When

traumatic experiences take place. The mind and body are found in numbed state. In such situation post-traumatic stress disorder comes.

Traumatic experiences often involve unexpected incidents such as accidents, violence, natural disasters, or extreme loss, which disrupt a person's sense of safety and stability. Trauma does not necessarily manifest immediately; its effects can emerge later, sometimes after a period of apparent normalcy. Trauma often results in symptoms that persist over time, including flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and even hallucinations. Trauma is not just any distressing event but one that significantly impacts a person's emotional, psychological, or physical state, exceeding their ability to cope. These symptoms can be unpredictable, uncontrollable, and repetitive, causing ongoing distress. Dominick LaCapra in *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory and Trauma* talks about two related goals: to intervene in and clarify some of the recent public controversies regarding holocaust representation and to elaborate a theory of historical trauma and its transmission his contribution to the trauma theory and its cultural transmission is extraordinarily lucid and insightful. A traumatic historical event as, LaCapra argues, "tends to be repressed and then to return in forms of compulsive repetition" (574). The traumatic historical events are often repressed by individuals or societies, only to resurface through compulsive repetition. This means that unresolved trauma does not simply disappear; instead, it returns in various forms—such as recurring narratives, cultural expressions, or even repeated historical patterns—until it is properly processed and worked through.

Trauma theory primarily focuses on acting out or working through Trauma has its own issue and it cannot be explained with in its limited territory for it is interconnected "with specific ethical and socio-cultural tension" (Hartman 257). This an awareness of persistence of violence in a culture that no longer condones the material virtues of war. Acting out is a compulsive repetition of traumatic experiences without conscious reflection or resolution. The individual or society re-experiences the trauma in uncontrolled ways, such as flashbacks, reenactments, or cycles of violence. It is a state where the past is relived as if it were still present, preventing healing or closure. This involves confronting and processing the trauma consciously and critically. It allows individuals or societies to differentiate between past and present, leading to understanding, mourning, and transformation. Unlike acting out, working through helps in integrating the traumatic experience into personal or collective memory without being trapped in repetition.

In postcolonial theory, stereotyping and hybridity are central to understanding the dynamics of colonial and postcolonial identities. Stereotyping reflects the power of colonial discourse to construct and control identities, while hybridity represents the resistance, subversion, and transformation of those identities. Together, these concepts highlight the complexity and fluidity of cultural encounters in the aftermath of colonialism, offering insights into the ongoing struggles for identity, representation, and power in postcolonial societies.

Stereotyping refers to the process by which colonial powers constructed fixed, simplistic, and often negative representations of colonized peoples. These stereotypes were used to justify colonial domination by portraying the colonized as inferior, uncivilized, or "other." Hybridity refers to the mixing and blending of cultures, identities, and languages that occur because of colonial encounters. It challenges the rigid binaries and hierarchies imposed by colonialism, emphasizing the fluidity and complexity of postcolonial identities.

In this connection Homi K. Bhabha views:

Racist stereotypical discourse, in its colonial moment, inscribes a form of governmentality that is informed by a productive splitting in its' constitution knowledge and exercise of power. Some of the practices recognize the difference of race, culture and history as elaborated by stereotypical knowledge, racial theories, administrative colonial experience, and on that basis institutionalize a range of political and cultural ideologies that are prejudiced, discriminatory, vestigial, archaic, mythical, and crucially, are recognized as being so. The colonized population is then deemed to be both the cause and effect of the system, imprisoned in the circle of interpretation. (p.118-119)

In post-colonial theory, 'Stereotype' refers to the highly generalized views of the colonizers about the colonized. These views are mostly negative, debasing, humiliating, and based on a racist or prejudiced view of the colonized people. Bhabha asserts the significance of 'fixity', "a concept whose key discursive strategy is the stereotype, where the other is fixed as unchangeable, known, and predictable" (Childs and Williams 125). Homi Bhabha's concept of *fixity* is central to his postcolonial theory, particularly in his analysis of stereotypes. *Fixity* refers to the way colonial discourse constructs the colonized subject as static, unchanging, and inherently different from the colonizer. This rigid representation serves as a means of control, allowing the dominant power to maintain authority by portraying the colonized as a predictable and inferior 'other.' Stereotypes are not just false representations but serve a strategic function in colonial discourse. They fix identities in a way that makes them seem natural and immutable.

The term 'subaltern' refers to the populations that are socially, politically, financially, and geographically outside the hegemonic power structures. Spivak's work, "Can the Subaltern Speak"? heavily influenced by postcolonial theory and Marxist thought critically examines the ways in which these groups are systematically silenced. As Spivak (2006) views: "one clearly available example of ideological epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity" (p.31). Spivak argues that the subaltern cannot speak within the frameworks of Western epistemology and intellectual discourse because their voices are either ignored or co-opted by those in power. The elite intellectuals and colonial powers often speak for the subaltern, thereby silencing their actual voices and perpetuating their marginalization.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses trauma theory as a theoretical modality along with the concept of subaltern studies. It brings theoretical insights from Trauma Theory, the ideas of Dominick LaCapra and Cathy Caruth. The concept of postcolonial discourses/theories -othering, stereotyping, hybridity, and representation especially the concept of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Stuart Hall and Homi K. Bhabha will constitute to buttress the textual analysis. To attain the objectives, related books, published journals, unpublished reports and library resources are immensely used and studied and thematic analysis about the text is carried out. The unheard voices of subaltern Cherokees have been made heard in the official historiography of America through the frame narratives in the novel.

While analysing the text from the margins, this research draws on the ideas and concept of subaltern studies developed by Ranjit Guha, David Ludden, Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak. "The colonial creation of the "I" and the "other," the "colonizer" and the "colonized," the "oppressor" and the "oppressed," the ruler, the native bourgeoisie, the working class or middle class, the lower class and most importantly the "subaltern" became the subjects of postcolonial studies and several scholars" (Farzana, 9). Western people's imposition of their own superiority on the colonial people and colonized people's sufferings gets the attention of post-colonial scholars. The voice of subaltern people, their capability of speaking and their history are important issues in subaltern studies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994) in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak," argues that the subaltern cannot speak because others are "speaking for them" (p.91). According to her to recover the voice of the "subaltern" is quite impossible. She criticizes this matter of trying to be their re-presentative, because it is impossible for people to represent subalterns who are in a privileged position of the society and cannot unlearn their own privilege. Similarly, according to Ranjit Guha subalterns do not have access to written history because the history is written by the privileged rulers. According to Spivak, they have different levels of oppressors, not only the colonizers but also the natives are their oppressors. They belong to the lowest level of the oppressed classes and cannot even speak for their own rights. Spivak suggests that the West should have an "effective" way of "unlearning privilege" to study the "other" and to discuss the the subaltern. She suggests that to represent them, postcolonial scholars should unlearn their privilege and they must "speak to" the subaltern rather than "speaking for them" (p.106). By this she suggests scholars not to try to be the voice of subaltern but to make a conversation with them through unlearning privilege.

Subaltern studies focus on the subaltern people to speak their own history which is ignored by the mainstream history. It gives the voices to voiceless. Subaltern studies began at the end of 1970s, but it formally came into existence in 1982 with the aim of writing the historiography of the people overlooked by the elitists. David Ludden (2003) views: "Subaltern studies became an original site for a new kind of history free of national constraints, a post-nationalist reimagining of the Indian nation on the underside, at the margins, outside nationalism" (p.12). The focus of subaltern studies is on the consciousness of the subaltern classes, their marginalization and subjugation. One of the great Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, analysed the term subaltern in social theory, using it to denote the people in the margin as opposed to those in the centre. Later, subaltern studies group aims to promote a systematic discussion of oppressed groups of society through a new historiography that rewrites history from margin. They describe their project as an attempt to study: "the general attribute of subordination in South Asian Society whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and in any other way" (Guha vii). As Ranjit Guha sees the contrasts politics of the people with elite politics, he privileges the former over the later. Guha (1997) views that "politics of the people "was an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics, nor did its existence depend on the later" (p.4). Obviously, the historiography, fails to acknowledge the contribution made by people on their own.

Representation of Trauma in Robert J. Conley's *Mountain Windsong*

Mountain Windsong: A Novel of the Trail of Tears (1992) narrates the tragic (hi)story of Cherokee (native Americans) removal of 1835 when the whole Cherokee population was forcefully removed from Georgia to Indian Territory in Oklahoma has been memorised as "Trail of Tears" in the history of Cherokee people. The removal included many members of the Cherokee, Muscogee, Seminole, and Choctaw nations among others in the United States, from their native land to Indian Territory. During this historical event the federal government captured, herded, and forced over nineteen thousand Cherokees to travel over eight hundred miles West where over four thousand Cherokees died of hunger, diseases, illness, injured, and killed. However, the event cannot be taken simply as an event of forced political removal, but more than that, an attempt to relocate the 'Self' of a tribal community traumatized by the violence and loss of self and identity. Through the fictional love story between Oconeechee and Waguli, Conley brings the suppressed history of Cherokee people into limelight. A patchwork of fragmentations employed to create an alternative narrative space; the novel dramatizes the unheard/forgotten accounts of the historic Trail of Tears. Narrated in fragments by an old man to his old grandson, Conley's story acts out the traumatic memory of violence perpetrated upon the Cherokee people by the Puritan White American Settlers.

The narrator of the novel is LeRoy, whom his grandfather calls Chooj, or boy. Throughout the book, the grandson tells the reader the story of the Trail of Tears, via listening to his grandfather's tale, a love story between Oconeechee and Waguli, a young Cherokee couple who were separated by the Trail of Tears. Woven into that personal story are historical documents such as treaties and letters that add a greater understanding to the severity of the situation. Within the grandfather's stories, Cherokee songs and poetry are heard and Cherokee beliefs and culture are learned. Also, extremely prevalent in the Indian culture, Conley recreates the bond between elder and youth. Conley uses dialogue to illustrate this cultural relationship. For example, while fishing one day grandfather teaches Chooj about the Cherokee relationship to nature and its creatures:

A piece of fresh chicken meat was tied to the end of Grandpa's line, and he had let it down on the flat rocks just a few feet out into the water. "Now just watch", he said. Grandpa had killed and plucked the chicken for us, and we had taken it, the fishing pole, a long-handed fishnet, and a big plastic bucket with us down to the creek. "Look", I said. A fat, sinister-looking crawdad had crept out from under a flat rock and was making his way toward the meat. "Jisduh", said Grandpa. (21)

Through the grandfather's actions and stories, both Chooj and the reader learn some of the old ways. The intention is to teach the grandson and the reader not only about the mentoring relationship of elder to youth, but also about the Cherokee knowledge and respect for nature. Natives are the only original worshipper of nature. Traumatized

by the forceful removal, the grandfather acts out the traumatic memory while recounting the fact that:

{...} the troops were disposed at various points throughout the Cherokee country, where stockade forts were erected for gathering in and holding the Indians preparatory to removal. From these, squads of troops were sent to search out with rifle and bayonet every small cabin hidden away in the coves or by the sides of mountain streams, to seize and bring in as prisoners all the occupants, however or wherever they might be found. Families in at dinner are startled by the sudden gleam of bayonets in the doorway and rose up to be driven with blows and oaths along the weary miles to trail that led to the stockade. Men were seized in their fields or going along the road. Women were taken from their wheels and children from their play. In many cases, on turning for one last look as they crossed the ridge, they saw their homes in flames, fired by the lawless rabble that followed on the heels of the soldiers to loot and pillage. A woman, on finding the house surrounded went to the door and called up the chickens to be fed for the last time, after which, taking her infant on her back and her two others by the hand, she followed her husband with the soldiers. (81).

This is the grim picture of atrocities that describes the brutal and inhumane forced removal of the Cherokee people from their lands, referring to the Trail of Tears (1838–1839), a tragic event in American history. The author vividly portrays the violence and suffering inflicted on the Cherokee families by the U.S. troops, who systematically searched, captured, and imprisoned them before forcing them into exile. The imagery is powerful and deeply emotional. The sudden intrusion of soldiers into homes during meals, the forceful separation of people from their daily lives, and the destruction of their homes highlight the cruelty of the operation. The phrase "startled by the sudden gleam of bayonets" emphasizes the fear and helplessness of the victims. The mention of looters setting fire to homes suggests both military aggression and lawless opportunism. LaCapra discusses three psychoanalytical topics: the return of the repressed, acting out versus working through; and the dynamics of transference. He clarifies that working thorough is aimed at achieving a closure of the trauma, whereas acting out means that trauma can only be managed through a constant playing out of the traumatic event—a recurrent playing out which relieves the burden of the trauma. In acting out, the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than “represent in memory and inscription and it hauntingly returns as the repressed” (716). With respect to traumatic losses, acting out may well be a necessary condition of working through at least for victims. He argues:

That a basis of desirable practice is to create conditions in which working through, while never fully transcending the force of acting out and the repetition compulsion, may nonetheless counteract or at least mitigate it to generate different possibilities a different force field in thought and life, notable empathic relations of trust not based on quasi-sacrificial processes of victimization and self- victimization. (717)

LaCapra wants to create a position that avoids both redemptive narrative and sublime acting out. He describes a way for work through the trauma. In this process, empathy and trust become crucial, but they should not be built on structures of sacrifice, victimization, or self-victimization. Instead of relationships where one person must suffer or be a victim for another to thrive (a dynamic often found in hierarchical or oppressive systems), this model envisions a more balanced, ethical, and sustainable way of relating to others. Essentially, it advocates for a transformative approach that fosters mutual understanding and growth without reinforcing cycles of harm. By doing so, it opens up new possibilities for thinking and living that are not dictated by past traumas or ingrained behaviours.

This extract underscores the deep sorrow of displacement. The woman feeding her chickens "for the last time" symbolizes the heartbreaking finality of leaving behind everything familiar. Her quiet, resigned act of care before departure contrasts with the violent, chaotic scene, emphasizing the dignity of the victims in the face of cruelty. Overall, excerpt illustrates the devastating impact of forced displacement, the destruction of Cherokee communities, and the emotional toll on individuals and families. It serves as a powerful condemnation of the injustice and suffering endured by the Cherokee people during their removal.

Cherokees' right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness was seized by White American settlers. They were, neither economically strong nor equipped with the power of gun, were always traumatized, and tormented inhumanly. As the grandfather remembers:

They said savages steal and kill people. But they stole from us, and they killed our people. So, I don't really know what they meant by that. But they said that Indians were savage, and they didn't want savage neighbours. But mostly, I think, they just wanted all our land. I think that's why they wanted to kick us out. (10-11)

For financial benefit and power, White Americans imposed inhumane act upon innocent Cherokees. Caruth cites other ideas including fantasies get attached to the traumatic event. "A memory" of such a trauma... enter(s) the great complex of associations, it comes alongside other experiences" (26). trauma is not isolated; it merges with other experiences and perceptions. This means that the suffering of the Cherokees is not just a historical event but continues to influence identity, culture, and even future narratives about justice, oppression, and survival.

Moreover, Caruth's idea that *fantasies get attached to the traumatic event* implies that people—both victims and perpetrators—construct meanings around trauma that may not always align with the factual event. For example, White Americans at the time may have justified their actions through distorted narratives of progress or civilization, while survivors and their descendants may experience the trauma as an enduring presence shaping their identity and resistance. In short, Caruth's interpretation suggests that trauma is not just a past event but an ongoing process of remembering, interpreting, and re-experiencing, influenced by both individual and collective consciousness.

Memories of a traumatic event—such as a massacre—are never purely objective recollections but are shaped by fantasies, other ideas, and subsequent experiences. In the context of a genocidal event, this means that survivors' memories of atrocities are not only direct recollections of violence and suffering but also become entangled with imagined possibilities, fears, hopes, and collective narratives like that of Cherokees. As Susana Onega and Jose Angel Garcia Landa state "a narrative is the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way. A narrative is not a series of events, but the representation of a series of events" (3-5). Being traumatized the grandfather repeatedly narrates many events that took place during the Cherokee removal. In one such events, the grandfather recollects, how the land was captured when early in the morning the Cherokee found White soldiers behind trees and rocks, rifles trained on them, bayonets fixed. They ran back again to the creek in front of their town, and across the creek, there were foot soldiers holding their rifles with fixed bayonets at the ready:

Little children began to cry and run for their mothers. Some began to wail. They had lived long enough with rumours and fear. They knew what this was. One soldier on a horse began shouting something, but his language was strange to most people of Old Town, for they knew only the Cherokee tongue. The soldiers began moving slowly, closing in on the people. The wailing and crying grew in volume. (81-2).

Genocide is a rupture in history, and the traumatic memories of those who experience it do not remain isolated; instead, they enter a vast web of associations. These memories interact with cultural narratives, political discourses, and personal histories, leading to a dynamic process of remembering and reconstructing. For instance, the memory of a specific massacre within a genocide may later be shaped by survivor testimonies, national myths, or even suppressed traumas that resurface in later generations. In this connection Anne Kaplan by citing Cathy Caruth states "trauma as a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or set of events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviours stemming from the event". (34-5) The phrase "other ideas including fantasies" implies that the trauma is not recalled in a pure, factual form but is mediated by emotions, unconscious desires, and social frameworks. Fantasies may include imagined rescue scenarios, alternative histories, or collective myths that help individuals and communities process the enormity of their suffering. Additionally, trauma can be reshaped through the lens of later political movements, cultural retellings, or ideological reinterpretations, reinforcing, or altering how a genocide is remembered and understood over time.

Thus, in the aftermath of the genocidal event, memory becomes part of an evolving historical and psychological process. The recollection of trauma is neither static nor complete; it is always in flux, influenced by individual psychology and collective cultural frameworks.

When the curious grandson wanted to know about Waguli the grandfather tells same kind of situation of the Tsali's family amalgamating the situation of Waguli. The situation of the Tsali's family was also harsh. The troops abruptly entered to the house of Tsali, and asked the whole family to get up and do whatever the troops ordered:

The soldiers came on a whole family. All of them together having a meal. The old man was named Tsali. Tsali and his wife had two grown sons and one young one. Tsali's brother and his wife and kids were there with them, and Tsali's two grown boys, they had families, too. They were all of them vising and having a meal together, and the soldiers came. Well Tsali and his family, none of them could talk any English or even understand any of it, but they sure enough could tell what those soldiers wanted. They didn't want anyone in his family to get hurt. So, the soldiers lined them all up out on the road headed down the mountain. They had to leave their food on the table, and their extra clothes and blankets. They had to leave their belongings behind. The soldiers wouldn't let them take anything. (87)

The horrible scene of the novel *Mountain Windsong* where soldiers arrive at the home of Tsali, Native American Cherokee, an elderly man, and his extended family while they were having a meal. Tsali's family includes his wife, their two grown sons with their own families, a younger son, and Tsali's brother with his family. None of them speak or understand English, but they understand the soldiers' intentions. Fearing for their safety, the family complies with the soldiers' orders. They are forced to leave their food, belongings, and extra clothing behind as they are lined up on the road, heading down the mountain as ordered by soldiers. The soldiers prohibit them from taking anything with them. This scene reflects a moment of displacement and loss under military authority- an extreme violation of human right on Cherokees as Cathy Caruth states "trauma is not experienced as a mere repression or defence, but as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first moment.

The trauma is repeated suffering of the event" (8). Trauma is not simply a psychological defence mechanism or repression of a painful event. Instead, it is characterized by a temporal delay, meaning the full impact of the traumatic experience is not immediately felt. The individual is initially overwhelmed by the shock, but the true suffering emerges later, as the event is relived or re-experienced over time. Trauma, therefore, is not a single moment but an ongoing process of revisiting and enduring the emotional weight of the event, extending its impact beyond the initial occurrence. This aligns with the idea that trauma often involves repetition—whether through memories, flashbacks, or emotional triggers—making it a prolonged and cyclical form of suffering as experienced by the Native American Cherokees whose bitterness of the horrible past can be reduced to the level of meaningful present in the form of traumatized narration.

Conclusion

The present research attempts to study the Robert J. Conley's *The Mountain Windsong: A Novel of the Trail of Tears* from the perspective of Trauma Theory. In the novel, Native American Cherokees are tortured, exploited, and killed in the process of removing them from their original and traditional land in North Carolina to Indian Territory of Oklahoma between 1835 and 1838, by the government of White Americans, brings traumatic memory and great cultural loss in the history of native Americans. The novel, through the traumatized characters attempts to recreate the forgotten history of Native Americans. Conley uses the technique of narration, as a form of memory to crystalize the trauma of Cherokees which is heavily ignored by the mainstream American history. In the discourse of American history, Cherokees have been made overlooked as Stuart Hall states "the subject can become the bearer of the kind of knowledge which discourse produces. It can become the object through which power is relayed" (55). Individuals are not independent agents but are shaped by the discourses they encounter, which are themselves tied to systems of power. The knowledge produced by discourse becomes a tool through which power operates, and individuals, as subjects, both

embody and perpetuate these power dynamics. This perspective challenges the idea of a fully autonomous self, emphasizing instead how subjectivity is constructed within broader social and historical contexts. With the help of legends, oral stories, love songs, historical documents etc. Conley counters the grand narrative of Anglo-Americans, details the most horrible Journey of Trail of Tears of the American native Cherokee tribes.

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