

CHAPTER 14

Exoticizing 1984

Trauma, telling and the anti-Sikh pogrom

Ritika Singh

The past is never dead. It's not even past.

William Faulkner¹

October 31, 1984: The sequence of events remains as vivid as ever.

Khushwant Singh²

Traumatic past as exotic

The exotic and the familiar operate within a spectrum of meaning. The etymology of the word “exotic” from the Greek word *exotikos* traces the exotic as something foreign, originating from the *exo* – the outside. The exotic emerges from beyond the horizons of the familiar therefore is strange and outlandish. To define the exotic then requires a realization of the familiar. The “familiar” from the Latin word *familiaris* is “domestic, private, belonging to a family, of a household:” belonging to the realm of one’s *familia* or family. It is akin to oneself while the mysterious exotic is the other. The dualism between the two functions on an oppositional conceptualization. However, this polar dichotomy negates the symbiotic relationship between the two because of their function and placement within the same spectrum. This paper seeks to understand this relationship within the domain of trauma theory and theoretically locate the familiar and the exotic within the topography of a traumatized mind.

In doing so, the exotic is conceptualized as trauma that is forcefully injected from the *exo* – the outside – and corrupts the familiar. A traumatic experience causes a disruption that results in a catastrophic reaction. A degree of shock and suddenness emerges from the subject’s unpreparedness to face such an experience.

1. William Faulkner, *Requiem for A Nun*, London: Random House, 2013, p. 85.

2. Khushwant Singh, “Oh, That Other Hindu Riot of Passage,” *Outlook India*, November 15, 2004. <https://www.outlookindia.com/magazine/story/oh-that-other-hindu-riot-of-passage/225692>