and roaming around in rooms, ensure an active internal space of mobility. While the cold taps of the college washroom provided her with no respite during her assault, the house felt like something that was embracing her. It acts as a womb for Rachita and serves as both a "repository of my youth, and the custodian of my dreams" (Gokhale 7).

This spatial reorganisation exemplifies Cresswell's claim that "mobility is the dynamic equivalent of place" (*On the Move* 3). When Rachita escapes to the hills, it is not merely a physical change of location. As Iain Chambers points out, it is "shifting constellations of meaning, identities, openings and possibilities" (193). Through all these different constellations of mobility, the colonial past of the house and all the people involved in it are reinterpreted when Rachita enters it as part of her own personal history.

Gender complicates Rachita's relationship with a place as well as her movement. The acid attack strips away her identity as Rachita, leaving her feeling alienated from "my face, the familiar index of my being, has dissolved into absurdity and abstraction" (Gokhale 7). According to Viola Klein, women are "restricted by a century-old history of submissions, which had bred in them a sense of inferiority" (34). Rachita's withdrawal from the world is thus both a defensive strategy and an enforced immobility against the violence she experiences as a woman—violence of the intimate, gender violence and social violence.

The house becomes her personal prison and increases her self-awareness. This stagnation of her life ultimately leads to self-realisation, in which she recognises that she is more than just her appearance or her roles as fiancée, lecturer, and sister. Throughout the day, she reads, reflects, and observes the world around her, describing her state of mind with the banal description of tedium and a feeling of inertia. At the same time, she recognises the ability to cope with her current state of mind through an inner struggle with herself: "if one loses—one's sense of self, there is no remedy but to proceed on a simulated model" (Gokhale 216). Therefore, in the novel, the house becomes a unique space or what Cresswell has termed as a crucible of "meaningful [im]mobility"— a place which is being interrupted; and this leads her to realise the importance of her movement in that place and the purpose behind that movement (*On the Move* 239).

Rachita moves physically in the space of Kumaon but her narrative expands in time. Her experience of trauma disrupts the timeline of her narrative, preventing her from separating her present from her past. The events of her past are in a continuous state of flux with her present. Trauma theorists suggest that it is not the temporal position of an event that makes it traumatic, but rather the structure of the subject's present experience that the event occupies. Caruth describes trauma as an "unclaimed experience" that returns through the media of nightmares, flashbacks and other symptoms long after the event has supposedly receded into the past (10). LaCapra explains "acting out" as the mechanism by which the subject of trauma re-enacts the traumatic event repeatedly but fails to integrate it into conscious experience (41).

Rachita is unable to sleep because of the fear that Anand's sister's face instilled in her. The stillness of the mountains was such that every time she shut her eyes, Anand's words came flooding back. Thus, nights became a dislocated time in which the linear progression of time was disrupted, and she lived in a state of non-linearity. What has changed is the affect or the manner in which the attack impacts her. It is now fear, or guilt, or anger, or hopelessness. The instability of her present, her insomnia, can thus be seen through the lens of trauma's "belatedness", as described by Caruth (17). "Traumatic recall" is belated because what is being recalled is not simply an event, but an event whose meaning has not yet been fully absorbed into experience (117).

The Book of Shadows explores the concept of temporal oscillation. Instead of narrating Rachita's story in a linear fashion from her college days to her relationship with Anand, her assault, her days in the hospital, and her subsequent movement to the hill house, the narrative is non-linear. The non-linear structure of the narrative, which disrupts the linear progression from cause to effect and from wound to cure, shows that Rachita's journey to healing is not linear. Instead of narrating her journey through her traumatic events in a linear fashion, the narrative shows Rachita oscillating through a cycle, and with each iteration of this cycle, she gains more understanding of her role in her story and the choices she has in life.

Thus, temporal mobility is as important to a novel as spatial mobility. In Rachita's journey from the city to the hills, her transformation is multi-layered. It is not just about her journey to the hills; it is also about her ability to negotiate

and manipulate time. Her memories begin to resurface, and she is able to look at them from a different perspective. She is also able to negotiate her self and time, thereby freeing herself from the sole traumatic incident that has dominated her. As she remarks towards the end of the novel, "my selfhood had for a while abandoned the confines of skin and bone, abandoned my cage and run away" (Gokhale 213).

However, the path to recovery from trauma is also full of barriers. Many times, remembering everything leads to being overwhelmed by memories. Rachita walks through her memories trying to deal with them in a way that exemplifies Cresswell's "constellations of mobility", which is not limited to physical space but also extends to time ("Towards a Politics" 26). He explains that every individual's life is driven by the force that creates meaning from their experiences, the rhythm of their memories, and the friction that fills their lives (such as pain, fear, and guilt).

Spectral mobility can be studied through Cresswell's troika of "movement, representations, and practices" ("Politics of Mobility" 18). Here, movement is mental, representations are characters, roles, and scripts the subject 'acts out' in the mind, and practices are reading stories, daydreaming, and avoiding family relations. At the very least, Rachita's imaginatively induced spectral mobility seems to be about fleeing from her present situation. It has multiple effects, and it is the mediatory forms of her fiction that enable Rachita to acquire other personas and consequently to experience or act out different attitudes towards her trauma. Crucially, through her imaginative mobility, some of her self-hatred is shifted to the figures of her fiction.

Rachita stumbles upon the most elaborate instance of spectral mobility in the form of William Cockrell's *Journal of Missionary* that she discovers in the house. Cockrell, who was stationed in the hills far from the valley, believed the local people to be almost subhuman. He narrates his struggles in building the house and how the local people thwarted his efforts by objecting to the site of the house being inauspicious. As Rachita turns the pages of the journal, she is transported to nineteenth-century colonial India and inhabits the space of the male stranger who had lived in the house that had now become her shelter.

This documented journey explores a second constellation of mobility and power. It is brought to life through the imperial travels of Cockrell and his wife, Fanny, who lived an unusual amount of imperial mobility as they travelled from Britain to India and from the plains to the hills to establish themselves in a house on a piece of land that the local Indians thought was evil. In contrast to the imperial elite, the local population had their mobility constrained in a multiplicity of ways: through beliefs and practices, economic needs, and the apparatus of colonial rule. Cockrell's problem was solved by recruiting labourers from Bareilly. The house stands on a terrain of colonial-induced asymmetrical mobilities that "alter[s] space, to participate in its continuing production" (Massey, *For Space* 360).

Rachita's engagement with the journal and the lurking ghost exemplifies the movement that is embodied in the line that connects two points – the line which is "both meaningful and laden with power" (Cresswell, *On the Move* 9). Here, this line connects colonial and postcolonial ways of inhabiting the house and the different kinds of movements attached to them: different kinds of imperial and missionary travels, the forced movements of labour from the villages, and the modern academic's retreat from the world into the house. Imaginative and spectral movements complicate the straightforward idea of Rachita entering the house as an individual searching for personal healing. Her recuperation takes place in a space inhabited by the literal and metaphorical ghosts of historical violence and immense disparities of movement that have accompanied them.

While power is the principle of mobility in *The Book of Shadows*, gender is one of the principles of power that regulates mobility in the real world. The acid attack that disfigured Rachita was not an ordinary case of a woman seeking revenge for her partner insulting her. Rather, it was a gendered attack on the part of Anand's sister, who threw acid on Rachita while claiming that Rachita was involved in immoral sex and her body should be punished with shame. Anand's sister manages to turn her moral outrage to a lasting physical injury on Rachita's body. Her goal was not only to humiliate Rachita but also to deprive her of her future as a beautiful woman. This act of violence had immediate ramifications on her mobility. Suddenly, those five miles between her home and college seemed like a long distance. Fearing ridicule, mockery,

and harassment, Rachita avoided public spaces, evaded colleagues and students, and refused to look at herself in the mirror.

Rachita's gradual re-engagement with the mirror indicates an important shift in her journey. Her sister rings from Bangalore to tell her about a plastic surgeon who might be able to restore her face. Rachita looks into the mirror and is shocked to discover that "the deep disturbances in my self-image, my body ego, the sense of depersonalization that was dogging me, simply vanished" (Gokhale 218). She realises that the changes have not been so dramatic that she no longer recognises herself, that she does not miss her former self, and that she has come to accept her new state as legitimate. It is not simply a refusal of the feminine role but a movement towards visibility on her own terms.

Cresswell notes that every form of mobility experiences friction that both "hinders and enables mobilities" (*Handbook of Mobilities* 113). The main type of friction that Rachita faces is constraint — trauma, shame, and fear. As time passes, this friction is transformed into motive friction. It is the 'snap' that wakes Rachita to her various sources of empowerment. The three major events in the narrative that result in this empowerment are her sister's telephone call, the illness of Lohaniju, and the birth of Lady's puppies.

The three episodes together paint a narrative of Rachita's movement towards recovery through the transition from guilt to an interest in caring for others and to dynamism and sociability in her life. It is a deeply relational form of mobility with others (sister, caretaker, and dog) that facilitates her physical, emotional, and social motility. They form a network of relations that supports her bodily freedom, multiplies her motive forces, reduces the weight and burden of her movement, and opens up new possibilities for action.

From being a detached literary critic, Rachita transforms into an individual appropriating literature to her own needs and from a dummy to a person in her own right. She is fully aware of the importance of not losing herself. Throughout the novel, the protagonist proceeds on a simulated model: she poses as an English lecturer, a distant and unemotional person, and an ascetic living in the hills. Later, she begins to learn the difference between a model and imagination. Rachita realises that one can live in a false world of make believe, or that one

can create for themselves an image of existence or character with which one can identify themselves.

By the time Lohaniju dies and the house is filled with grief, Rachita has changed. She ponders whether she "will return to that other world, the world I have left behind" (Gokhale 231). She worries that if she stays in the house, she will be frozen in time. Her statement, "we must know what to hold on to, what to discard, in this radical flux which is life" illustrates her ability to cope with change (229). She is no longer longing for the complete erasure of her old life, but rather for the selective remembrance of it.

The home in Kumaon that was meant to be her safe permanent home becomes for her a transit point—a place where she has done her work of survival, but which she must leave in order to assert her existence in "time and space and dimension" (Gokhale 213). That she can leave the house that had become her abode implies that she has been able to regain her place in the social flow of life. Her determination to survive knows no bounds, and as the novel reaches its conclusion, Rachita regains her strength and holds hope for a future in which "the garden will bloom again" (229).

Thus, this article shows how a postcolonial novel about trauma and its recovery can be studied through the lens of mobility studies. Various forms of physical, temporal, and spectral mobilities and the frictions between them are exemplified in *The Book of Shadows*. The text explicates the representation of mobility and its relationship with power, gender, and history. It highlights the various forms of mobility that Rachita traverses in her journey from Delhi to the Kumaon hills, from the hospital to the haunted house, and from mirror refusal to self-discovery.

It discusses the physical and social structures that make her withdrawal possible as well as restrictive along the axes of class and gender. Rachita's experience of time is non-linear, constantly oscillating between states of reliving the trauma through flashbacks, auditory hallucinations of traumatic sounds, and compulsive reenactments of the traumatic event until it is rendered manageable. Through her journey in the realm of the imaginary, where her personal memories, colonial texts, and ghostly narratives of the past intersect, this essay explores the multiple histories embedded in individual and personal

experiences. The house in Kumaon emerges as a critical site where these different trajectories intersect. Built on colonial ideas of space, the house becomes the site of a modern woman's struggle for independence.

Friction—trauma, guilt, gender, and the social gaze—is that thickening force that keeps Rachita confined and restricted within the domestic space. Through the three snapping events of her everyday—the call from her sister, Lohaniju's sickness and Lady's puppies—friction is transferred into a mobilising force that takes Rachita out of the home and into the wider world of action and care for others, and a dream of a more imaginative future beyond the drudgery and poverty of their present circumstances.

By the end of *The Book of Shadows*, Rachita is not fully cured, and the various scars on her body and psyche are not erased. Rather, she achieves a certain kind of 'meaningful [im]mobility': the ability to negotiate spaces of flow and stagnation, memory and oblivion, solitude and togetherness in a way that is neither one of rejection or unthinking assimilation. In a world marked by violence and an unequal distribution of mobility and access, Rachita is finally able to negotiate the flows and currents of life on her own terms, having struggled long and hard with the question of whether she ought to exist or not.

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Narrativising Resistance and Resilience: Depicting Kurdish Struggle and Cultural Identity in Haritha Savitri's *Zin*

Santhi U.

Abstract

This article examines the representation of Kurdish identity, resistance, and displacement in *Zin*, the 2023 Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award-winning Malayalam novel by Haritha Savitri, translated into English by Nandakumar K. The narrative centers on Seetha, an Indian woman who travels to war-torn Turkey in search of her Kurdish lover, Dewran, who is framed as a terrorist by the Turkish state. Set against the backdrop of political turmoil, state-sponsored violence, and cultural erasure, the novel offers a poignant exploration of the intersection of personal trauma and collective suffering. Employing postcolonial theory and intersectional feminist frameworks, this article analyzes how *Zin* captures the multidimensional oppression faced by the Kurdish people, particularly at the crossroads of gender, ethnicity, and authoritarianism. Through a polyphonic narrative structure and shifting points of view, the novel depicts the emotional and psychological toll of resistance and exile. Despite occasional structural disjunctions, the novel contributes significantly to the tradition of resistance literature by foregrounding female agency, ethical witness, and transnational empathy. This article situates *Zin* within broader discourses on trauma literature, postcolonial resistance, and global minority representation, ultimately affirming the power of storytelling to reclaim silenced histories, confront geopolitical injustices, and inspire cross-cultural solidarity in an increasingly polarised world.

Keywords: Kurdish Identity; Postcolonial Theory; Trauma Narrative; Cultural Erasure; Transnational solidarity

Introduction

In academic discourses surrounding Kurdish struggles, much of the focus has

traditionally been on the Kurdish question within the framework of national identity, geopolitics, and the ongoing quest for autonomy (Gunter 2008; Natali 2005). This literature has explored the sociopolitical forces shaping Kurdish identity, including the historic marginalisation of Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Scholarly works have examined how Kurdish resistance movements reflect broader themes of resilience and agency in the face of repression, with some analysing the narratives of Kurdish exile communities that have sought to maintain their heritage while advocating for political recognition on the global stage. However, the representation of Kurdish experiences by non-Kurdish authors remains an underexplored dimension, offering fresh perspectives that often speak to global audiences less familiar with Kurdish history and culture. Haritha Savitri's *Zin*, here serves as an important cultural bridge, connecting the realities of Kurdish life to readers across diverse sociopolitical contexts. Through literature, Savitri constructs a compelling narrative that speaks to universal themes of suffering, survival, and the search for identity, thereby fostering empathy and awareness beyond regional boundaries.

The Kurdish people, often referred to as the largest stateless nation in the world, have endured systemic oppression, displacement, and cultural erasure for centuries. Literature, as a medium of resistance, plays a significant role in articulating such struggle for self-determination and cultural survival. A particularly poignant symbol that encapsulates the urgency of the Kurdish struggle is the tragic image of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Kurdish boy whose body was found washed ashore on a beach in Bodrum, Turkey, in 2015. This heartrending image, which went viral worldwide, depicted Aylan lying face-down in the sand, highlighting the desperate journey of many Kurdish families fleeing violence in Syria. His tragic death underscored the harrowing choices facing Kurdish and other displaced families and became emblematic of the broader humanitarian crisis faced by refugees. The photograph galvanised international response, drawing attention to the consequences of prolonged conflict and statelessness affecting Kurdish communities. Aylan Kurdi's death has been referenced not only as a moment of collective grief but also as a symbol of systemic failures that have left millions vulnerable. The media portrayal of this tragedy stirred global conversations about the human cost of conflict and displacement, pushing governments, NGOs, and policymakers to confront the underlying political and social factors contributing to such crises. This image

became a catalyst for renewed calls for international cooperation and humanitarian support, pressing the need to address root causes—such as violence, persecution, and statelessness—that fuel the ongoing Kurdish diaspora.

By incorporating this incident into the broader narrative, Haritha Savitri's *Zin* deepens the discourse on the Kurdish plight.Savitri's narrative is rooted in 'ethical witness,' born from a chance encounter with a Kurdish woman at a demonstration in Barcelona regarding the offensive in Afrin. This real-world spark led Savitri to Diyarbakir, where she stayed in the district of Sur—an area scarred by iron fences and bullet holes. In the novel, this physical landscape is mirrored in Seetha's journey. Refusing to rely on secondary digital data, Savitri draws from her time living with families in remote villages, capturing the 'screams' of a conflict that went largely unnoticed by the global stage.

Originally written in Malayalam and translated into English by Nandakumar K., *Zin* is a poignant narrative of love, loss, and political resistance set against the backdrop of the Kurdish-Turkish conflict. The story follows Seetha, a pregnant Indian woman, who journeys into war-torn Turkey, where "to speak Kurdish is to invite suspicion; to love a Kurd is to become the enemy," in search of her Kurdish lover, Dewran—branded a terrorist by the state (87). Arrested and subjected to harrowing torture, Seetha becomes a symbol of the collateral damage inflicted on innocents in nationalist conflicts. Her transition from a woman seeking a lost lover to a political prisoner subjected to torture mirrors the broader Kurdish experience of being 'othered' within their own geography. Savitri utilises the setting of Sur—with its iron fences, scorched roads, and bullet-riddled walls—not just as a backdrop, but as a living witness to cultural erasure. The novel vividly portrays the Kurdish struggle through multiple narrative voices, highlighting themes of resilience, cultural identity, and global solidarity.

Zin underscores not only the immediacy of the Kurdish struggle but also the enduring resilience of a people caught in the crossfire of geopolitical forces. Through her portrayal, Savitri brings the Kurdish story into a more personal and humanised framework, capturing the complexities and tragedies faced by Kurdish communities while advocating for their recognition and justice on a global scale. *Zin* emerges as a compelling narrative that sheds light on these

issues from a unique, cross-cultural perspective. The novel's literary significance was further recognised when it received the prestigious 2023 Kerala Sahitya Academy Award, highlighting its impact on contemporary Malayalam literature. By situating the Kurdish struggle within a Malayalam literary framework, Haritha Savitri has expanded the boundaries of regional literature, bringing global human rights issues to the forefront of Indian literary consciousness. This accolade has brought wider attention to the novel's thematic depth and narrative innovation, encouraging further scholarly exploration of its portrayal of marginalised communities. In the Foreword to the novel, N. S. Madhavan states that, "This novel takes Malayalam literature- which has never stepped beyond north India or the Gulf Nations at best-directly to Diyarbakir"(vii). As Natali (2005) notes, the global visibility of such narratives is crucial for challenging dominant discourses and advocating for the rights of stateless peoples.

Historical Context of Kurdish Nationalism

The Kurdish national movement has deep historical roots, emerging in response to centuries of oppression, cultural erasure, and political marginalisation faced by the Kurdish people, who inhabit a region spanning Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria.The roots of Kurdish nationalism can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during a time of rising national consciousness among various ethnic groups within the Ottoman Empire.The Kurds initially faced a fragmented political landscape, with many local chieftains and tribal leaders exercising power rather than a cohesive national identity.

The Kurdish people, estimated numbering between 25 and 35 million today, have historically inhabited a mountainous region spanning southeastern Turkey, northern Iraq, western Iran, and parts of Syria and Armenia. Although the Kurds share a common ethnic identity, they were not unified under a single political or cultural banner during the Ottoman era. The empire ruled Kurdish regions with a degree of autonomy, allowing Kurdish chieftains to govern their areas in exchange for loyalty to the Ottoman Sultan. This decentralised structure fostered a fragmented Kurdish identity, where tribal affiliations and local loyalties often took precedence over a unified Kurdish nationalism.

In the late nineteenth century, however, as the Ottoman Empire faced