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Unpacking the Resilience: Explore the Impact of Trauma and Loss in Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green*

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Abstract

The research paper explores the themes of trauma, grief, and resilience portrayed in Sarah Joseph's novel *Gift in Green*. She builds an idealised environment that a businessman wants to develop into an industrial township. It is based on true events on the island of Valanthakaad, located in the backwaters of the Ernakulam District which has an abundance of fish and beautiful mangroves. The people of Aathi practise traditional farming methods and are self-sufficient. The people of Aathi are passionate about their Mother Earth. They don't cause any damage to Aathi's land or scenery. They despise visitors who come to purchase land there. They also dislike those who lease or sell their productive land to get employment and money. They are particularly attached to the land and water of Aathi. They have also voiced opposition to the concept of building a bridge. The novel emphasises how the mechanical forces of power and money take advantage of everything pure, natural, and abundant in life. The novel *Gift in Green* offers a diverse array of human experiences and coping strategies, set in a community confronting both personal hardships and environmental destruction. The goal of the research paper is to provide a comprehensive study of how people and communities deal with the complexity of trauma and loss and how they come out as resilient.

Keywords: *Trauma, Resilience, Environment, Water life, Psychology*

Introduction

People are unaware of the fact that nature is watching everything and will exact punishment on those who harm it. They are oblivious to the generosity of nature, which has provided them with everything but they continuously harm nature because of their human greed. The money minded people do anything for the sake of money. Literature is a tool to create awareness among the people. Sarah Joseph is one of the well-known Indian-English Writers. Her novel *Gift in Green* is the first regional novel to be translated into English by Valson Thampu. It is an intensive narrative that combines environmental conservation, community resilience and personal transformation. It is set against the backdrop of a community grappling with ecological degradation, the novel offers a poignant exploration of trauma and loss and the remarkable resilience that emerges in response.

The process of development caused by globalisation and industrialisation creates a danger to the inhabitants and their land. After colonisation, India had several development

projects. Rather, these alleged "developmental" initiatives have uprooted the powerless and defenceless peasants, confiscated their homesteads, and altered their way of life by converting them from farmers to labourers.

I would say that if the village perishes, India will perish too. India will be no more India. Her mission in the world will get lost. The revival of the village is possible only when it is no longer exploited. Industrialization on a mass scale will necessarily lead to passive or active exploitation of the village as the problems of competition and marketing come in (M.K. Gandhi)

The above statement proves the necessity of a village in a developed country. But the village and its natural resources are exploited in the name of civilisation, globalisation, modernisation and industrialisation. Sarah Joseph pictured the exploitation of natural resources by greedy businessmen and how it affected the inhabitants on both physical and psychological levels. The pain, loss and love of their land create power and they fight against the exploitation of the natural resources. In this context, resilience refers to flourishing in the face of hardship rather than just surviving. The ability to adapt to difficult or demanding situations in life is known as resilience. It is characterized in particular by the ability to think, feel, and act with flexibility as well as the ability to overcome obstacles on the inside as well as the outside (APA Dictionary of Psychology). It includes the community's collaborative efforts to rebuild their surroundings, the social circle that provides support and helps people deal with loss, and the personal development that results from conquering obstacles. The research paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the impact of trauma and loss in *The Gift in Green* and to uncover the multifaceted nature of resilience.

Objectives

- To analyze the impact of trauma and loss on individual characters and the community in *The Gift in Green*.
- To investigate the resiliency mechanisms portrayed in the novel *The Gift in Green*.
- To contrast psychological ideas of trauma and resiliency with actual incidents and these creative representations.

Methodology

The research paper uses a multifaceted methodology that reviews all of the research that has been done on trauma, loss, and resiliency. It examines research on community resilience, intergenerational trauma, environmental trauma and psychological theory, comparative analysis, and other methods to offer a thorough comprehension of the novel *Gift in Green*'s themes of trauma, loss, and resilience. This research methodology aims to provide a holistic analysis of trauma and resilience in *Gift in Green* offering valuable insights that bridge literary analysis with psychological and environmental studies.

Research Gap

Most studies could look into the literary techniques the writer uses to depict trauma and loss. There might be a research gap nevertheless, if psychological theories of trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or bereavement studies, are combined with this literary

approach. A more complete comprehension of the effects of trauma and loss on characters and readers equally can arise from analyzing how Sarah Joseph's story adheres to or deviates from psychiatric frameworks. There may be a research gap on the long-term impacts on characters' resilience, even though trauma and loss are major themes in the novel, *Gift in Green*. The present research paper could delve into how characters in the novel navigate their journeys towards healing and resilience over time, offering insights into the narrative's overarching themes of survival and recovery.

Literary Review

The Gift in Green has been a topic of previous reviews that have emphasised its focus on environmental conservation and the interaction between humans and nature. Academics have studied the novel's depiction of the effects of environmental deterioration on the ecosystem and the community that depends upon it. Sarah Joseph has received recognition for his realistic portrayal of grassroots environmental action and his emphasis on the connection between ecological and human health in his portrayal of the community's fight against environmental concerns. Literary critics have explored the novel's treatment of trauma and loss, particularly how these experiences are interwoven with environmental issues. The community's grief over the state of their native land is a major motif, expressing larger worries about ecological devastation and how it affects human cultures. Analyses have also focused on the theme of community resilience. The novel's portrayal of collective action and solidarity in the face of environmental and personal challenges has been examined as a key aspect of its narrative. An area of particular attention has been the impact that cultural practices, traditions, and social support networks play in building resilience; these behaviours demonstrate how community ties are reinforced during difficult times.

Theoretical background

The term "ecological grief" describes the mourning that people and communities go through when they lose something environmental (Cunsolo and Ellis 2018). It includes emotions like helplessness, rage, and melancholy in reaction to the deterioration of the environment. The novel's portrayal of the community's sadness is consistent with this notion, emphasising the psychological cost of ecological devastation (Ojala, M & Et. al, 2021). Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—offer a framework for comprehending characters' emotional reactions to losses that are both environmental and personal (Corr CA, 2020). According to post-traumatic growth theory, people might go through good psychological changes after going through terrible experiences (Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. 1995). The characters in *Gift in Green* exhibit post-traumatic growth through their transformations and strengthened resolve to protect their environment. The ability of a community to endure difficult circumstances and bounce back from them is the subject of the phrase "community resilience". *Gift in Green* depiction of collective action, adaptive practices, and cultural resilience illustrates the principles of community resilience.

Discussion

Sarah Joseph's *Gift in Green* portrays the suffering and anxiety caused by severing the relationship between humanity and the environment while also giving hope for redemption through the restoration of a comprehensive and integrative attitude and effort. She uses water as the primary metaphor to predict the calamity that awaits humanity if man does not cease his atrocities against the natural world and the environment. She accomplishes this by defining specific modern issues that are trans-local and global. The problems relate to development, urbanisation, tourism, deforestation, uprooting, trash disposal, contaminated water, pollution of the environment, etc. which the reader finds particularly upsetting when he encounters these problems in his daily life and surroundings and which seem to be the direct and personal troubles of the residents of the picturesque village known as Aathi.

The novel *Gift in Green* is set in the village of Aathi, which acts as a counter space against numerous types of material, cultural, and political invasions and exploitations. In *Gift in Green*, Sarah Josephs gives an account of Aathi culture:

For generations, the people of Aathi had deemed that land to be Thampuran. No one had ever dared to take advantage of it in any way... other than birds, squirrels, snakes, garden lizards, chameleons and crickets familiar denizens of the forest as well as amphibious creatures like turtles and frogs, no one had ever aid claim to it(GIG 04)

The idyllic village of Aathi nurtures and protects all living things. It has successfully resisted the onslaught of urbanisation, commercialisation, and modernisation until Kumaran, a former Aathi inhabitant, returns there.

Kumaran returned to Aathi after thirty-five years and it was the end of the natural world. He became a prosperous and well-known business magnate as a result of his exposure to modernity in the city. He planned to transform Aathi into a cutting-edge village with access to the newest facilities and technology. Kumaran made some of the young people believe he had better career prospects and a more sophisticated lifestyle to facilitate the simple execution of his objectives. The village will eventually split into two extreme groups: those who embrace modernity and those who reject it. In the interim, Kunjimathu supported the movement against Kumaran, very subtly. It was easier for Aathi to "develop" because of Kumaran's strong influence. Bridges and highways started to suffocate aquatic life. Fish that were destroying their embryos were caught using scientific methods. In addition to chemicals leaking into the paddy fields that had fed generations for hundreds of years, birds and butterflies started to leave the fading mangrove forests. Once famed for pure white water, Aathi's water was now tainted with disease and pollution.

Environmental Trauma and Loss in *Gift in Green*

The destruction of the community's natural environment serves as the novel's primary representation of environmental trauma. Witnessing the devastation of their nation causes the protagonists great distress. Their physical surroundings, cultural heritage, and mental health are all impacted by this complex trauma. Kumaran is the best example of the corporate mind people. Kumaran pushes him from the village due to his selfishness. To live a lavish lifestyle and make

money, he moves from his home country to a metropolis. He intends to destroy the community for his selfish gain and sell its natural beauty when he returns. He says that he wants to provide a comfortable life for his hamlet and its residents, but in reality, he casts them into a life of misery. Following the army of Kumaran into the village,

The army marched, ploughing the river bed and crushing the empire of oysters. As the baby oysters began to rise and float on the water, the women began to beat their breasts and wail. 'What are you doing, you buffalo? It is our food you're running. While collecting oysters, they used to pick out the little ones gingerly and let them out of their nets(GIG 40).

There is a magician along with Kumaran's army. He performs some magical tricks and makes the people laugh. After watching his magical performances, the children, women, young people and elderly people are dumbstruck because the bank, the ferry boats, the water, the paddy fields, the canal, the pond, the wells, the palm groves and the mangroves are vanished by doing some magical tricks. And a new world has appeared in which huge houses, broad roads, hotels, cinema halls, and parks. The people of Aathi are surprised to see these magical scenes. Kumaran desires to change his native place to a huge city. The unavoidable phenomenon of social and economic progress is urbanisation.

The magician shows a golden temple instead of Thampuram and tells them that it is the dream of Kumaran. The people of Aathi are shocked to hear the words of Kumaran. Because the shrine of Thampuram is the most traditional place. It is created by the elder women of Aathi. Thampuram's shrine is said to have been built by the women of Aathi. They kneaded clay using their feet, formed it into balls, baked them, and used them to construct the walls. They trowelled the walls with stones after plastering them with a mixture of finely powdered earth and paddy husk. The walls were made in earth tones. Still, the Thampuram's shrine is maintained and guarded by women. Kunjimathu and her friends are going to light the lamp in the shrine of Thampuram every day. They are unable to agree to build a new Thampuram. The policemen are taking their positions, guarding the lantana bush beside Thampuram's Shrine. The whole area of Thampuram's shrine is marked and tied with rope on all four sides. The people of Aathi do not understand what is going on there and why they come here. The two groups are fighting each other and the policemen start to shoot. The people are frightened of the sound and Baaji, who is the friend of Siddhu, knows the consequences. Baaji tells him that they come to fire the land. When Kumaran's ceremonial boat arrives crackers are burned out. In the woods, shrubs, and paddy fields, birds in a condition of peaceful meditation rush up to the sky because they are scared. The sky darkened. Aathi's long-held quiet is broken. With the shrinking of birds and the flapping of wings, the air became tight. It causes a commotion in the waves.

The priest is at the centre of the group. The group of women are showering flowers in their path. Ponmani and his companion get angry and collect all the weapons like iron bars, crowbars, hatchets, spades, axes and thick wooden rafters. They are ready to fight with them. Dinakaran tries to control them but they board the boat. They are surrounded by the policemen and show their respect to the lathis. They escape from the policemen by falling into the water.

Dinakaran, Ponmani and other people of the land hear the sound coming from the shrine of Thampuran and they go to the place and see that Kunjamathu cracks the shrine. Kunjimathu is very angry and says that there is no battle here. If their deity is there she will come and solve their problems.

Don't fight and kill each other in the name of Thampuram, Dinakara. If darkness is our deity, where and how will you build a shrine for what fills the universe and has no beginning or end? (GIG 119)

She requests the god Thampuran with a broken heart, suddenly seeing an empty future barren of water. She sees the village's whole wealth being destroyed one by one in that vision.

Paddy fields, parched. Trees, dry and withered. The Earth cracked. Wells are dried up. Cattle tormented by thirst. Birds perishing. Children howling in hunger. Desert storms raging with a vengeance. The burning sand it brought along, covered the land. Red-hot rocks. Thorny bushes. Scorching heat. Cold (GIG 196).

A severe typhoid epidemic in Aathi is caused by pollution, which also emerges as a major theme, underscoring the significant effects of industrialisation on both the environment and traditional ways of life. Kumaran and his team started to execute their idea and so trucks, JCBs, drillers and tipper lorries carrying stones, bricks, sand, cement and steel came to the place. The earth mover digs the land and there is a heavy slug coming out. It has formed for a lot of generations. Shailaja is emotionally connected to the destruction of the environment. She becomes upset upon discovering that medical waste is contaminating the water.

Laden with the stench, the wind was heavy. Besides placentas and murdered fetuses, Shailaja saw emerging from innumerable cracks and crevices, served limbs, swabs oozing with pus, blood clots, decomposed phlegm, chemical agents, plastic bottles and bags and garbage. A terrible thirst afflicted Shailaja. Her throat was dry, her lips parched. She sweated profusely (GIG 75).

When she discovers the contaminated water, she loses all hope. The best local example of a polluted village is Chakkam Kandan. People's casual errors and how they treat the environment become crucial factors. People who fail at it will suffer.

The usage of endosulfan in border areas like Kasargod and Palakkad has led all fish and waterfowl to float on water, and Sarah Joseph illustrates this truth in her sketch of modern Kerala. Despite the state environmental control board's pronouncement of a ban on endosulfan, corporate landowners continue to buy it from border states. Genotoxicity, neurotoxicity, and carcinogenicity are all associated with endosulfan. Endosulfan is currently listed as a persistent organic pollutant by the Stockholm Convention, an international agreement to safeguard human health and the environment against such chemical compounds. The people of Aathi are disappointed to hear the words and it is the first time in Aathi that endosulfan was used for this purpose. If they use endosulfan in water and land, the birds and fish are not able to survive. If they eat the fish from it, it will be poisonous to them. They are not able to catch the fish in the carnival of Kaappu-kalakku. The prawn farms and five acres of Pokkali paddy lay poisoned to death. The activities of Poisoning the land are not the sole responsibility of Komban Joy and

every activity is dictated by Kumaran. Kumaran gave the amount to Komban and took a lease of Kunjimathu's Pokkali paddy rice field and two acres of Mangrove forest. Kunjimathu tells him that the making of farms has come to them from our elders over the ages. Now they farm with spraying pesticides, mixing quicklime, spreading various potions and power is not acceptable. Their elders have followed to form it naturally. The little prawns lived in the roots of mangrove trees and the process of growth was naturally done; they did not use any specific fertilizer for growth in prawns.

' Go into the mangrove forest and see the little prawns. It's among the roots of mangrove trees that the prawns spawn(GIG 177)

The blissful moment of Aathi is changed after the arrival of the greedy businessman Kumaran. Kunjimathu and her companions are still waiting for the high tide on the full moon day. Kunjimathu tells her companions that she can hear the sound of water. Her companions continued to listen for the coming of water. They say that the water came and filled their knees, waists, breasts and shoulders. In those days, when the water filled above the shoulder, the three companies were standing together and steady in their embrace. So three women were standing for the arrival of the high tide when the water filled their waists and it looked like a chain of silver. Kunjimathu gets angry that the level of water does not rise even on the full moon day. Then Kunjimathu walks very fast. Her companions do not know where Kunjimathu is going. Without any knowledge, they follow in the footsteps of Kunjimathu. When Kunjimathu crosses the paddy field and reaches the property of Ganesha Subramanian, she stops and cries a lot and she runs to the end of the property. She sees Kumaran's granite embankment. The water is not able to find a way forward and thrashing with its very soul, flailing, roiling, running here and there. When she sees this, she is paralysed. She fell on the ground and cried loudly "Oh, my Thampuran " and she does not use it for living hereafter. The Paddy fields are parched, trees are dry and the earth is cracked. She does not know the way to save her land. Enlarging all the wetlands, removing mangroves, and contaminating prawn farms, unsustainable development initiatives and the meddling of individuals like Kumaran upset the natural equilibrium.

Kumaran shows his philanthropy to the corporation officials. He brought the waste of the city and sank into the water. He did many things to exploit the land. Kunjikali and her son Unnimon get off the boat and are ready to go to the city. After a long time of travel, they come to the main road. Kunjikali does not view this type of long narrow road. There is a lot of fear in Kunjikali. Prakashan accompanies them to go to the flat. Kunjikali feels sick due to the long trip. Prakashan comforts her till they reach the place. When they reach the flat which is situated on the twentieth floor. Kunjikali wonders about the sky-level building. There is a man who invites them and helps to reach their flat. They use a 'lift' to go to the stairs. Kunjikali never heard the word 'lift' and how it functions. It is the first time Unnimon has stepped into the lift. They reach the flat which is given by Kumaran. In that place, no one is there, even cows do not arrive in that place. The man explains that this living room, kitchen, bedroom and balcony give him a key to him. Kunjikali does not have the practice of locking and unlocking the door. It is new to her. Unnimon is the first time to see his full figure in the living room mirror and feel proud.

This is your living room. This is the office room. This is the bedroom. Here, the store room. This, the kitchen and this, the work area, the creepy fellow muttered mechanically.

You get water from here. Look here... like this. He opened the tap.

At the flick of a finger, you will get a breeze from this. He switched on the fan.

And light? The same way. Here, this is the switch. He turned on the lights. It's that simple. Wind switch. Light, switch! Good, no? (GIG 322).

After settling all the arrangements, Prakashan and the other men flee away from the flat. They are sleeping in their room and Unnimon has the vision that his skull is broken into thousands of pieces. Meanwhile, the tent is burnt, and no one loses their life but Unnimon and his mother are the reason for this incident. It is one of the finest examples of the cunning plan of Kumaran to capture the land. Kumaran consoles the western part of the Aathi that the documents are kept in the tent and it is burnt. So all documents are burnt, but he tells them that they do not get any confusion or fear about the burnt documents. It will be given within a month and they all have a place in the flat which is invested one crore to build it. Already flats are allocated to everybody who is selling their land to him. The flat is built for the city and the western part of the people will stay and go to work which is offered by Kumaran. The western part of Aathi believes the words of Kumaran and he is a good man so he never cheats on us. Kunjimathu teases them that Unnimon is the first one who leaves Aathi, believing the words of Kumaran but he is in prison for suspecting the case. Thus, Aathi comes to represent the resourceful, beautiful, natural environments of the third and fourth worlds devastated by corporate power systems and global tycoons. Sarah Joseph demonstrates how the forces of patriarchy and capitalist political power collaborate in all exploitation-related contexts in the novel, *Gift in Green*.

Community Resilience

The community of *Gift in Green* demonstrates resilience through their unwavering spirit and collective acts, despite the tremendous impact of environmental trauma. The rehabilitation will be accelerated by Aathi, where the air is light, the water is pure, and the breeze is pure. Gitanjali recounts a moral tale to the Aathi people. The rules and customs of Aathi are unique. There are many customs, traditions, and rituals in a land. There are two main objectives in the narrative of the novel. On the one side, there is the depiction of the life and hardships of the Aathi people, which is earthy and unique to the setting. The story revolves around Aathi's deterioration, demise, and phoenix-like rebirth. The story-telling nights' recurring ritual appears to halt the plot's unstoppable advancement. A variety of narratives are told. However, they are all very reflective of the destiny and state of the Aathi people. A minority division made up of Dinakaran, Ponmani, Markose, Shailaja, and Kunjimathu vehemently opposes destructive tendencies. Porinchu Chakramakkal and Grace Chaly, the advocate, provide this marginalized community with great assistance. A girl, who appears frequently in the book, comes to Aathi and removes all of the trash and plastics that have been left on the property.

Sarah Joseph paints a heartbreaking picture of the Pokkali landscape that has been poisoned. The mother of Aathi worries about their children because they do not sleep the whole

night due to hunger. How would they go to school? On previous days, the children filled their stomachs and went to school. Now they suffered a lot. Siddhu, Baaji and other children of Aathi were going to school, they watched Kumaran's lorries come to the path of the mangrove forest. Baaji ran to Ponmani and Siddhu ran to Dinakaran and told about the arrival of Kumaran's lorries. But this time, the lorries were not only filled with garbage but also filled with viruses, bacteria and microbes. They invited the children to offer many diseases. The children ran to their house, unaware of these viruses, bacteria and microbes, the mother opened the door and saw their children. Their eyes were red and looked very tired, their mother thought that they were suffering from hunger. So they gave them some hot Oysters to eat. After some children felt down and lifeless. Nineteen children died and her mother cried a lot. Oh, my Thampuran, what had happened to our children? There have been Nineteen child deaths from cholera. Only then are people willing to reflect on and acknowledge their shortcomings. The people of Aathi have been divided into two groups. One group is young men who have a leader, Prakashan and on the other hand, some fathers are Markose, Ponmani and Dinakaran. However, a few female characters, including Shailaja, Kunjootan, and Ponmani, are against building the bridge. The driver of the truck shouts to them to go away from the place. But they do not move a single bit. The skirmish between these two groups. They argue with each other. Dinakaran says that they are not showing their strength. They must save Aathi. Prakashan angrily says that people like Ponmani will not allow any good to come to Aathi. Meanwhile, the policeman arrives at that place and they begin to give a path to the vehicle but these men do not move an inch. It shows how they can be attached to their land. When the policeman starts to beat the men, she and her people carry a can of kerosene oil in their heads. She tries to stop it but she can not, she says if anyone beats the man she will be burnt.

She emptied the can of kerosene on her head. Holding aloft a matchbox, she said
"If you touch one person more, I will...(GIG 218).

Their bloodshed puts an end to the struggle. It shows how they have affection for their land. The resiliency strategies portrayed in *The Gift in Green* are based on actual cases of communities dealing with environmental trauma. Like this, many indigenous civilisations around the world show resilience because of their close ties to the earth, collaborative nature, and flexible ways of doing things. A well-known example of environmental activism with a foundation in cultural and social resilience is the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline. The way that cultural heritage and community activity support resilience is exemplified by New Orleans' post-Katrina rehabilitation. Global environmental movements, like the effort to stop the destruction of the Amazon's forests, show the strength of group effort and cultural adaptability in the face of environmental dangers. Through a comparison of these fictional representations with actual cases, we can better comprehend how communities can overcome environmental trauma and emerge resilient. The research paper emphasises the value of cultural identity, solidarity, and adaptable techniques in building resilience against environmental obstacles.

Gift in Green investigates how groups of people come together to recover from trauma and loss. The characters in the novel find comfort and strength in one another's company and

their shared experiences. A group of women come to the ferry bank and get ready to work in the Pokkali field. It is the season for farming paddy rice. The women of Aathi are talking to other women and decide that they are going to plant the paddy rice. Kunjimathu, Devaki, Karthiayani and other women are ready to join and work in the paddy field. Kunjimathu brings clay filled with her boat. The field is filled with clay in one layer and grass in the next layer; another layer is clay. They work a lot and try to read the field to spread over the seed. The seed sprouts and the smell of birds comes to the field. When one bird came and other birds followed it. Then the land is filled with birds and paddy rice and they can restore the Aathi.

Conclusion

Gift in Green portrays the deep effects of both environmental and emotional losses on a community and its members, providing a moving examination of pain and perseverance. The characters in the novel *Gift in Green* show how people may overcome adversity and come out stronger through their cooperative efforts, flexible behaviours, and cultural resilience. The research paper provides a comprehensive understanding of these themes, bridging literary analysis with psychological and environmental studies. It creates the awareness of the reader, the importance of nature and we have to save them. All the creatures are interconnected with one another. Nature provides all the necessities to live for a human being but man has a supreme role to take rule over it. If he continues to exploit nature then nature will take an act of revenge on them. To avoid it, all are joined together and fight against the exploitation of nature because it is our responsibility to save Mother Earth.

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