



Scars That Shine: Trauma, Migration and Power of Female Hope in *Girls Burn Brighter* of Shobha Rao

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Abstract

This paper analyzes how the factors of trauma, migration, and human trafficking influence the lives of women in Shobha Rao's Girls Burn Brighter. The shared experiences of the characters Poornima and Savitha illustrate how patriarchal values, the caste system, and poverty combine to confine women to areas where their bodies become controlled by factors of exploitation. This research paper holds important value as such suffering pervades the lives of women all across the world today. The paper elucidates how the effects of trauma have the ability to transform the identities of such characters while hope sustains them in these zones of exploitation. Based on text analysis, it could be asserted that instances such as "Every moment in a woman's life was a deal, a deal for her body" (Rao 193) reveal the extent of gender-trauma inflicted upon these characters; however, these also reveal how women have become conscious of it. The wounds of these characters reveal not only pain but also zones of hope, hope that sustains them.

Keywords: trauma; migration; human trafficking; hope; resilience

Scarring is the experience of pain, but it is also the experience of survival. In the life of many women, trauma, migration, and exploitation leave a scar. The scar does not simply recall the experience of suffering. It testifies to the strength that emerges in the context of fear, loss, and displacement. The hope of women in the context of violence and lack exhibits the strength of women more easily noticed than the scar.

The significance of "scars shine" is well expressed by how pain and dignity, self-esteem, and resistance are intertwined. Trauma, migration, and

human trafficking remain a reality for women living in struggle to find safety, belonging, and freedom. In the words of Muhammad Hasan Imam, "Women and children are often trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation and sex industry" (Hasan Imam 248). It indicates how violence-generated realities impact the lives of women. The rupturing of identity and the need for exceptional emotional stamina are simultaneously required.

Shobha Rao is an Indian-American novelist whose works have recently gained prominence for the manner in which she portrays the struggles and



resilience of women who exist on the fringes of society. Her fiction deals with very tough issues like gender-based violence, poverty, and displacement with emotional truthful realism while focusing considerably on the resilience of women. *Girls Burn Brighter* is significant for its very candid treatment of human trafficking and its strong suggestion of hope threshed out from the depths of pain. The novel revolves around two girls and the relationship that becomes their lifeline.

Poornima and Savitha are the pivot around whom the whole book revolves. Poornima faces life with a background of poverty and emotional repression, while Savitha brings warmth, grit, and hope into her life. Though they hail from a background of hardship and violence, it is this very friendship that ends up being a source of comfort and solace for the two women when they undergo the trauma of abuse, migration, and trafficking. When the two women's lives traumatically go apart due to the aforementioned experiences, one thing they carry with them is the remembrance of the other in terms of the strength they derive from the emotional bonding they shared. This is the exact meaning of the title of the book: "pain converted into strength."

In Shobha Rao's *Girls Burn Brighter*, such patterns are also portrayed through the two protagonists, Poornima and Savitha, whose bonding in the novel acts as the only solace in the existence of a world where freedom seems to be restricted for them. In the novel, the fear that the girls have been following them since childhood is portrayed through the words of Savitha herself, where she says, "We girls. Afraid of the wrong things at the wrong times... afraid because you are a girl, and because you are ash" (Rao 283). This depicts how the society makes women learn to exist in fear and danger themselves. As the girls are exposed to exploitation and migration, the hope lies inside them as well, and the scars are not just the trademarks of what the girls have been through but also of what they have been surviving through, as portrayed in the title "**Scars That Shine**."

The debate surrounding *Girls Burn Brighter* largely dwells on the issues of violence experienced

by the characters. The analysis will bridge this gap by investigating trauma from the perspective of both destruction and transformation. The research goals include analyzing Poornima and Savitha's traumatic tale, understanding the ways through which unsafe migration is associated with their struggles, and demonstrating that the characters' bond can act as an anchor for their bravery. The other sections of the analysis cover the turning points, losses, and instances when hope revives for both characters.

As the stories progress, key incidents emerge that shape the intertwined themes of trauma and the strength of these women. The betrayal by Savitha and her exploitation define incidents of tragic loss, whereas the suffering of Poornima within her married life defines incidents of irrevocable suffering. These incidents alienate them to the point of migrating to unsafe zones, which demonstrates how social factors shape the life of women. However, hope persists through their union. While Savitha survives through the memory of Poornima, Poornima also keeps finding hope through her friend despite undesirable incidents.

Scholars of trauma, such as Judith Herman, point out the ways violence disrupts identity and memory in shaping a survivor's emotional life. Migration and trafficking studies detail how poverty and gendered inequality push women into dangerous journeys. Most critical readings of *Girls Burn Brighter* focus on its depictions of brutality and victimhood. This paper expands on those various studies but adds another layer to show how hope, friendship, and resilience function alongside trauma. By so doing, it shows that this novel is not only about suffering but also survival and the power of human connection.

Psychological trauma places survivors between silence and the desire to be heard. As Judith Herman writes, "Psychological trauma places survivors between silence and the desire to be heard" (Herman 1). This tension reflects Poornima and Savitha's journey. While fear and abuse do silent them, they still keep in themselves this urge to reclaim their story. Savitha's painful acknowledgement, "Every moment in a woman's life was a deal, a deal for her



body...," shows how trauma steals agency yet also sparks awareness. Their scars become more than wounds; they are testimonies of the lives which they refuse to relinquish. In this way, the novel shows that even when trauma pushes women into silence, their inner strength keeps speaking.

This paper draws on the feminist trauma approach, which explains how suffering and survival create an identity for Poornima and Savitha. She analyzes scenes of emotional shift, scenes of forced migration, trafficking scenes, and the narrative points where visibility of hope emerges while exploring how trauma influences identity and how migration enhances vulnerability and resilience created from the pain. Main indications are given to trace the traumatic experiences of the characters, their migration routes, studying how the narrative portrays exploitation, and showing how hope functions as a tool for survival and emotional endurance.

In this paper, textual analysis and a focus on the close reading of scenes are done. Trauma, migration, exploitation, and resilience are some of the aspects of the scenes that are analyzed by the scholar in an attempt to comprehend the way in which pain turns to strength. Some of the scenes identified in this analysis include the moment in which Savitha reflects on gender violence in addition to the moment in which Poornima decides to look for her friend. The paper uses the novel as its major source of information in addition to some book reviews and academic journals that form broader sources of information. Specially because of the aspect of trauma, language in the analysis of violence is considered.

The reading proceeds through the key events in the lives of Poornima and Savitha to establish how trauma intensifies and resilience develops. This paper will first consider their early life trauma, influenced by poverty, their caste, and patriarchy, from instances that illustrate how Poornima ponders on the constraints in her life. Their migration sequences illustrate how each migration further conscripts them into exploitation. The forced separation of Savitha

and the life-threatening beating of Poornima, for instance, illustrate how vulnerability trails each migrant woman. The paper then proceeds to consider their exposure to human trafficking, analyzing how it impacts their minds and body, respectively. Lastly, their friendships and hopes are explored as their tools for survival, especially when Poornima fantasizes about reuniting while Savitha holds on to memories, respectively.

Every point is addressed using short quotes, explained, and related back to their relation to "Scars That Shine" as their scars are a representation of their strength.

In conclusion, *Girls Burn Brighter* illustrates the struggle women make for life despite the world they live in trying to suppress and demolish it. Poornima and Savitha live in a world of violence, loss, and abuse. However, they don't allow this experience to consume their identities. This painful experience of theirs compels them to strive for a safe place for themselves and for each other. The experience they undergo while migrating and getting trafficked exposes the deep failure of society for women like them. However, it is not a hopeless experience either. Instead, the experience better indicates the power of hope in the most hopeless situations. The marks they bear on their bodies and minds make them strong. They don't indicate defeat; they indicate the power of love and the power of hope. This upholds the key point of this paper: the women don't let the world reduce them; they shine since they don't stop hoping or fighting.

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