

Trauma as Reflected in Imtiaz Ali's 'Highway'

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RUKHSANA

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St. Paul's College
Kalamassery

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Declaration

I do hereby declare that the project “Trauma as Reflected in Imtiaz Ali’s ‘Highway’ ” is the record of genuine research work done by me under the guidance of Prof. Lima Sunny, Assistant Professor, Department of English, St Paul’s College, Kalamassery.

Rukhsana

Certificate

This is to certify that the project work “Trauma as Reflected in Imtiaz Ali’s ‘Highway’ ”is the record of the original work carried out by Rukhsana under the supervision and guidance of Prof. Lima Sunny Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Paul’s College, Kalamassery.

**Dr. Saliya Rex
Head of the Department
Department of English
St. Paul's College Kalamassery**

**Prof. Lima Sunny
Instructor in-charge
Department of English
St. Paul's College Kalamassery**

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Introduction

Cinema has always played powerful role in creating a sense of identity. You relate to the person next to you at the cinema, who laughs at the same moment as you. You might strike up a conversation with a stranger on the bus about the latest blockbuster.

People in the whole world watch cinema as one of the many types of entertainment. Films are the most recent way of telling stories. It is arguably the most effective instrument that mass media have. Films are considered to be an important art form.

Cinemas are an integral part of our lives as we tend to relate with the characters we watch, some of them relates our good qualities and some of them bad. Films about the importance of identities have evolved over the years in terms of mounting the film and the most bizarre way of narrating the stories.

Cinema and Literature are two distinct but equally extraordinary works of art. Where literature was a popular form of expression during the 18th and 19th century, film has taken its place by the 20th century onwards. Though both these arts have certain connections and differences, both have a similarity of taking its readers/audience to a different world.

Movies affect many of us powerfully because the combined impact of images, music, dialogue, lighting, sound and special effects can elicit deep feelings and help us

reflect on our lives. They can help us to better understand our own lives, the lives of those around us and even how our society and culture operate. Society is reflected in movies and in turn movies influence society by changes in representations, challenging audience's morals and transforming viewers' opinions. This amplifies the power of film whether it influences a personal or mass response.

Literature has always been a great inspiration for cinema all over the world. In India, especially, epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana have been created and recreated on the silver screen several times.

The history of Indian Cinema goes back to the nineteenth century. In 1896, the very first films shot by the Lumiere Brothers were shown in Mumbai (then Bombay). But history was actually created when Harishchandra Sakharam Bhatavdekar popularly known as Save Dada, the still photographer, was so much influenced by the Lumiere Brothers' production that he ordered a camera from England. His first film was shot at the Hanging Gardens in Mumbai, known as 'The Wrestlers'. It was a simple recording of a wrestling match which was screened in 1899 and is considered as the first motion picture in the Indian Film Industry. Numerous new production companies emerged in the early 1920s. Films based on mythological and historical facts and episodes from Mahabharata and Ramayana dominated the 20s. The first Indian sound film, Ardeshir Irani's Alam Ara (1931), was commercially successful.

Imtiaz Ali (born 16 June 1971 in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand) is an Indian film director, producer and writer. He started his career with writing and directing television

shows. He directed shows like Imtehaan, Naina and Kurukshetra. In 2005 he made his directorial debut with Socha Na Tha, which didn't do that well. Then he earned critical and commercial success for his direction of Jab We Met (2007). Love Aaj Kal (2009) and Rockstar (2011) made him a noted filmmaker. However, it was his second film Jab We Met (2007) that brought him success and fame. His 2009 film Love Aaj Kal gained much critical success, and was declared a super hit at the box office. His movie Rockstar (2011) was also a commercial and critical success. Imtiaz Ali had his origins in Jamshedpur, Jharkhand. He was brought up in Patna and Jamshedpur. He had his early education in Patna- D.B.M.S. English school, Jamshedpur, and later attended University of Delhi in Delhi, where he took part in college theatre. He started Ibtida the dramatic society of Hindu College. Thereafter he moved to Mumbai and did a diploma course from Xavier Institute of Communication. Ali founded his film production company, Window Seat Films; whose first release was Highway. Starring Randeep Hooda and Alia Bhatt, the film was well appreciated by critics.

In an interview with The Telegraph, director Imtiaz Ali stated, "Highway has been a story that has stayed with me for 15 years. There was something in it that didn't die. Usually you lose interest in a story beyond a certain point. But with Highway, there was something very subtle, yet something very influential".

Imtiaz Ali is an enviably brilliant storyteller. Through his trademark idealistic lens, he has managed to make a handful of movies that have left their mark on audiences spread across the globe.

Highway is a 2014 Indian road drama film written and directed by Imtiaz Ali and produced by Sajid Nadiadwala. The film stars Alia Bhatt and Randeep Hooda.

Screened in the Panorama section of the 2014 Berlin International Film Festival, the film released worldwide on 21 February 2014. The film is based on the episode of the same name from the Zee TV anthology series *Rishtey*, starring Aditya Srivastava and Kartika Rane, which was also written and directed by Imtiaz Ali. It tells the story of a girl (Alia Bhatt) who, for reasons later revealed, discovers freedom after being kidnapped. Upon release the film met with positive reviews, with Alia Bhatt and Randeep Hooda's performances praised by both audiences and critics alike.

Alia Bhatt is only 20-years-old but she has given the performance of a lifetime in *Highway*, her second film. There are several scenes where she performs like a pro. Her monologues about talking too much, her run in the desert, her narration of her turmoil, her transformation and not to forget the climax where she quite literally steals the show.

Alia Bhatt (born 15 March 1993) is an actress and singer of Indian origin and British citizenship, who works in Hindi films. The highest-paid actress in India, as of 2019, her accolades include three Filmfare Awards. She has appeared in *Forbes India's* Celebrity 100 list since 2014 and was featured by *Forbes Asia* in their 30 Under 30 list of 2017. Bhatt won the Filmfare Critics Award for Best Actress for playing a kidnapping victim in the road drama *Highway* (2014), and two Best Actress awards at the ceremony for playing a Bihari migrant in the crime drama *Uda Punjab* (2016) and a spy in the thriller *Raazi* (2018). The latter emerged as one of Hindi cinema's biggest-earning

female-led films, and her highest-grossing release came with the musical drama Gully Boy (2019).

This film has been the biggest break for Randeep Hooda as well. This is a film where his talent will not only be seen but appreciated and this is something he deserves. The way he crumbles in the scene when Alia cooks for him is phenomenal. His hesitation and eagerness, his firmness and shyness are a work of absolute brilliance.

Randeep Hooda (born 20 August 1976) is an Indian actor and equestrian. Best known for his work in the Hindi film industry, he is the recipient of accolades such as two Stardust Awards and a nomination each for the Filmfare and the International Indian Film Academy Awards. He won Lions Gold Awards(2010) in the category Favourite Actor in a Supporting Role for the film Once Upon a Time in Mumbai, and Stardust Awards(2014) in the category Best Actor for Highway movie.

There's nothing better than a movie that discusses a true event that happened in a person's life, detailing the way they overcame the odds that were stacked against them and rose to the challenges before them. Movies like 'The Blind Side' and 'Antwone Fisher' capture the true stories of child abuse victims and their fight to overcome the pain and trauma that was left behind due to their home lives.

Some movies which deals with child sexual abuse are Highway(2014), Kahaani 2, The Perks of Being a Wallflower (2012), Mansoon Wedding(2001), I Am(2010), An American Crime (2007),Page 3(2005), Capturing the Friedmans (2003), Antwone Fisher

(2002), Radio Flyer (1992), Radio Flyer (1992), Mommie Dearest(1981), Gunday(2014), Mardaani (2014), Bajrangi Bhaaijaan (2015), Water (2007).

'Komal' which is a short film about child abuse, which has won several awards, including the National Film Award. The film aimed to create awareness among children and their parents about recognizing abuse and fighting it. More than a film, it is an educational video which should be shown to every child and parent to make them understand the very real danger of sexual abuse on children. The movie was worthy to be included in this list as it the first of its kind in India that has gained so much recognition and appreciation.

The voices of the children, especially girls, have been stifled by our way of life. Most of them internalize their anger and grief and suffer silently for the rest of their lives. The perpetrators often walk away unpunished. How cruel is that? This film at least brings to bear the suppressed conditions of childhood abuse at home, a topic conveniently avoided by most filmmakers. Alia Bhatt, all of 20 years old, owns Veera Tripathi's character. It is hard to believe that this is only her second film. Randeep Hooda shines in Mahabir Bhati's role.

Ali uses travel like artistry, a narrative form to unfold the adventures of its two leading protagonists learning and unlearning a few precious lessons about the capricious course life follows when tackled head-on.

How do adults traumatized as children describe childhood trauma, effects of the trauma, and their ability to move the trauma to normalized adult behaviour?.

In this project I make an attempt to analyse film 'Highway' on the basis of trauma theory :childhood trauma faced by characters Veera and Mahabir. It is a dream like film, complete with achingly beautiful Himalayan landscapes and vast, unpopulated, dusty expanses. At the centre is a pair of utterly unlikely soul mates—a spunky, rosy-cheeked girl of wealth from South Delhi and her captor, a Haryanvi rogue extortionist. What is this utopia? What are they running from? Torment that they have nursed from childhood. Finally, life has opened up, and the promise of happy-ever-after in the upper Himalayas is in sight. It is a sort of meta-love that cynicism and intellect alienate. This is spectacular fluff. But what really rankles about Highway is the central message—and the message is loud and clear—that for a young girl, the escape from abuse and trauma in her ivory tower is through another kind of captivity which she begins to love because at least the captor is honest. It's a disturbing message.

Their journey is the theme of this movie. Alia Bhatt and Randeep Hooda deliver power packed performances with a great supporting cast. The movie forces us to think about the society we live in and how people struggle to lead a normal life. Be it a rich family or a poor villager.

This project is mainly divided into four chapters. First chapter of the main section will examine trauma from the perspective of its origin and childhood trauma. Characteristics of traumatic events and their powerful impact upon the individual will be addressed. A closer look will be taken at the influence of social oppression in reference to traumatic experiences. Second chapter analyses the film Highway in the light of trauma theory. The last chapter gives the overview of the work.

CHAPTER 1

Trauma Theory

At the beginning of every trauma, according to Sigmund Freud, stands an event which confronts the psyche with an unbearable amount of information in a short period of time. The psyche is incapable of processing this amount of new information in such a short period and in a common manner, which results in an energetic imbalance within the person (Freud 1999: XVIII 284). What kind of event confronts somebody with an insurmountable amount of information depends on the individual sensitivity of the person (Freud & Breuer 2004: 9). Thus what makes a traumatic event different from any other event is the incapability of the psyche to consciously process the current situation according to common schemes. This notion of the traumatic event concentrating on a neurological explanation for the disruption within the human psyche points at Freud's medical background. Freud who exercised as a doctor was especially interested in the mental disease of hysteria. Based on his observations and documentations of hysteric patients, Freud claimed that the aetiology of neurosis was one or more sexual traumas during childhood. This theory known as the seduction theory was later abandoned by Freud who concluded that it made no difference whether it was a real event or an infantile fantasy which served as the origin of the trauma (Freud 1999: V 152 ff). Caruth gets to the point when stating that a traumatic event "takes place too soon, too suddenly, too unexpectedly, to be fully grasped by consciousness" (Caruth 1996: 101).

Trauma studies first developed in the 1990s and relied on Freudian theory to develop a model of trauma that imagines an extreme experience which challenges the

limits of language and even ruptures meaning altogether. This model of trauma indicates that suffering is unrepresentable. Quickly following the traditional model was a more pluralistic model of trauma that suggests the assumed unspeakability of trauma is one among many responses to an extreme event rather than its defining feature. The idea that a traumatic experience challenges the limits of language, fragments the psyche, and even ruptures meaning altogether set the initial parameters of the field and continues to impact the critical conversation even while alternative approaches displace this notion.

Freud's theories on traumatic experience and memory define the psychological concepts that guide the field. Psychoanalytic theories regarding the origins and effects of trauma arose in the nineteenth-century study of shock and hysteria by researchers who, in addition to Freud, include Joseph Breuer, Pierre Janet, Jean-Martin Charcot, Hermann Oppenheim, Abram Kardiner, and Morton Prince. Freud's early theories in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) written with Joseph Breuer, and especially his adapted theories later in his career in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), dominate trauma's conceptual employment by literary trauma critics today.

In Freud's early work he argues that traumatic hysteria develops from a repressed, earlier experience of sexual assault. Freud and Breuer emphasize in *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) that the original event was not traumatic in itself but only in its remembrance. Because the original event continues to inflict harm, the talking cure or abreaction is required to understand the effects of the past and gain freedom from its symptom-causing grasp. Importantly, the traumatic event is understood only after a latency period of deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*) that delays the effects and meaning

of the past (Breuer and Freud 1955: 192). It is only after a contemporary event calls forth the previously repressed event that the past event can become known in the process of remembering. Freud and Breuer write:

We may reverse the dictum “*cessante causa cessat effectus*” (when the cause ceases the effect ceases) and conclude from these observations that the determining process (that is, the recollection of it) continues to operate for years—not indirectly, through a chain of intermediate causal links, but as a directly releasing cause—just as psychological pain that is remembered in waking consciousness still provokes a lachrymal secretion long after the event. Hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences. (1955: 7)

The process of remembering inflicts the psychological pain but also ascribes value to a previously repressed experience in the unconscious. Trauma is thus defined in relation to the process of remembering and as an event harboured within the unconscious that causes a splitting of the ego or dissociation. The authors, citing Janet’s work on dissociation, write: “the splitting of consciousness which is so striking in the well-known classical cases under the form of ‘double conscience’ is present to a rudimentary degree in every hysteria, and that a tendency to such dissociation, and with it the emergence of abnormal states of consciousness is the basic phenomenon of this neurosis” (1955: 9). The fundamental “phenomenon of hysteria” involves dissociation which the authors argue is a defence mechanism that arises from repression; another mode of defence is amnesia (1955: 248, 793). The notion that trauma causes dissociation or a gap in the psyche is taken up by Freud throughout his career. The concept of the latency period between the event and its pathological effects, along with the idea that trauma fragments

the psyche, can cause dissociation, and continuously wreaks havoc or infects it, are principles that Freud adjusts later in his career but still influence the contemporary definition of trauma for literary critics.

Freud's later work on war neurosis and the problem of traumatic repetition in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) extends and adapts his earlier theories on the defence mechanisms of the ego as well as the origin and effects of trauma upon the psyche. Traumatic events create conflicts in the ego which "split off" from the unity of the ego and are repressed but return later often in dreams (Freud 1920: 8). The conflicts caused by trauma create traumatic neurosis, which is "a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli". The mind as an organism, according to Freud, contains outer and inner layers, with the outer layer having a "protective shield" against harmful external stimuli. However, when "fright" occurs, that is "the state a person gets into when he has run into danger without being prepared for it," the lack of anxiety coupled with the external stimuli cause neurosis. Anxiety acts as a protection mechanism against traumatic neurosis but unexpected fright carries no defence. The external stimuli rupture the barrier and enter the inner psyche without the adequate internal defence. He writes: "We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli" (1920: 33). Trauma is imagined as both an external agent that shocks the unprepared system and an internal action of defence against overstimulation.

Judith Herman puts forward a modified explanation for the uniqueness of a traumatic experience. Her argumentation displays a more psychological approach and assigns the traumatic event the power to overwhelm the ordinary human adaption of life (Suleiman 2008: 276). Furthermore she asserts that, “Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach attachments of family, friendship, love and community. They shatter the construction of self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim’s faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.”

CHAPTER 2

Understanding Child Trauma: Child Abuse

To understand what trauma does we have to understand what it is. Lenore Terr, a child psychiatrist who did the first longitudinal study of traumatized children writes, “Psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind” (p.8) . Van der Kolk makes a similar point about the complicated nature of trauma when he says, “Traumatization occurs when both internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with external threat” (p.393). Both clinicians make the point that it is not the trauma itself that does the damage. It is how the individual’s mind and body reacts in its own unique way to the traumatic experience in combination with the unique response of the individual’s social group.

Child abuse is defined as the non-accidental injury, sexual abuse, emotional abuse or trauma inflicted on a minor by a parent or other caregiver. Child neglect is defined as “when a caregiver fails to provide those basic human needs that are necessary for a child/youth to grow into a healthy adult.”¹ It can be as “Actual abuse” or “Probable abuse” depending on presentation. “At risk” indicates a child in danger of abuse or neglect or both, that is recognized by others or by the family itself. It includes maltreatment of a child less than 18 years of age by a person responsible for the child's welfare encompassing a broad spectrum of abuse and neglect scenarios that

can be classified in seven subtypes: physical or sexual abuse, physical neglect, lack of supervision, emotional and / or educational maltreatment and moral-legal maltreatment.

Children who suffer from child traumatic stress are those who have been exposed to one or more traumas over the course of their lives and develop reactions that persist and affect their daily lives after the events have ended. When a child feels intensely threatened by an event he or she is involved in or witnesses, we call that event a trauma. There is a range of traumatic events or trauma types to which children and adolescents can be exposed.

Bullying is a deliberate and unsolicited action that occurs with the intent of inflicting social, emotional, physical, and/or psychological harm to someone who often is perceived as being less powerful.

Complex trauma describes both children's exposure to multiple traumatic events—often of an invasive, interpersonal nature—and the wide-ranging, long-term effects of this exposure. These events are severe and pervasive, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually occur early in life and can disrupt many aspects of the child's development and the formation of a sense of self. Since these events often occur with a caregiver, they interfere with the child's ability to form a secure attachment. Many aspects of a child's healthy physical and mental development rely on this primary source of safety and stability.

Early childhood trauma generally refers to the traumatic experiences that occur to children aged 0-6. A growing body of research has established that young children may be affected by events that threaten their safety or the safety of their parents/caregivers, and their symptoms have been well documented. These traumas can be the result of intentional violence—such as child physical or sexual abuse, or domestic violence—or the result of natural disaster, accidents, or war. Young children also may experience traumatic stress in response to painful medical procedures or the sudden loss of a parent/caregiver.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), also referred to as domestic violence, occurs when an individual purposely causes harm or threatens the risk of harm to any past or current partner or spouse.

Paediatric medical traumatic stress refers to a set of psychological and physiological responses of children and their families to pain, injury, serious illness, medical procedures, and invasive or frightening treatment experiences. Medical trauma may occur as a response to a single or multiple medical events.

Physical abuse is one of the most common forms of child maltreatment. Legal definitions vary from state to state, but broadly, physical abuse occurs when a parent or caregiver commits an act that results in physical injury to a child or adolescent, such as red marks, cuts, welts, bruises, muscle sprains, or broken bones, even if the injury was unintentional.

Many refugees, especially children, have experienced trauma related to war or persecution that may affect their mental and physical health long after the events have occurred. These traumatic events may occur while the refugees are in their country of origin, during displacement from their country of origin, or in the resettlement process.

Child sexual abuse is any interaction between a child and an adult (or another child) in which the child is used for the sexual stimulation of the perpetrator or an observer. Sexual abuse can include both touching and non-touching behaviours. Non-touching behaviours can include voyeurism (trying to look at a child's naked body), exhibitionism, or exposing the child to pornography. Children of all ages, races, ethnicities, and economic backgrounds may experience sexual abuse. Child sexual abuse affects both girls and boys in all kinds of neighbourhoods and communities.

CHAPTER 3

Breaking the Silence

The film leads to a moving denouement where the female protagonist confronts her abuser. It scores in showing how trauma operates in subtle, long-lasting ways, and how emotional support can provide strength to survivors and help them confront both, their abusers and their trauma. It also explores how such abuse cuts across class boundaries – the kidnapper comes from an entirely different social strata than the hostage, and his experience of abuse is informed by destitution and violence, while the hostage is unable to come to terms with how a seemingly reliable and respectable family figure abused her, and how she never found support from her family.

The film revolves around Bhatt's character, Veera Tripathi, daughter of a business tycoon, who is taken hostage by Mahabir Bhati – played by Hooda – on the night before her wedding, while her fiancé watches the scene unfold, paralyzed with fear. The narrative follows Veera and Mahabir's collective journeys, touching upon numerous important themes in the process.

Veera's plight, evident as she bemoans her fate, gagged roughly at the back of Mahabir's truck, is goosebump-inducing. A particularly powerful scene cements the film's depth. Veera tries to escape in the dark of the night, only to be caught by Mahabir. He tells her to run, which she does. However, as the camera follows a distraught Veera finally making a run for her freedom, the audience is thrown into the same pit of

hopelessness as Veera herself. She is in the middle of nowhere – lost, directionless, and absolutely alone. In what can only be called cruel irony, Veera is forced to run back to her captors – her only hope and safe haven at that point in time.

The film then shows Mahabir's henchmen softening up to Veera. Out in the open, away from societal pressures, Veera begins thinking out loud. We see glimpses of the Veera that has always wished to remain on the surface – unabashedly quirky, outspoken, and at ease.

One of the themes that Ali puts forward through his narrative is that of Stockholm Syndrome – a condition where a hostage forms strong emotional ties with the captor. Time and again, as Veera opens up, she tries to unravel the stoic, bitter and angry Mahabir. Her fear of him fades and she confronts him, trying to break down his walls, overlooking all instances of harshness shown by him towards her.

Mahabir remains a mystery, till a particularly heartbreaking scene takes place. As Veera hums a lullaby to herself, Mahabir is thrown into a black hole of terrifying flashbacks. He is reminded of his childhood – where his father would physically abuse him. Moreover, he is reminded of his mother being dropped off to work as a sex slave, only to return in the morning.

As the film progresses, Mahabir and Veera's journeys continue. The backdrop of the film is inundated by Veera's family attempting to track her down. At one point, the truck – with Veera bound in the back – is stopped by the police for a quick search. To everyone's surprise, Veera hides from the police. Though the captors and Veera don't

realize it then, the audience sees why she does what she does. It is in this captivity that she finds herself freer than before.

One of the most important scenes in Highway is the one where the themes of sexual abuse and child abuse are highlighted through Veera's narration of the events that transpired in her childhood.

As she dines with Mahabir, she discusses how her uncle would rape her 9-year-old self. Bhatt shows incredible skill at this point, making the narration all too believable. The way she describes her past in great detail, unable to hold back her tears, is inarguably heart-wrenching. Moreover, she highlights how her own mother silences her. "Shhh, kisi ko mat batana," (dont tell anyone) Veera says, with a distant look of pain and betrayal on her face.

While he's having dinner, she begins to tell her horrible story, and he stops eating and looks at her. The so called uncle who comes to her home often with imported chocolates for her and makes her sit on his lap, then sexually assault her. She explains the pain and trauma she went through. Her screams were never heard as he shut her mouth with his hands. When she finally confronts the matter with her mother, she silences her saying not to tell anyone. The unimaginable moment which are faced by almost every girl inside home, around loved ones and also fails to break the silence.

As the story of a woman whose past trauma is exorcised by a traumatic experience in the present. Bhatt is spectacular in the scene where she reveals what this trauma is – it's as if all those suppressed screams which she talks about have congealed

into this creature that's burrowing its way out through her throat. Ali doesn't lead up to this moment. We're thrust into it. There's no explanation, no why – Veera's decision to speak up, here, is like her decision to hide at the checkpoint. When asked, then, why she didn't make a run for it, she whispers to herself, "What's wrong with me? What's going on?" This confession is part of what's going on. For the first time, she's free to speak about the past, without being shushed, without the topic being changed by her mother.

In that moment, we are a part of that conversation Veera has with her mother. We feel the rage bubbling inside ourselves at the silencing of a 9-year-old. We are made to feel Veera's pain. Through this highly necessary and remarkably impactful scene. Ali gives a face to sexual assault and child abuse. It is no longer just a story we hear.

On the other hand Ranbir too has a horrible story from his past, one that involves people like her, rich people, but after hearing her story, the anger he's been holding on to abates a little. He sees that at least this rich person is like him. The love between Veera and Mahabir is also the love between two scarred people (Hooda literally carries a scar, which slices through an eyebrow) who finally luck into someone like them.

Here on out, Mahabir and Veera's relationship takes a turn. He softens up to her – to the point where he eventually sets her free. However, she returns to him. She's found a life away from the suffocation of societal pressures, away from being silenced, to the point of repression. They travel together, eventually finding her dream home in the mountains. Together, they believe they've escaped their haunting pasts.

More interestingly, the love here is also that of a mother for her son, of a father for his daughter. Veera baby-talks to Mahabir, the way a mother would respond to her son's cuteness. She strokes his head when he sleeps, and she sings him a lullaby, making up itty-bitty staccato words to fit the tune she overheard him humming. (In contrast, the words sung by his mother, in the flashback featuring the lovely Sooha saha, are more free-flowing.) In some ways, Veera becomes the mother Mahabir has left behind, and he becomes the father she never had. When she runs away and returns after finding that she has nowhere to go in the desert, he instructs the members of his gang not to help her. "Apni marzi se bhaagi, apni marzi se bheetar jaayegi." And the next morning, she asks for permission when she wants to step out. This disciplinarian aspect of a father is also brought out when he asks her to dress properly. But elsewhere, when she gaily climbs a tree, he watches with worry from below. And he buys her new clothes, which she parades before him. She's like a child in a fancy-dress competition, with every state presenting the opportunity for a different look.

Ali doesn't allow the audience to ease into this belief for long, though. The search parties catch up with them, retrieving Veera and fatally injuring Mahabir in the process.

This, alongside her family keeping her medicated, contained within her room, push Veera to her breaking point. Her family, much like before, pretend like nothing happened. But it did. A lot happened. A new Veera had been born. One that refuses to hold back. The absolute rise in dramatic action is shown through Veera's final explosion – one where she confronts her rapist at a gathering and puts her foot down.

Children who have experienced complex trauma often have difficulty identifying, expressing, and managing emotions, and may have limited language for feeling states. They often internalize and/or externalize stress reactions and as a result may experience significant depression, anxiety, or anger. Their emotional responses may be unpredictable or explosive. A child may react to a reminder of a traumatic event with trembling, anger, sadness, or avoidance. For a child with a complex trauma history, reminders of various traumatic events may be everywhere in the environment. Such a child may react often, react powerfully, and have difficulty calming down when upset. Since the traumas are often of an interpersonal nature, even mildly stressful interactions with others may serve as trauma reminders and trigger intense emotional responses. Having learned that the world is a dangerous place where even loved ones can't be trusted to protect you, children are often vigilant and guarded in their interactions with others and are more likely to perceive situations as stressful or dangerous. While this defensive posture is protective when an individual is under attack, it becomes problematic in situations that do not warrant such intense reactions. Alternately, many children also learn to "tune out" (emotional numbing) to threats in their environment, making them vulnerable to re-victimization.

In the last sequence of the film *Veera* break the silence giving everyone an unimaginable moment. She starts the moment in a low tone but in an effective way. She asks the uncle, the assaulter that why he hadn't brought chocolates for her today?. Uncle, not realising the situation tells that he can bring it now. The hurt and anger in her bursts out and family around her fails to stop her from humiliation. *Veera* clears the air by

explaining how the so called uncle had abused her by giving her chocolates and making her sit in his lap when she was just nine years old. The uncle tries to ignore it by saying she is uttering nonsense and she is not in her senses. While Veera's mother tries to shut her up and she screams. The pain she carried till then was having it's time now, to finally speak up to finally exposing the rapist. Everyone around is in shock . Thus the uncle leaves the house. Veera breakdown and asks her father a question which leaves him awestruck. She asks why he had told her to be careful from strangers outside home and forgot to tell her to be careful from the ones inside home too. She confronts that she doesn't understand this so called society where these things are said ok and neglected. She doesn't want to live like that.

Not only is it a movie that touches upon issues that are almost never talked about, it presents them in a way that tears at pieces of our hearts. Imtiaz Ali achieves something that is incredibly difficult to carry out through a film – he manages to instil and evoke empathy in the hearts of the audience.

Conclusion

One of the other fairly regular aspects of a beloved family film tends to be an occasional moment of borderline inappropriate trauma. These are the moments your parents fast-forwarded over when you were really young to save you from the anguish. The moments that even now, decades down the line as a fully-fledged adult with a council tax bill and a sensible coat, you remember with an all-too crystal clear clarity.

The movie 'Highway' has a soul. A silent scream of a person that has nowhere to go and no one to speak to...and so life is just a HIGHWAY!! Two people from different economic strata, brought together by fate, yet having similar childhood of mistrust, trauma and abuse. There is that void a deep hole within the soul that can never ever be forgotten and never be filled ever again. This movie has so many layers deep within it. Like how men react differently to traumatic childhood by being aggressive and secluded within, longing for the mother figure to comfort them, and women on the other hand become carefree, wanting to just run from it all and always longing for that father figure that can take care of her always. Imtiaz Ali has researched it so well that you can feel the pain, the inappropriate joy and the crazy feeling of comfort in the strangest circumstances.

Both Veera and Mahabir are haunted by deep childhood sexual traumas. These horrific backstories gain weight and resonance through the characters' tension-filled accounts, while brief flashbacks reinforce their present-day impact. These demons have left Veera and Mahabir alienated from their pasts.

In the end of the film Veera breaks the silence and confesses the haunting experiences she had to go through and how she felt, how her so called uncle destroyed her childhood. Veera let everyone present at her house in shock. While her mother again tries to shut her out of embarrassment saying that she has not recovered fully when it's not an embarrassing thing at all. Veera stood for herself this time as she is not a nine year old right then and speaks it out. The burden she carried till then, she releases herself from it. Veera finally feels independent and free.

We are made to sit through this uncomfortable narration. We are made to feel uneasy. Moreover, we are made to realize that this is the face of reality in our society as well. Veera's story is not uncommon. It is merely one that is brushed under the carpet, too taboo to discuss in the open. It emphasizes on how sexual abuse sees no caste, creed, social stature or kinship. Predators roam free among us. Some of them have the same blood running through their veins as we do.

Child abuse and neglect in the home is but one aspect of the larger set of problems related to child maltreatment that occurs in a variety of places and by people with varied relationships to the victim. Unlike many other crimes that occur in public places, child abuse and neglect usually occurs in private places, and the victims may try to hide evidence of the abuse or deny that it took place. As a result, collecting sufficient evidence to determine whether a crime occurred and to identify effective responses to the problem is very difficult.

Children are never responsible for their victimization, but certain characteristics increase their vulnerability. Children's need for attention and affection is their single most

exploitable characteristic.¹³ Particularly in the case of sexual abuse, a trusted adult may take advantage of a child's natural curiosity, desire to be included, and need for affection. The relationship between children and their caretakers makes it difficult for children to interpret what is happening to them as "abuse." A victim may also feel a sense of loyalty to the abuser, and while the victim may want the abuse to stop, he or she may not want the perpetrator to be punished. Children with disabilities are extremely dependent on adults, and this dependence limits their ability to protect themselves and, in some situations, their ability to disclose what is happening to them.

Research has shown that child sexual abuse can have a very serious impact on physical and mental health, as well as later sexual adjustment. Depending on the severity of and number of traumas experienced, child sexual abuse can have wide-reaching and long-lasting effects. Those who have suffered multiple traumas and received little parental support may develop post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety. Their ability to trust adults to take care of them may also be dropped out. Sadly, when children do not disclose sexual abuse and or do not receive effective counseling, they can suffer difficulties long into the future. As one child expressed it, "Abuse is like a boomerang. If you don't deal with it, it can come back to hurt you." On the other hand, children who have the support of an understanding caregiver and effective treatment can recover without long-term effects.

Although the film sounds like just another love story from a distance, 'Highway' has a lot more to offer when you come closer, a lot more substance, a lot more to feel.

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