

The Lion's Burden: Exploring Trauma and Memory in the movie

Mufasa: The Lion King

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ABSTRACT

Trauma is caused by a series of stressful events. Trauma not only affects a person's mental state but also results in a change of a person's character. Happy memories and pampered life make an individual complete. Once shelter is lost, those memories remain nostalgic. Mufasa undergoes several stressful events from his childhood to adulthood. These traumatic events shape him as a king, build his character emotionally and make him strong. Separation from parents makes him nostalgic about the cherished memories of his past, particularly the love and care showered by

his parents. Mufasa is treated as a refugee by Taka's father. The concept of displacement and identity is explored through the characters Mufasa and Taka. Displacement not only changes one's identity but also strips away the power to rule. A dispute arises about the role of leadership between Taka and Mufasa, causing trouble to their bond. This dispute leads to vengeance and wrath. The paper explores the themes of trauma, memory, leadership, brotherhood and vengeance through the lens of Mufasa and Taka from the movie *Mufasa: The Lion King*.

Keywords: Memory, Trauma, Vengeance.

Mufasa: The Lion King is an American musical drama film directed by Barry Jenkins and produced by Walt Disney Pictures. The film is photo realistically animated and serves as both a prequel and sequel to *The Lion King* (2019). The movie *Mufasa: The Lion King* begins with the narration of Mufasa's life journey. Simba and Nala, Kiara's parents, leave her with Timon and Pumbaa to take care of her. Simba and Nala go to another place to give birth to Kiara's younger sibling. Rafiki arrives and shares flashbacks of Kiara's grandparents. The story introduces Mufasa as an orphaned cub until he meets Taka. Taka saves Mufasa from a flood and takes him to his parents. Taka's father does not accept Mufasa, but his mother does. Taka also longs for a brother to share everything with. This marks the beginning of Mufasa's traumatic life. Taka's father, Obasi, calls him a stray and declares that Mufasa cannot be part of their family. He believes that if Mufasa joins them, Taka will not be able to lead the jungle in the future.

Mufasa initially lives happily with his parents, but these incidents bring him trauma. He speaks with Obasi to prove that he will never take Taka's place in the future. Obasi organizes a race between Mufasa and Taka. Taka wins but allows Mufasa to cross first so that he can remain his brother forever. From a young age, Mufasa experiences many hardships. He often misses his

family and recalls their happy moments. However, being separated from them strengthens him and makes him bold enough to face the world. His journey is deeply connected with nature. He always dreams of *Milele*, a place in his imagination with fertile land, rain, shelter, and abundant food. His parents often spoke of *Milele*, and he keeps it in his memory, hoping to see it one day in his life.

Memory is a cognitive process that involves storage, encoding, and retrieval in the human brain. Memory is essential for daily life, planning, decision-making, and learning. It can be divided into different types based on duration and function. Memory is another major theme. "Many incidents of those early years are fixed in my memory, isolated, but clear and distinct, making the sense of that silent, aimless, dayless life all the more intense" (Keller). The memory of his parents holds a strong place in his heart, but it does not bring him down. Instead, it makes him stronger and gives him hope of reuniting with his family. This paper delves into trauma and memory, examining how past experiences shape identities and influence destinies.

Trauma is an emotional response to a distressing event that can have long-term effects. Mufasa's separation from his mother and father causes him great distress. After the separation, he goes through several stressful events without an identity. He struggles to prove himself, but Obasi does not accept him. However, Mufasa eventually demonstrates his leadership skills to Obasi. Taka betrays Mufasa by revealing the place where he lives, further adding to Mufasa's stress. "Trauma is personal; it does not disappear if it is not validated. When it is ignored or invalidated, the silent screams continue internally, heard only by the one held captive. When someone enters the pain and hears the screams, healing can begin" (Bernock).

The article *Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory and Contemporary Indian Fiction: A Study* states that trauma is a highly emotional and psychological response to an event or experience that is deeply frightening and devastating. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines trauma as "a mental condition that is

caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time,” or an unpleasant experience that makes a person feel upset and anxious. Sigmund Freud’s theory of trauma suggests that traumatic events are linked to mental experiences and can lead to psychiatric illness. Freud believes that traumatic memories are difficult to forget and not easily recalled.

Important and emotional life events leave strong and durable memory representations that allow a person to remember the events in detail even years later. While thinking of a flashback, a person feels that a traumatic event is happening again which implies that they are not fully aware that experiences are memories from the past. Freud suggests that traumatic events leave a lasting imprint on the unconscious shaping behaviors and emotions in later life. In the movie *Mufasa: The Lion King*, Mufasa the orphaned cub faces displacement, and this leads him to a traumatic rupture. His resilience and leadership may be understood as defense mechanism. Mufasa tends to protect others. He grows this character with him from his childhood. Taka is not like Mufasa, he has unresolved childhood that makes him to be destructive in all his life situations. Mufasa overcomes trauma through leadership, and his life lesson teaches one how a past suffering shapes personal life and identity.

Mufasa’s past helps one overcome struggle from any incident and fosters personal growth. The younger generation faces many issues, just like the little cub, Mufasa. There is a lack of mental strength to face the present world. The little cub serves as an example of how to confront struggles and overcome them with knowledge and power. Trauma can make a person emotionally vulnerable. Even in such situations, one should act like the little cub, Mufasa.

Mufasa survives with Taka’s family despite Taka’s father’s rejection. Taka and his mother protect him and provide him with a safe place to lead his life. They ensure that Mufasa does not dwell on his family or feel emotionally down. Memories often make a person emotionally vulnerable in many situations. Past incidents remain as memories; they cannot happen again. However, Mufasa’s recollection of his past life

with his mother and father makes him stronger. He holds onto the hope that he will reunite with his family one day. Mufasa follows every step of his father, Vengeance and wrath arise between Taka and Mufasa over a lioness called Sarabi. Taka has feelings for her, but Mufasa wins Sarabi's heart. Mufasa's modest and brave character attracts her. Taka and Mufasa do not fight for leadership, but they fight for a lioness. This leads to intense vengeance and wrath.

Mufasa's role as protector comes out in one of the events. During the fight with white lions, Mufasa protects his adoptive mother, Eshe. It results in the death of a white lion Shaju. This incident makes Shaju's father angry, and the lions come as a group to kill Mufasa. Obasi comes to know about this, and he exiles Mufasa and Taka to safeguard the land from future attacks. These incidents make Obasi think of Mufasa as a hero, because Mufasa is the one who attacked the white lions and protected his wife from enemies. Taka's role is not being a part here. His dad feels bad about that, and this incident causes trauma in Obasi. After the exile of Mufasa and Taka, Obasi misses his son. Here comes displacement. During the exile Mufasa and Taka both show their feelings for Sarabi and there comes vengeance between them. Both like the same girl and Taka comes to know about it. Taka tries to show his betrayal in the form of joining his hands with the white lions. Mufasa does not expect this from Taka. While he is in Milele, white lions enter the land. These incidents bring trauma to Mufasa, but these things make him stronger. Overcoming these challenges strengthens Mufasa's resilience and prepares him for the responsibilities of kingship.

Displacement affects Mufasa to the core, yet he still holds onto the hope of reuniting with his family. Displacement and dislocation, accompanied by a sense of loss and a longing to return home, destabilize one's rooted sense of identity. However, being separated from his family helps Mufasa become a better person and shapes him into a stronger leader. From childhood, Mufasa faces numerous stressful events that impact his life, like his separation from his parents, entering a new land, fighting with white lions, searching for another homeland, experiencing Taka's betrayal, witnessing Taka's reunion, and finally

reuniting with his own family. All these incidents make Mufasa stronger. In the end, he possesses all the qualities needed to become the king of a new Pride Land.

Even though Taka leads the white lions to take revenge on Mufasa, he cannot leave Mufasa to die at the hands of the white lions. Taka gets a scar in his face to save Mufasa. Taka saves Mufasa because of their shared bond as brothers. He cannot leave Mufasa alone in a very difficult situation caused by his own insecurity and inability to win the heart of lioness, Sarabi or the throne as King. This incident serves as the last incident where Scar shows some kind of compassion towards Mufasa. After this incident Taka takes up a new identity as Scar and possesses the characteristics of an evil individual. The scar in Taka's face symbolizes that he has lost the love of his life, his brother and innocence. Scar turns completely into an evil personality. Mufasa feels pain due to the commotion and betrayal caused by Taka. This incident makes Mufasa sad, and he decides never to use Taka's name again in his lifetime. Mufasa therefore addresses him as Scar.

Taka himself symbolizes Scar because his behavior reflects the true nature of Uncle Scar. It represents his internalised pain and his mark in a failed betrayal. He makes himself destructive. He is not bold enough to face trauma. So, he calls himself "scar". This thought does not come suddenly but is due to some impact left in his mind before. He is not healed from that mental wound. That leads him to make this decision. This is the situation of trauma survivors. They define themselves by a negative character. This thought never heals them till the end. Taka too does not come outside trauma as he gets into it by his negative thoughts. Taka's traumatic experiences make him emotionally weak. This emotional trauma makes him realize that he has wronged Mufasa, and this realization transforms him into a kind-hearted person. Taka acknowledges his mistakes and accepts everything. He then reunites with Mufasa with a good heart.

This paper explores how a young cub, separated from his parents, becomes stronger. Despite being displaced, the young cub survives bravely and proves his identity to another group of animals. This paper

discusses trauma and memory in relation to a lion named Mufasa. As a fast and young cub, Mufasa faces many distressing moments in his life. However, he never loses hope. He fights against all odds and eventually becomes the leader of Pride Lands.

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