



The Impact of Trauma in Literature

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ABSTRACT

In this Paper I have tried to demonstrate how trauma fiction serves several valuable functions. It is an important way of witnessing or testifying for the history and experience of historically marginalized people. Further, it chronicles lives under pressure that need the powers of literary imagination and character development. These imaginative literary approaches provide a necessary supplement to coping up with psychological situation. The texts considered in this study explore traumatic events like World War and Partition and their lingering consequences, both were events of incredible scope and complexity, impossible to define satisfactorily why these happened and involve differing circumstances, populations, ideologies, intentions and effects

Key Words : Literature review, Research Methodology and Trauma Impact with Concepts.

INTRODUCTION

Trauma is often defined as a coping response to and a consequence of overwhelming situations. However, as an individual's sense of being overwhelmed is subjective, the occurrence of trauma is also subjective. There is evidence to suggest that how people cope with extremely stressful situations is associated to the amount of trauma suffered from such events.

Trauma is well-known in genocide, war, and crime situations. It is almost always seen in torture victims and targets of mobbing. It is common, but less often identified in situations of domestic violence, pedophilia, and incest. It also occurs in victims of child or elder abuse. Victims in situations of pedophilia, domestic violence, and neglect are often not identified by caregivers and

are also unlikely to receive proper treatment for ongoing trauma. sexual violence is usually targeted specifically at women. But women are often reluctant to report rape, either because they fear the social stigma or because they feel that it is useless to report the crime in conditions of chaos and societal breakdown. The extent of sexual violence often becomes evident long after the world knows the extent of other crimes.

Even years later, the suffering never goes away. It manifests itself as a deep breakdown of the individual and feelings of shame and humiliation that are especially strong since the crime was committed in front of witnesses, the family, the village. Young women who were virgins at the time of the rape say no one will ever want them. It is impossible for them to imagine having a normal relationship with a man. These women feel guilty rather than victimized. They cannot accept that their torturers were the inhuman ones. They wonder why they survived while others died. They tell themselves their lives were spared because they let themselves be raped.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

In this context it may not be surprising that women writers were thought to have little to contribute to a set of predominantly masculine myths. The male canon often seems oblivious of its women's writing, let alone its claim to significance. Nevertheless some women's work has remained well known. Vera Brittain's (1918), *Testament of Youth*, which recounts both what women lost in the war and their vicarious experience of the conflict, and Rebecca West's (1918) *The Return of the Soldier*, one of the first explorations of the effects of shell shock on a soldier's family are both works which have achieved something of the status of classics amongst women's war narratives. It is probable that readers have continued to find these works interesting as much for their depiction of women's roles as for their literary quality.

Braybon (1995) writes “we can talk about women as a group ‘by virtue of their gender’, on the one hand, and because of ‘society’s expectations of them”, (145) on the other we can group women together because of their gender, that is, because they are women. We are used to thinking of Vera Brittain, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, perhaps, as typical of women’s literary expression of the war. Yet these are reconstructions defined as much by the pressure of our interpretations and mythologies of the First World War as by our understanding of the historical development of women’s experience and women’s writing. However, some feminists are becoming slightly uneasy about writing separately about women as if women were a unified group, requiring special pleading; or as if ‘woman’ were an unproblematic category for organizing knowledge.

Cathy Caruth (1996) argues in *Unclaimed Experience* that trauma is a wound inflicted upon the mind and as such is not a simple healable event like some physical ailments. According to Caruth, “trauma is an overwhelming experience that is best represented in a literary text because of the text’s symbolic and ordered narrative. What makes literature the privileged, though not the only, site of trauma is the fact that literature as an art form can contain and present an aspect of experience which is not fully comprehended or mentally processed by either victims or authors.

Kali Tal, a scholar in trauma criticism and author of *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, believes that “if survivors retain control over the interpretation of their trauma, they can . force a shift in the social and political structure. If the dominant culture manages to . . . codify it in its own terms, the status quo will remain unchanged. On a social as well as an individual psychological level, the penalty for repression is repetition”

Kali Tal to assert: "Getting used to" moving through the perils of time without the assurance of luck, without the conviction of a special grace conferred by a special geography, is precisely the function of the literary and cinematic narratives .These narratives purge us, forcing the reader or viewer to reexperience, this time self-consciously, the tragic shattering of our old myths. This process may prepare the culture to accept a significant alteration of our view of ourselves and of our world, a new mythic interpretation of our historical experience But survivors never "get used to" losing their sense of meaning; they are forever changed by it.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Literary research often deals with questions of meaning, social conventions, representations of lived experience, and aesthetic effects; these are questions that reward dialogue and different perspectives rather than one great experiment that settles the issue. In literary research, we might get many valuable answers even though they are quite different from one another. Also in literary research, we usually have some room to speculate about answers, but our claims have to be plausible (believable) and our argument comprehensive (meaning we don't overlook evidence that would alter our argument significantly if it were known). A clear objective should be in mind before beginning any research, as a good research question will be precise, applicable, and valuable. This indicates that you can fully address the issue and base judgments thereon. In this paper used only secondary data like books, journals, website and others etc.

IMPACT TRAUMA IN LITERATURE

The story of trauma is the story of the haunting of the unacknowledged and irreparable loss and grief. This thesis seeks to scrutinize the female characters by examining the effects of trauma on the female body and psyche. Rather than using trauma studies as merely an approach at elucidating a character analysis, this work intends to examine the verbal signification, or testimony, of the traumatized subjects as a means to better comprehend the experience and reveal trauma as an instrument of female oppression. This thesis focuses on the women with regards to the trauma they experience and their testimony of trauma.

Representation of traumatic experience is ultimately a tool in the hands of those who shape public perceptions and national myth. The partition of the Indian Subcontinent was the single most traumatic experience in our recent history. The memory of those days is branded very deeply in some souls. Partition was much more than just a political divide, or a division of properties, of assets and liabilities. It was also a division of hearts. It brought untold sufferings, tragedy, trauma pain and violence to communities who had till the time of partition lived together in same of social contract. It separated families across as arbitrarily drawn border sometimes overnight and made practically impossible for people to know if their parents, sisters, brothers or children were alive or dead. As far as Indian Writing is concerned, as an event of shattering consequence the partition retains its pre-eminence even today despite two wars on our borders and wave after wave of communal violence. It is transmitted to us in its many representations: Political, social, historical, testimonial, literary, documentary. There is no dearth of written material on Partition: official records, documents, private papers, agreement and treaties, political histories, newspaper

reportage, parliamentary debates etc. But literature has recorded the full horror of Partition in cultural, psychological and social terms. The greater part of which was written in the period immediately following the division of the country. In one sense it can be considered a kind of social history not only because it so approximates reality but because it is the only significant non-official contemporary record we have of the time, apart from reportage. Partition fiction has been a far richer source both because it provides popular and astringent commentary on the politics of partition and because we find here and there women's voices speaking for themselves. The refusal of these scholars to essentialize the differences between men's and women's writings is most promising.

This study attempts to raise some general issues with regard to violence and trauma suffered by women. In some way they are moral and philosophical questions about how societies organise their universe and how the individual will often triumphs above adversity.

In researching violence, many scholars have noted the difference between the way men and women tell their stories. Val Daniel (1996) in *Charred Lullabies* points to how while men have coherent narratives, women find it very difficult to speak about sexual violence. The classic case of victim of sexual violence when asked to tell their story, they just could not speak. Their eyes are filled with tears. Whatever reality they face is obviously a devastating one. Silence then is the first reaction of anyone who has experienced sexual violence. It is only with effective counseling and support that women break that silence and cope with the emotional fall out of breaking the silence. It is therefore not unusual that the victims who have been most articulate have been those who have gone through counseling, who are close to women's NGOs and who are being treated by them. Without a supportive network, as many are discovering in Kosovo, women will not speak. The terror is too intimate.

Trauma isolates and alienates people from their communities, but reading and creating texts can reintegrate them into other communities and help them rebuild the broken pieces of their lives. Horvitz (2000) asserts, "If traumatic events are not repressed, they can be used: victims remember and imagine stories to be repeated and passed on. That is, when the stories of the past are consciously recognized, the cycle of violence can end, because the narratives, not the trauma, are repeated and passed on" (134). If as Freud (1989) suggests that victims have a need to master the

trauma and may attempt to do so through compulsive repetition, it is better that stories are passed from person-to-person rather than the violent acts themselves. This process of repeating narratives, not violence, is constructive for victims who are able to legitimize and bear witness to their experiences through texts that have the potential of reaching beyond themselves. Furthermore, it helps to educate the societies and communities in which they are apart. By sharing stories, isolated victims can be reintegrated back into communities that before did not understand or care about the victims' histories because they now have greater empathy of their struggles. The prevention of speech and not listening to marginalized voices represent two elements of violence. It is not enough simply to allow those on the margins to speak, but we must also listen, recognise the enormity of the event called Partition, and the universality, the obscenity and the unacceptability of its violence. It is a need that certainly comes out in survivors' accounts. In a very large number of these recollections, the detail seems to put on record the awful suffering that people went through, as also, perhaps, the fact that the violence is in all of us. The accounts of violence contribute significantly to the making of new subjectivities, new versions of self and other, new communities and new histories.

Trauma theorists search for an opening, a liminal space, to accommodate past, present, and future generations, presences and absences, spectres and spirits seeking a community willing to listen to their stories. Traumas become narratable and survivors stories listened to when we cease to define individuals and landscapes as decayed, polluted, and shameful, and begin instead, to investigate our relationships with these witnesses, listening for what they have to say, not to put to rest an historical atrocity, rather to be attentive to whom and what, historically, we have been unable and unwilling to listen. Trauma isolates and alienates people from their communities, but reading and creating texts can reintegrate them into other communities and help them rebuild the broken pieces of their lives. Horvitz (2000) asserts, "If traumatic events are not repressed, they can be used: victims remember and imagine stories to be repeated and passed on. That is, when the stories of the past are consciously recognized, the cycle of violence can end, because the narratives, not . . . the trauma, are repeated and passed on" (134). If as Freud (1989) suggests that victims have a need to master the trauma and may attempt to do so through compulsive repetition, it is better that stories are passed from person-to-person rather than the violent acts themselves.

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Trauma work is also memory work, and the testimony of the survivor does not, in its articulation, determine meaning, and thus close a familial, cultural, or historical chapter. Rather, the speaking of the trauma opens meaning, is productive of meaning, and necessitates a willingness on the part of the listener to bear witness to the catastrophic event, to untangle the narrative knots, and to listen through the gaps and ruptures, which takes precedence over any desire for finality. We are never free of the past, whether it is named history, memory, or experience. It is also the understanding that the past is, what has already taken place, and the memories of which it is composed, is constituted by suffering. We remember trauma; we are made as ourselves out of trauma. If there is a lesson in trauma stories, it is not about facing up to the past so we can move forward, not in learning how to get over trauma, but in how to continue living with it and even to continue loving oneself and the world through it.

CONCLUSION

The study of trauma leads us to examine the human consequences of socio historical phenomena and the interconnections between public and private, the political and the psychological. The array of literary ,theoretical ,historical and cultural texts referred to in this study have provided

ample evidence and argument that trauma is frequently caused by human made injustice, oppression, violence, and exploitation .Trauma also has meaning in that it is indicative of basic life issues such as the relation between life and death, the meaning and quality of existence whether physical or psychological survival, how people understand and cope with loss and self diminishment.

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