



Shattered Innocence: Traumatic Experience Of Childhood Abuse In Umera Ahmed's *Aks*

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the issue of physical violence and gender discrimination in the patriarchal society of Pakistan, where women are marginalized and considered inferior by the male dominated society, women are hardly accepted as an free independent individuals must fight for their rights at every step of their lives. Justice is often denied to them for the exploitation and oppression they face. This paper study examines the trauma-affected characters in Umera Ahmed's novel *Aks*, exploring issues of traumatic and post-traumatic stress disorders through a psychoanalytic lens. It also highlights the challenges faced by trauma survivors and investigates the underlying causes of the violence and trauma experienced by the protagonist, a nine-year-old girl named Chiriya, as well as other characters throughout the novel. The focuses of the study to explore *Aks* through the lenses of Herman's concept of traumatic disorder and post traumatic stress disorder and psychoanalytic perspective. The study aims to illustrate the crises and struggles of traumatized survivors and their efforts to mitigate the effects of traumatic events.

Key words- Trauma, Violence, female sexuality, psychoanalysis, PTSD gender power, patriarchy.

Introduction-

This research paper examine the portrayal of a physically and psychologically traumatized, sexually abused child in the novel. It explore the social circumstances that follow the traumatic events. It also deals with the child either motivated to overcome the trauma and live a normal life or become demoralized, struggling to cope with the lasting effects of the abuse. The novel has been analyzed using Jungian theory of

psychoanalysis and the theory of Judith Herman Lewis's Post-traumatic stress disorder. Louis Tyson (2006)

writes in *Critical theory today*: "if psychoanalysis can help us better understand human behaviour, then it must certainly be able to help us understand literary texts, which are about human behaviour" (Tyson 11).

The study explores at Chiriya's situation as a child who was tortured both physically and mentally. It examines her struggles as a traumatized victim and the psychological deterioration, anguish, anxiety, shame, humiliation and helplessness ensue after such traumatic incident occurrence. The survivor journey towards leading a normal life is meticulously studied along with the societal environment that exacerbates their hardships due to the lack of physical power women face in a patriarchal society.

Umera Ahmed is a renowned Pakistani author and screenwriter. Who often addresses social issues in her works. She emphasizes in her novels the hardships and struggle for justice and survival in a patriarchal society. The story of *Aks* tells the narrative of a young child who lived in a deputy commissioner house with her mother and grandfather Khairdin, he was a government employee in DC house, works as cook and lives a happy life with his family. Being a government servant Khairdin's status in his village was very high. He was very poor but he believes in hard work and honesty. He was very popular in DC house for his honesty. The novel is mainly focused on the sexually abused child Chiriya, a nine-year-old girl raped by her landlord and her struggle to seek justice.

Umera Ahmed also focuses on social differences through the character of Chiriya and Khairdin. The struggle and suffering of Chiriya and her family after the incident of her physical violation and how the incident generates trauma and develops post-traumatic stress disorder in a well-mannered way. The protagonist of the novel illustrates how the hardships and struggle lead her to a successful life and at the end she proves herself a queen, the most powerful character of the chess game by getting the post of deputy commissioner in the same house where as a child she suffered physical abuse.

Being a servant child Chiriya was not allowed to play with officers' children, because commissioners maintain distance from the servants because of their class status. Munaza's character serves as an attack on how social status and class are performing constructs. Her strong desire on preserving social boundaries and her instruction of her children to sustain these inequalities. She teaches her children to maintain distance from them, "I have always told you not to associate with class. there is a huge difference between them and us" (Aks 92) Munaza's statements made clear how much she detested the servant class. she believes that these servant class made fools of others with their innocence for their needs.

look what happens when the children of servants start attending good schools. They rise above their rank. They teach their children all sorts of tricks and they mature before their age and come up with all sorts of cunning and deceit. Now listen to this; are these the words of a child? No! She has obviously been coached by Khairdin and her mother Halima (Aks 91)

Instead of Khairdin was an educated person yet he restricted Chiriya to play and enter in the DC house. He teaches her to be honest and hard worker. Chiriya develop a friendship with Abaik when he and his other siblings came to the DC house to spend their summer vacations. Aibak was DC's nephew and his mother always restricted to their children to stay away from servants children. She considered servant children can spoil them. Aibak's mother always differentiating people with their class. Despite being a bright and intelligent child Chiriya suffered with the class status of the society at the very same age she suffered from child abuse by the DC Shahbaz Husain and that tragic incident haunted her throughout her life. She experience psychological trauma and after that tragic event see face many problems in life one by one because of her lower class. She always thought the people who doesn't have the power, can't stand against the upper class.

Chiriya is very fascinated about new things she hear from her grandfather. She often plays chess with him while playing chess she expressed her idea about chess. She says to her grandfather Khairdin that she will invent a game in which she wants to present queen as the king of chess because she think it is queen who is most powerful and it deserve the high position. Chiriya is a very brilliant child, curious and expert in chess. For her life is like a chess board she always question to her grandfather, "Why can the queen not be the king" (Aks 45) because she is the most powerful on the board queen can move anywhere on the board. King was strong but had some limitation and therefore a weak piece on chess board but queen is unique and had no limitation, she is strong and powerful, she could saw king from being checkmated by moving in any direction. She wasn't satisfied with the rule of chess. On the other hand Chiriya tries to find the power of women. At the age of nine Chiriya learn many things from her surroundings.

DC house gained popularity for a number of stories including the presence of supernatural elements dwarfs and those who posted there committed suicide or divorce eventually. There was a cheval mirror standing in hall of the DC house and it symbolizes as witness of all happy and tragic incident happened there all the circumstances and occurrence of the past and present. When the protagonist of the novel confronted with the mirror in the DC house after twenty six years she overwhelmed by the flashback of past memories, the

mirror has seen all the happy and tragic memories, death, separation, friendship, molestation of her life. “the house was an inextricable part of her memory and try as she might she could not erase it from her mind. She entered the house and her feet froze refusing to move further in. The staircase was in front of her...the staircase, the screams...” (Aks 157) the staircase reminded her a harrowing memory, the place where DC tried to strangle her after her rape and she desperately ran to protect herself from him. she becomes unable to prevent herself of being panic by thinking about that night. As Herman stated, “long after the event, many traumatized people feel the part of themselves have died.” (Herman 49) The same DC house once she loved the house which held golden memories of her life as well as the darkest one. She harbored a mixture of love and hate at the same time. That house that stood so strong and arrogant, indifferent, to the pains and pleasure of its components.

Aibak also experience the trauma when he confronts the cheval mirror after years. Turning to face the mirror takes him back in time and brings the tragic event back to life. The weight of guilt and haunting memories burden his soul, keeping him trapped in the emotional aftermath of the past, “memories that evoked feeling of guilt was an eyewitness to what happened to Chiriya and memories of the event were burden on his soul.” (Aks 331) flashbacks and nightmares that bring up the traumatic events for the person and give them a sense that it is happening again Herman says: “Trauma arrests the course of normal development by its repetitive intrusion into the survivor’s life” (Herman 37)

Aibak plays an important role in Chiriya’s life they both were good friends before that incident happened. Aibak was the only eye witness of that incident of Chiriya’s molestation, he woke by the scream of Chiriya he went out of the room and saw his uncle trying to kill Chiriya in the state of lost, he hidden himself behind the railing. He was shivering and freeze at his place when he saw Chiriya without cloth and his uncle running after her, grab her hair and trying to strangle her. After the incident he falls ill and admitted to the hospital, where he was depressed for many days, “Aibak had become very irritable during his sickness and whenever his uncle came to see him, he would get even more ill-tempered.” (Aks 123) he had witnessed his young loving friend being abuse by his uncle and whenever he saw his uncle, he struggle to control is emotions. According to Herman, feelings of fear, anxiety and terror are triggered in state of hyper-arousal, which is recognised as the symptom of Post-traumatic stress disorder. Harman explain hyper-arousal, “the traumatized person startles easily, reacts irritably to small provocations, and sleeps poorly” (Herman 35).

The re-experiencing of traumatic incident causes the victim go through the feeling of fear and insecurity. Chiriya didn't want to face anyone and answer their questions, she climbed to the roof to find the place for refuse but when Khairdin found her sitting behind the broken wooden frame, holding her breath in trepidation, “anguish, fear, and a sense of loss would assail her over and over. And so it continued till the time came when this young nine year old Child developed a strong abhorrence for herself” (Aks 137) Chiriya feels she is not safe anywhere as everyone questions her about her molestation in her village school she was forced to such an extent by the students behaviour that she try to hide herself during lunch break to avoid them. Herman mention in her book “a psychological trauma is a feeling of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control and threat of humiliation” (Herman 33) The abuser's threat causes the victim to experience extreme fear, which undermines their sense of safety.

The loosing of sense of safety and negative thoughts of traumatic event leads them to post traumatic stress disorder as Herman described the physiological changes of first traumatic stress disorder are both extensive and enduring. Patient suffer from a combination of generalized anxiety symptoms and specific fear. For instance Chiriya and young Shahbaz’s character reflects feeling of fear when Hafiz Gul take Shahbaz to his swimming class, and he began crying and continuously refuse to go with him, similarly, after the tragic event of her life she started hide herself from other talking to anyone who doesn't want to face anyone not even who was very close to her. The fear, insecurity, and lasting impact on their mental and emotional well-being are powerfully depicted, shedding light on the complex psychological struggles faced by individuals who have experienced traumatic events in their lives. Umera Ahmed's narrative captures the deep-rooted consequences of trauma and serves as a poignant reflection on the resilience and coping mechanisms employed by the characters to navigate their traumatic pasts.

The prolonged impact of the trauma on the characters is evident in their development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As described by Herman, the physiological changes associated with PTSD are extensive and enduring. The characters, like Chiriya and little Shahbaz, exhibit symptoms of generalized anxiety and specific fear, reflecting the ongoing impact of the traumatic events on their lives. Shahbaz's suicide after his separation from his wife Sharmeen intensified Sharmeen's pain, exacerbating her trauma. When she comes to know the reality of Chiriya expulsion from DC house and from the school. She insisted Sister Agnes to tell her everything about Chiriya’s case, what happened to her and why her husband threte to expel her from school. She could not believe her ears what sister Anges tell her “did Shahbaz do this? She

asked in a state of disbelief.” (Aks 308) she stared sister for while her mind has gone in the state of disbelief she left school as soon as possible while returning home she suddenly realized the purpose of her coming to school, she went back to school and started looking for her daughter, but she was unable to find her she suddenly realized she had forgotten her daughter face, how she looks like, in the state of fear she took out her photograph from her wallet and then she remember her face, she turned to the crowd of children to find her daughter but the minute she looked away from the photograph her mind went blank. Herman says, “traumatized people feel and act as though their nervous system have been disconnected from the present.” (Herman 35) Sharmeen’s mind went blank, she feels she is not present anywhere, all she can see only little Chiriya face, all the children were there looked like Chiriya and that innocent girl molested by husband its mention the novel as, “all the girls looked like Chiriya, Chiriya’s running around, busy with their tasks, coming and going.” (Aks 309)

Chiriya and Aibak go through the psychologically upset and remained in the guilt for many years. Feeling of guilt more effected to the person who saw the traumatic incident as Herman says, “they feel guilty for not risking their life to save others, or for failing to fulfill the request of a dying person.” (Herman 54) Even after twenty six years he come DC house as a officer, he could be able to erase the memory of the house he reminded everything whenever he sees the house. The feeling of guilt that he invited Chiriya to come at midnight to play chess with his uncle glass chessboard, he balme himself that whatever happened to Chiriya that night, is because of him, he says, I was partly responsible for whatever happened to that night. Uncle Shahbaz, he was not even human, he was animal” (Aks 366) The words of Aibak clearly show his guilt and it remains for life time.

On the other hand Chiriya feels guilty for her own molestation, after the happening of tragedy she develops the feeling of detestation in herself. She began to feel that bad things never happened with good girls, in her words, “good children never subjected to such trauma.” (Aks 137) she blame herself for the torture condition of her grandfather, he was respectable person, live in a well-mannered way now he has thrown out of the house with the accusation of theft. Khairdin blame himself that he could not save princes Chiriya from hand of abuser. He spend his two days in jail and on his return when Chiriya looked up Khairdin, his heart lost beating, he had not seen this unfortunate child after that traumatic night, her condition perturb him, “he could not bear the look in Chiriya’s eyes. It was not the pain in her eyes that hurts him, it was look of guilt that hurt him so.” (Aks138) The feelings of shame and guilt arise in a

traumatized victim start when he finds his action in a negative way. Feelings of guilt are also interconnected to the feeling of shame and generates when traumatized survivor blame himself a big cause of tragedy happening to her.

Herman says when a person faced trauma he/she seeks for protection from their society, family, and friends. At the same time the guilt of being molested take away from their loving ones. After Chiriya's molestation when Khairdin come back to village for his people support and love. He thought gradually Chiriya will get back to her normal life, but he finds that nothing is same, the news of Chiriya's molestation had reached their village long before they arrived. "There was a stream of visitors to his house – but this time, they had come as spectators out for fun. They came to see the fall of a once proud man. After a few words of concern for Khairdin and a few curse directed at the DC, they would depart with a sense of satisfaction. After all what had khairdin achieved with striving so hard? Nothing but humiliation for himself and disgrace for the child" (Aks 150). She further says trauma arouses the feeling of shame, guilt and inferiority in victim. They try to avoid the place and people who reminded them the incident they have faced. They also make an effort to be not recognized because their sense of shame intensified by the guilt that the degradation and deterioration of their body and soul witnessed by others.

Many a time survivors surrounding increases the pain of the trauma. Specially, for a girl, who belongs from lower class of the society and a patriarchal country. Abusive environment deform the personality of traumatized victim as they try to seek protection and help from their social surrounding, instead of helping the victim to lessen their pain they increase it by prod into it. Such environment distrusts the creative capabilities of the child. Khairdin admitted Chiriya in village government school to continue her study, but she suffered a lot in the contemptuous environment of the school. She afraid of going to school because people asking questions about her sexual abuse, "Everyone in the school was aware of what had befallen her. And soon she became the butt of all conversation in school" (Aks 152). Herman says, "Assurance of safety and protection are of the greatest importance. The survivor who is often in terror of being alone craves the simple presence of a sympathetic person" (Herman 61) rape survivors need the support of their families to re-establish their sense of self. The relations have been distorted and damaged after the traumatic occurrence, need to rectify and for this purpose the tolerance and respected attitude of society can help victim to rebuild their self image.

In order to overcome the feeling of guilt and shame the traumatized victim needs support and encouragement from the family and society because the response and reactions of others is very important in her life to survive. Child humiliation and guilt tolerated by the judgment and attitude of others generate the feelings of self-blame and isolation.

Sister Agnes insists Khairdin to know the reason behind DC threat for expulsion of Chiriya from school. After knowing the incident of Chiriya sexual abuse, she tried her best to heal trembling Chiriya, she made no effort to probe into the incident. She hears everything patiently and analyzes that her primary concern to heal her pain, she keeps the secret of Chiriya's molestation to herself and encourages her therefore she could walk confidently in the school. Agnes says, "whatever happened was not your fault, it was unfortunate that it happened but you should not dwell into it, sister Agnes had said to a pale faced, trembling Chiriya. Taking her by the hand she spoke gently. "treat whatever happened as you would any injury; it has nothing to do with honor. And you are a very brave girl. That is what you should remember." (Aks 208) the secret of Chiriya's abuse remains between Khairdin and Sister Agnes. No teacher and nun overheard about it.

Sister Agnes helps Chiriya to overcome the traumatic incident and to live a normal life and it becomes possible because of the supportive attitude. Sister Agnes encourages her to face people bravely and participate in every school activity. That incident had badly affected Chiriya into a quite introspective child, now it was very hard for Chiriya to believe anyone. Sister Agnes taught her before her transfer from the school,

These calamities that bedevil our lives are shameful for those who perpetrate them; they are not a cause for shame for those who suffer the trauma. Never allow this heart-rending tragedy to blight your life. Don't allow this one incident to darken your life so that it swallows your brightness, your talent and your personality. Don't ever pity yourself because of this one incident never ever let pity overwhelm you. You are one of our brightest students. One day you will make us proud. (Aks 209)

Herman says, "traumatic life events invariably cause damage to relationships, people in the survivor's social world have the power to influence the eventual outcome of the trauma." (Herman 61) she stresses how crucial it is for victims to know the difference between intrusion and confinement when thinking about their past experiences. She emphasizes that talking about the experience could be detrimental to the victim's personality, as reliving the incident may increase the risk of developing Post-traumatic stress disorder.

Conclusion- Umera Ahmed reveals her brilliance as a writer of novels in creating women characters that have fully developed her female characters. Whose psychological profile resonate with depth and complexity. In the context of Pakistan where girls have often been perceived as inferior being since birth, Ahmed's work challenges societal attitudes and delves into the human psyche in the face of trauma and adversity. Umera Ahmed through the character of Chiriya presented the harsh reality of the Pakistani society, where many children molested but could raise voice because some have no power to take action against the abuser. Through the character of Chiriya, Ahmed expresses the inside feeling of a survivor, the psychology of child destroy by the abuser but the society increase the pain of survivor and it developed the post-traumatic stress disorder and the guilt that haunt them for the rest of their life. It suffered massive psychological damage which further blocked many more way to growth of the child, if the victim not able to find support from the family and society.

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