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Impact Of Trauma On The Transition Of Personality In Anita Nair's *The Better Man*

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Abstract: It is crucial to grow after trauma which either breaks or makes. People attempt to adapt it as a phase of refining their personality. This article focus on the leading character who confront traumatic event in his life and how it moulds him to be better than before. Though the process of curing is challenging which is pivotal to keep moving in life. The present study builds up on Tedeschi and Calhoun's concept of post traumatic growth. It aligns with resilience and coping which is one of the core principles of his post traumatic growth. The title of the novel *Better man* is self-explanatory that reflects the growth of the protagonist after disruption of traumatic event in his life. The novel traces the healing and maturation of an individual, journey of getting away from the psychic stagnant. The present study deals with the positive impacts of traumatic event, how the event transform the personality and perception of the people in a productive way. It also illustrate the relevance of caruth's theory which posits the destructive and constructive power of trauma in an individual. It explores the internal landscape of the mind from stagnant to flow. The process of transforming into better version in terms of bounds back to regular life.

Index Terms - Trauma, Cathy caruth, Post traumatic Growth, Tedeschi and Calhoun, Transition

I. INTRODUCTION

Everything has its dual nature right from the object to the theories and every event carries its own destructive and creative phase. The article explores an individual trauma and how it moulds him to become better version in productive way. It incorporates the concept of Cathy caruth and Tedeschi and Calhoun to represent the journey of healing from psychic disruption. Though trauma and stress become part and parcel of our existence, it needs to be directed for self-growth rather than self-deterioration. Trauma Theory in literature was developed in the 1990s by scholars like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Geoffery H. Hartman. An interdisciplinary approach towards trauma was initiated by Cathy Caruth with her collection *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995). After her interest in trauma studies deepened, Caruth wrote *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* in 1996.

Caruth concept explains the ways in which the texts of psychoanalysis, literature, and literary theory both speak about and speak through the profound story of traumatic experience. In the novel, *The Better man*, I would like to explore the traumatic experience of the protagonist and how he developed himself through his coping skills. The article mainly focus on individual trauma and the growth after trauma.

Tedeschi and Calhoun introduced the term posttraumatic growth to describe both the process of development of positive changes in the struggle with trauma and the outcomes themselves. Posttraumatic growth develops as a result of the struggle with traumatic life events, the same type of events that are known to produce negative responses in many people. Posttraumatic growth must also be distinguished from *resilience*. Resilience is a broader construct that includes resistance or recovery from trauma but it does not necessarily entail the transformative outcomes that characterize posttraumatic growth. The term "growth" underscores that the person has developed beyond previous levels of adaptation, psychological functioning, or life awareness. It has a quality of transformation or a qualitative change in functioning (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2004, p. 4).

The Better man: A Journey of Transformation and rebirth after Trauma

The Better Man is a passionate yet introspective story about a long-repressed man who learns that the respect of others is worth nothing when one does not respect oneself. Anita Nair's first novel sets out to explore the theme of fragmented and suppressed psyche. Mukundan, leading character of the novel confront his childhood trauma in the form of his tyrannical father and his submissive mother. He is a recently retired government employee, beset by bitterness and self-doubt. The novel opens with the conversation between Mukundan and Bhasi. Mukundan returns his native after he gets retirement from his work. It is a metaphorical representation of revisiting the past which reminds the childhood trauma that bruised his naïve psyche.

A fundamental aspect of Caruth's trauma theory is the continual occurrence of trauma. It is apparent through Mukundan's narrative of the traumatic past. As Caruth states in her ground-breaking work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narratives and History* (1996), trauma as "In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other uncontrolled phenomenon"(11). The impact of trauma is long lasting and delayed response which either construct the person or destruct. The repetition and replay of traumatic event can be tuned with the help of coping mechanism which is innate in everyone.

In the life of Mukundan, his father Achuthan Nair symbolise tyranny that suppressed Mukundan and left him ambiguous and mentally disruptive. In his village he meets Bhasi, known locally as 'one-screw-loose Bhasi', house painter and self-appointed emotional healer of the village. It is this relationship that forms the main strand of the narrative. Bhasi appears as an external drive to ease the healing of the protagonist.

There is power house Rama Krishnan representing the thrusting, arriviste new order, Che kutty, the Marxist owner of the toddy shop, Krishnan Nair, the faithful retainer and Philipose, the aggressive postmaster. Valsala, the lonely wife of the ageing school master, falls in love with her neighbor Sridharan, and together they killed and dismember her husband in order to claim his insurance policy. But the police discover the plot and Valsala is led away in handcuffs in front of the entire village. These random vignettes form the backdrop against which the story of Mukundan's journey of self-discovery and healing takes place.

When Mukundan was thirteen, he discovered the manifest power of the written word. When Mukundan was so interested in writing, his father scolded him not to do that:

I was trying to write like he did; Mukundan whispered. Well then; it reads like a précis and nothing more. Don't you have anything better to do? Or is it that you fancy you are a writer? Achuthan Nair asked with a malicious grin, wagging his finger. Let me tell you, boy, banish that thought from your mind. No son of mine is going to waste his life trying to be a writer. Do you understand? He barked (TBM 16).

When his interest in writing blooms his tyrannical father cut it off before it develops into well form. Though it appears trivial, it creates the Mind block which has the long term scar in his life later the protagonist opt a profession of a librarian. Healing demands patience and trust. When a person is emotionally broken, his defence mechanism increase the resilient to overcome from the haunting event. As Chomsky's Language acquisition device structures in brain, the healing power is also in brain which is internal and innate. When Mukundan got illness Bhasi cured him:

Think of that dark gloomy forest as your past, what your life was till this moment. Guilt clung to your feet. Fear brushed your cheeks. But with me at your side, you found your way to this clearing toward escape, this purity of light. Kneel down and gather the dew from the grass in your palms. Cleanse your eyes, open them wide. Look around you now. This is how your life will be henceforth. This is how you will be as long as you live (TBM 193).

As if in a trance Mukundan moved towards the grass and did as Bhasi asked him to. He raised his wet cheeks to the skies waiting for some sign, some signal from the heavens. A gentle breeze laden with moisture and the fragrance of invisible flowers caressed his skin. After the sullen steamy forest, the breeze was a benign blessing sent down from the vault of heaven. Mukundan felt a great peace fill him.

As a child Mukundan had often longed to hide in one of the gigantic jars to escape his father's wrath. That was many years ago, but just this once there could be no harm in doing as Bhasi asked. Bhasi patted the rounded belly of the urn. Mukundan stepped closer and touched the cold clay of its flanks gingerly. He stepped into the jar. There was no room for him to sit or even squat on his haunches. Knees against his chest, arms wrapped around his legs, Mukundan crouched in the womb with the clay walls. It represents his rebirth from the tormenting memories of his dead mother. Bhasi's voice flowed over him. The fluid that would nourish the new being that sought to grow within him:

Mukundan, it is time you released your mother's soul. To cling to the dead is to curse them to exist without a body. Let her go. Let her find the destination that every soul is

headed towards, from the moment it is separated from the greater soul. You don't need her anymore. Within you are the genes of your ancestors. Of men and women who let nothing trample them down, let the genes of your ancestors talk to you now (TBM 198).

Crouched in the womb, Mukundan called forth his genes. He reverted to his original form a single cell. Bit by bit the embryo of this new man developed, Eyes, nose, ears the three sensory organs. Two hearts fused into one. Budding limbs, bones, genitals lulled by the warmth of the jar, fed by the soothing drone that washed over him, Mukundan felt himself dissipate. He closed his eyes to shut out the light. One could describe it as the process of formation of new being emerge from the traumatic past.

Surrounded by blackness, he felt himself split into several selves. All of whom had no claim to the one that had stepped into the urn. Disembodied, he was no longer anything that he had been before. He could separate himself endlessly so that he could be anything he wanted to be. A new man, a new life, afraid no longer and capable of so much more than he had ever dreamed of. The result of reborn happens through his defence mechanism. Though the direction for healing is obtained from Bhasi the transformation happens from within. The post traumatic growth is evident in the case of Mukundan's life. Though he got healed with the help of Bhasi it last for few months alone. After the death of his father he became lonely and it paves the way for his mental sickness again. What is worth mentioning in the second time is he took the effort of healing himself and found the way to become better. Because last time Bhasi was there to guide him but this time he is alone and he should take the responsible for his own life.

Mukundan made responsible for his own self and set his own choice. "Mukundan walked into the bathroom and examined himself in the mirror. He stared at his reflection, aghast. The nakedness of his self-challenged him unabashedly. He saw for himself who he really was" (Balakrishnan). A creature that had hidden his inadequacies by using his father's domineering methods as an excuse to explain his own weakness of character.

It is the second transformation which takes place in Mukundan's life that is more effective. It is a kind of solace, when he tries to amend his mistakes, "Mukundan felt his destiny flicker, leap, and change its course" (TBM 361). He explodes the community hall as well as his repressed psyche at the end of the novel. The psyche disruption is resolved and refined through his healing device which lies in every brain.

A selfish being whose world and happiness revolved around the appearing and nurturing of his fragile ego. A timid man who used his niceness as a façade to deflect attention from the fact that he had made nothing of his life. He was no better man than his father had been, "All my life I wanted to be my father's equal. But now I want more. I want to be better than him. I don't want to wake up one morning and discover that I have fritted way my life chasing after ephemeral dreams" (Sengupta). Post traumatic growth occurs in terms of resilience and this time Mukundan's coping mechanism transformed him into a better version. Trauma may not ends with growth it varies in accordance with people. However, through resilience and internal healing device people can overcome easily it is the choice they make.

Conclusion

The article explains the healing journey of an individual after confronting traumatic events in life. It makes reference to the concept of Cathy Caruth and Tedeschi and Calhoun. The significance of the study lies in elaborating the recuperation process using one's coping skills which is innate. People should be aware of utilising their inner strength to direct themselves to become stronger personality. Though individual varies in the concept, healing power is internal and the matter of choice. It is uncertain that post traumatic growth happens yet everyone has the power to reconstruct after every trauma they confront. It also state that trauma is repetition and inevitable but people can tune their smooth flow rather stay at psychic stuck. It lies again in knowing that healing device in other term we can call it as defence mechanism is internal. There are higher chance of reconstructing stronger self after trauma. Memory of people is just like waves it flows nonstop and sailor should be aware of the skills to travel along the waves.

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