



A GLIMPSE OF THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11 TRAUMA

Durga Patva

Research scholar

Department of English MEL

Lucknow University, Lucknow

ABSTRACT

Trauma is generally known as a mental illness in which victim leads his/her life apathetically. Traumatic suffering is the result of sudden change in life style or atmosphere, loss or death of someone dear due to any disastrous event, epidemic, terrorist invasion, incurable accident which compels someone to lead an abnormal life with strange behaviour. This paper aims to focus on the trauma caused by the terrorist attacks on World Trade Center of United States of America. The purpose of the paper is to highlight what is trauma? What are its features? How does it relate terror and violence? And what are its symptoms? World Trade Center and its destruction is the main theme in many literary texts written by many authors in the wake of 9/11 attacks. In this paper I will try to explore to answer these questions in the context of Cathy Caruth concept of trauma with the substitute reading of Freud and other critics.

KEYWORDS: Trauma, History, Memory, Symptom, 9/11 Attack, Trauma Fiction.

A GLIMPSE OF THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11 TRAUMA

9/11 event was an unprecedented phenomenon not only for the American history but for the whole world. It is said that this heinous act accomplished by 19 terrorists belong to terrorist group Al-Qaida and for their purpose they high-jack four American planes the first plane crashed into the North tower of the World Trade Center building at 8:46 and within seventeen minutes hiatus i. e. at 9:03 there was second plane infiltrated the South tower. After the destruction of these two towers there was other plane crash in the Pentagon and in the Pennsylvanian woods. According to a source taking from Ellen Verbestel's thesis the whole people approximately affected in this event: "There were 2974 casualties that day, not counting the nineteen hijackers who were killed during the attacks as well" (4). And "On the planes, 246 were killed, 2603 people from New York who were on the ground or in the towers did not survive, 125 lost their lives in the Pentagon and 24 people remain listed as missing until this day" (4). People of the world cannot forget this event as due to this horrific event they have lost their precious relations and dear persons.

Aftermath trauma of 9/11 and Literature after 9/11 both genre came in to existence as a aftermath result of 9/11 event and for some of the people 9/11 event brought the illness, post traumatic disorder generally known as trauma. According to a critic named Bent Sørensen, after post 9/11 event the victims enjoyed this traumatic syndrome that is "Certainly a whole new batch of trauma literature and trauma films has appeared, as American culture has attempted to come to terms with the cruel fact that apparently not everyone in the world loves the American way of life" (web). In this state of trauma or post traumatic disorder memory, history, narrative, repressed desires, haunted images, including media, culture, national and political environment, economic status, power and money all things play significant role. Though the term trauma is assimilated to the various nervous 'shocks', physical wounding, psychological damage, caused by industrial accidents and railway disasters, performed by supplement experience of an unprecedented event. Trauma theory has developed in 19th century it is the predominant theme in



9/11 literature. It may be said that Sigmund Freud is the first who brought trauma theory in light by sightseeing psychology and psychoanalysis the main concerning terms of trauma theory.

Trauma is the main theme for the post 9/11 novelists and to understand its impact on victims there is the need of detailed analysis of trauma there is a necessity to move toward a speculative genre so that one can also give clarification for the materialistic conditions of traumatized persons and other related perspectives of trauma, such as economic, cultural, political, and social and so on. According to Oxford dictionary trauma is “a mental condition caused by severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time” or it may be related to “an unpleasant experience that makes you feel upset and/or anxious.” A number of critics have presented their ideas regarding anxiety sufferings, mourning, grief, and trauma about the future of mankind after the 9/11 event. Trauma theory has very well delineated into the works of Geoffrey Hartman, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub, Spiegelman, Versluys and so many more.

Trauma cannot be described properly in words just as Versluys wrote about “Trauma” that it “is deemed to be unsayable, any saying of it may be seen as a cheapening, a reduction of its irreducible atrocity to something less threatening, more controllable” (11). And Spiegelman’s consideration seems the deepest because he defines trauma as, “an external interruption that follows witness, but rather as something that resides in the temporality of the witness and more exactly in time’s standing still” (Keniston and Quinn99). While Freud’s term for the trauma is that it is the “repetition compulsion: the belated and obsessive return of past events not properly assimilated into memory” (Lucy Bond 19). Freud also gives the concept of “shell shock” which did not properly equal to the background of 9/11 trauma. Freud used the term hysteria to this psychological trauma on the basis of women’s experiences in his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), later on this trauma came to be known as ‘Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder’ (PTSD):

In 1980, PTSD was classified by the American Psychological Association (APA) to explain the psychological symptoms exhibited by veterans of the Vietnam War and after ten years after the APA’s classification of PTSD in 1980, literary critics at Yale University established the foundations of contemporary trauma theory – shifting attention from the specifically psychical to the more broadly cultural (and particularly literary) dimensions of the condition (Lucy Bond 19).

Cathy Caruth in her own collections *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) summed up trauma that, “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, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Verbestel 10). According to Caruth trauma is like a pathology, consisting ‘solely in the structure of its experience or reception’, arising from an event that ‘is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it’ (Lucy Bond 19). Traumatic experience merges both representation and remembrance perhaps for this reason the event bothers its victim by belatedly repeated occurrences or images.

Entangling trauma to history Caruth says that the splitting of “word and world” becomes the origin of a structural trauma that exasperates all attempts at historical understanding because in some way “history itself becomes a chronicle of trauma and trauma ‘a symptom of history’” (Caruth 1995, 5) for “history of trauma” represents that “it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history that can



be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence” (Caruth 1996, 18). In Conversely just as trauma infers a history that is manageable only in its impenetrability for which Caruth’s argument is “the attempt to gain any knowledge about the past through testimonies such as those offered by the guides of the walking tour can herald only a failed act of witnessing that threatens ‘the traumatisation of those who listen’ (Caruth 1995, 10). In *Unclaimed Experience* Caruth accepts that any act of historicizing trauma is doomed to miss its objects; the emphasis on history in testimony ends up silencing trauma rather than recognizing traumatic events” (Keniston and Quinn 99). which takes the form of “repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event” (Verbestel 10). History preserves past memory and memory preserves history because history is the literary exemplification of traumatic and memorial narratives.

Memory plays vital part of connectivity between past and present for traumatic survivors. A French psychiatrist Pierre Janet observes about trauma, “Traumatic memory must be turned into narrative memory” (Vers.3) memory turns into narrative and narrative takes the form of history. Memory and history are interconnected to each other because in traumatic condition there was a past and there is a present too and memory works like a corpus of history by bringing past into present. Both history and memory have significant place in the trauma theory Just as Rosenfeld characterises memory as a “process aimed at working through the past suggests that the study and practice of memory are essentially dedicated to healing and redemption, and thus to closing down – rather than opening up – the historical record” (Lucy Bond). There is a well-known fact that after passing more than 15 years of the 9/11 attacks American people have not forgotten the event it is still a live event for them in their memory or consciousness. Recollection or memory is the ephemeral and vague also related to the culture in which it is verbalized, and repeatedly remediated by the form of its representation. Memories are the accumulation of social, cultural, political local, national, and even global cultures and happenings in which the processes of production and reception remains stored. According to Spiegelman, “the persistence of trauma of 9/11 takes the form of the event’s constant timeless present; even memory cannot place the event as past” (Keniston and Quinn 101) good and bad memories have their own place in the life of a man good memories make them happy and vice versa. But the memories cannot be easily forgettable related to such furious incident like 9/11 so “trauma-including memories” (Keniston and Quinn 102).

A traumatized person cannot overcome trauma in a day rather he has to pass different stages in healing for what Freud’s terms are “mourning and melancholia” LaCapra replaces these terms from “acting out” and “working through” (Verbestel 15). “Acting out” means traumatized person act according to his traumatic experiences and in “working through” he learns to share his traumatic experiences with others. In the phase of “Acting out or melancholia” past events trap the victim mind and the pathetic past events keep repeating “in the form of nightmares or compulsive behaviour” It is through this stage that the traumatized person learns to lead life with this traumatic situation. At this situation the traumatized person “distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future” (Verbestel 15). It is said that there are so many ways in which a traumatic “person can ‘act out’ his or her traumatic experiences”. In maximum cases “nightmares often take the patient back to the trauma unconsciously but even when awake and fully conscious, the patient can experience flash-backs of the traumatic event” this process of “acting out” in the words of LaCapra is a state “in which one is haunted or



possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes ...In acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene”(Verbestel 16). It means that the victim has to transact through extra unscrupulous dream because the “traumatic nightmare” keeps on haunting them, long after they have woken up” (16). According to LaCapra “the fact that the past is “relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription” (Verbestel 16). Well this hallucinations through “acting out” throws light uncontrollable behaviour and “amnesia, a lack of memory, or sometimes through hypermnesia, an excess of memory” (16).

While in the second phase from LaCapra’s point of view means “trauma involves the effort to articulate and rearticulate affect and representation in a manner that may never transcend, but may to some viable extent counteract, a re-enactment, or acting out of that disabling disassociation” (LaCapra 2001, 42 Lucy Bond). In other words, working through process represents that the victim is overcoming the traumatic consequences of the calamity. Versluys writes that “an active working-through of a traumatic loss, the former is characterized by inertia and self-hatred. The melancholic is apathetic ... incapable of love and achievement” (2009, 20). The healing process of working through represents victim’s ability to realize and to understand his or hers trauma which comprises a form of erasure that denies the very occurrence of loss in order to negate “the burden of having to reconstitute one’s self-identity under “posttraumatic” conditions” (Lucy Bond 35). Perhaps that’s why Verbestel writes that “these distressing experiences are not easy to handle (17) without the help of other people, insiders of outsiders to the event, which will be discussed in the subchapter on ‘working through” (18).

The symptom of trauma does not appear in a day as a replacement for its realization the victim has to pass different phases “in order to heal” according to some critics theme of absence and presence/ things before and after the unprecedented event play significant role in traumatic situation LaCapra says that “in converting absence into loss, one assumes that there was (or at least could be) some original unity, wholeness, security, or identity that others have ruined, polluted, or contaminated and thus made ‘us’ lose” (Verbestel 18). All the traumatic victims swing between the sense of absence and presence or after and before. They remain in depression for losing their real identity which got alienated due to the 9/11. They lead stoic life becoming indifference towards the living things, moral and cultural values. They remain stoic to good or bad happenings around them because they get unable to expose their mind everywhere what occurred or happened. It is written by Versluys that “Trauma makes time come to a standstill as the victim cannot shed his or her remembrance and is caught in a ceaseless imaginative reiteration of the traumatic experience” (3).

Trauma is mental illness which cannot be easily cured. Kai Erikson in his “Note on Trauma and Community” accepts that “Trauma can create community” and it is a “spiritual kinship” and a “sense of identity” (Sven 37). They (trauma victim) could not cope themselves from the incident. LaCapra further mentions that “when absence, approximated to loss, becomes the object of mourning, the mourning may (perhaps must) become impossible and turn continually back into endless melancholy” (18). They never forget the traumatic event. In trauma theory main focus is on the witnesses who organize terror of memory, extreme power and suddenly changed conditions mostly shelter of traumatic historical events reviving trauma not for themselves only but for all the people. “If, in one of its aspects, trauma can work to establish affective ties and thus support the formation of collectivities, the question arises about how the limits of this collectivity are set.” and “the trauma of 9/11 travelled to encompass the nation” (Sven35).



9/11 Trauma fiction is that genre of literature which reveals the instability or tension or complexities brought by 9/11 attacks. Trauma fiction also reveals the initial and outer catastrophic and earth-shattering experiences of incommensurability and uncertainty caused by 9/11 terrorist attacks. Don DeLillo, Ian McEwan, Philip Roth, John Updike, Louise Gluck, Frank Bidart, Robert Pinsky are some prominent trauma fiction authors. In the words of Anne Whitehead proficiently articulates numerous issues that subsidize to the existing interest in memory, “the recognition that representing the past raises complex ethical problems; the challenge posed to conventional narrative frameworks and epistemologies” (Lucy Bond 21). 9/11 trauma fiction engenders life-threatening approach to the past narratives or events that edge tragedy within emotional internal situations by assimilating trauma into conventional narrative structures, and by producing a uniform more or less unvarying portrayal of post-9/11 America. But “the difficulty of spatially locating the past and the hitherto unrecognised cultural diversity of historical representation” (Lucy Bond 21). On the other hand, Michael Rothberg recommends that “trauma fiction manifests two oppositional approaches to the problem of historical representation: a realist perspective” (21) which generates an “epistemological claim that [trauma] is knowable and a representational claim that this knowledge can be translated into a familiar mimetic universe” (Lucy Bond 21). In traumatic condition the victim does not realize it because trauma is not “knowable or would be knowable only under radically new regimes of knowledge and that it cannot be explored in traditional representational schemata” (Rothberg 2000, 4). The literature of 9/11 has been dominated by the notion of rupture, silence, suppression and sudden responses to this traumatic event from which the victims tripping out of the smoulder into a dissimilar world. In an article published in Harper’s in late 2001, Don DeLillo described 9/11 as an event that ‘changed the grain of the most routine moment’ (Lucy Bond 21). Lynne Sharon Schwartz’s *The Writing on the Wall* (2005), Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007) and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). The second one includes Lorrie Moore’s *A Gate at the Stairs* (2009), John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006) and Joseph O’Neill’s *Netherland* (2008), Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*, Frederic Beigbeder’s *Windows on the World* (2004), Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of no Towers* and so many others, all these works epitomize direct or indirect impact, terror and violence, pathetic portrayal of 9/11 event’s trauma, failure ability of victims’ to cope with reality. Each and every aspect of 9/11 terrorist attacks articulated into trauma fiction.

Traumatic or painful images persist in the experience of trauma look as if they are unalloyed just as Caruth qualifies, “the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (Lucy Bond 20). She is right by saying so because the traumatic event does not affect anybody at the happening time rather it works with the victim throughout the rest of his life being come into his mind again and again in the form of haunted images. The traumatic practise grows from “the delay or incompleteness in knowing, or even in seeing, an overwhelming occurrence that then remains, in its insistent return, absolutely true to the event” (Lucy Bond 19). The continuous occurrences of the haunted images disable him in realizing the realm of life. One can define trauma as a traumatic event which understands or represents a strange behaviour after a traumatic moment or occurrence or event or traumatic experience after the event. The sufferers of trauma always remains engaged with their fantasies, dreams they also remain aloof from the company of others and want to live alone without having anybody’s company. These entire things make them indifference towards the activities happening around there by making them unable in observing right meaning of the virtual present. Sudden change, repetition of images and witnessing all greatly influenced traumatic condition.



As it has stated above that trauma may be result of natural epidemic or scientific accident. Another related causes of trauma may be business loss or loss of something precious, death of love and relative, invasion, sudden or unpleasant change in life which the viewer or witness cannot forget throughout his /her whole life. The traumatic event which marks the cause of trauma always remains enliven into the mind of the victims and when they witnesses it they do not response it at random rather the reflection of traumatic events comes again and again into their minds which disable them to cope with the present happening. Trauma is like a mental shock; sometimes it becomes the cause of paralysis for the victims or sometimes freezes their feeling of emotions. The victims of trauma remain totally unaware about their traumatic illness or mental disorder. The victims adhere with the past and cannot accept the change brought by the unprecedented event because a live picture plays continuous in their mine. In this way memory and history play significant role of transsition in the process of acting out and working through. Gradually old memories turn into narratives and narratives take the form of history and when these narratives penned by the authors with their actual aspects they get stored in the literature by giving birth of a genre known as trauma fiction.

WORKS CITED

1. Bond, Lucy. *Frames of Memory After 9/11: Culture, Criticism, Politics and Law*. England: Mcmillan, 2015. Print.
2. Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995. Print.
3. Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. Print.
4. Cvek, Sven. *9/11: Event, Trauma, Nation, Globalization*. Zagreb: Filozofski Fakultet. 2009. Print.
5. Keniston, Ann., Jeanne Follansbee Quinn. *Literature After 9/11*. New York: Routledge. 2008. Print.
6. LaCapra, Dominick. *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2004. Print.
7. LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001. Print.
8. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper*. 7th ed. New Delhi: East- West Pvt. Ltd. 2009. Print.
9. Rothberg, Michael. *Traumatic Realism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Print.
10. Verbestel, Ellen. *Trauma and Post-9/11 novels: Foer, McEwan and McInerney*. Diss. Ghent University. 2010. Print.
11. Versluys, Kristiaan. *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*. New York: Columbia Uni. Press. 2009. Print.