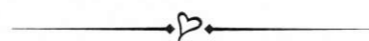


EIGHT

IS LITERATURE REALLY A TOOL TO HEAL YOUR TRAUMA? AN ANALYSIS BASED ON THE NOVEL 'NOT WITHOUT MY DAUGHTER'



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Abstract : *The more that the world advances, the more complicated the human mind becomes. People are currently suffering from severe depression as a result of numerous traumatic events. Trauma is frequently the result of an excessive amount of stress that transcends an individual's capacity to manage or assimilate the emotions associated with the experience. People use a variety of strategies to surmount the trauma they have encountered in their lifetimes. One such technique is writing about their experiences. Not without My Daughter is a novel by Betty Mahmoody that portrays the life of the author while she was in her abusive*

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husband's home at Iran. The crux of the story is embedded in its subtitle; "The true story of one woman's struggle to keep her child and win freedom from her husband's domestic violence along with her daughter." Writers use literature as a medium to convey the unfortunate events of their lives. By doing so, they seek some form of relief and also satiate the need for a record of traumatic events in general. The paper delves into the traumatic experiences of Betty Mahmoody portrayed in her novel to seek answer to the question "Is literature really a tool to heal your trauma?"

Keywords: *Trauma, Creative writing, Not without my Daughter, Autobiographies, Literature.*

The more that the world advances, the more complicated the human mind becomes. People are currently suffering from severe depression as a result of numerous traumatic events. According to the National Mental Health Survey 2015-16, 15% of Indian adults suffer from depression and require active intervention. Trauma is a form of psychological injury that results from a highly distressing event. Trauma is frequently the result of an excessive amount of stress that transcends an individual's capacity to manage or assimilate the emotions associated with the experience. A traumatic event consists of a single experience or a series of events with a sense of being overwhelmed that can be delayed by weeks, years, or even decades as the individual struggles to cope with the immediate circumstances, ultimately leading to serious, long-term negative consequences that are frequently unnoticed by mental health professionals.

Psychologically, traumatic experiences frequently entail physical trauma that endangers an individual's survival and sense of safety. Harassment, embarrassment, sexual abuse, employment, discrimination, police brutality, bullying, domestic violence, indoctrination, being a dependent of an alcoholic parent, the threat of either, or witnessing either, particularly in childhood, life-threatening medical conditions, and medication-induced trauma are typical causes and risks of psychological trauma. War and other forms of mass violence, as well as natural disasters such as earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, can induce psychological trauma. Long-term exposure to circumstances such as acute destitution or milder forms of abuse, such as verbal abuse, may trigger psychological trauma even in the absence of physical trauma.

People use a variety of strategies to surmount the trauma they have encountered in their lifetimes. One such technique is writing about their experiences. This has led to the creation of a multitude of autobiographical works. Not without My Daughter is a novel by Betty Mahmoody that portrays the life of the author while she was in her abusive husband's home at Iran. The crux of the story is embedded in its subtitle; "The true story of one woman's struggle to keep her child and win freedom from her husband's domestic violence along with her daughter." Writers use literature as a medium to convey the unfortunate events of their lives. By doing so, they seek some form of relief and also satiate the need for a record of traumatic events in general. Indeed, some authors, such as Frank, have argued that this need for testimony is not limited to traumatic experiences, but is a feature of postmodern contemporary culture in which subordinated people (such as women, the working class, ethnic minorities, and disabled people) have been "written on from the outside" and consequently "lost their voices" (Frank, 71).

Hence, 'speaking in a voice recognisable as one's own becomes increasingly difficult', speech proliferates in search of voice' and 'self-stories proliferates' (71).

The necessity for 'survivors' to testify to others about the truth of their experience is a central theme in literature on various types of trauma. (Tal, 120). As a writer on holocaust, Elie Wiesel has reported:

"The only role I sought was witness. I believed that having survived by chance, I was duty bound to give meaning to my survival, to justify each moment of my life. I knew the story had to be told. Not to transmit an experience is to betray it". (Wiesel, cited in Tal, 120)

Betty Mahmoody in her novel expresses the belief that she is a storyteller with a mission. Her responsibility as a survivor is to 'bear the tale', and the practice of storytelling is viewed as a 'personally reconstitutive act' (Tal, 121). As Frank (xii) argues, wounded people need to be cared for, but they can also become healers because 'their injuries become the source of the potency of their stories. Through such stories, 'the teller not only recovers the voice; she becomes a witness to the conditions that rob others of their voices' (Pg. xii). The novel completely deals with the events and incidents happened in the life of Betty Mahmoody after reaching the land of Iran, her husband's homeland. The novel explains the mental and physical torturing faced by Betty. Her husband Mahmoody and his family treated Betty as a foreign enemy. "His entire family, in fact, ignored me, turning their backs when I entered a room, or scowling at me. The fact that I was American seemed to outweigh my dubious role as Moody's wife" (Betty, 80).

Moody and his family kept her locked inside the house isolating her from the external world. She also had to face too much physical torture. She was repeatedly beaten by her husband Moody and was severely hurt. Moody once grabbed her, one hand digging into her arm, the other pulling at her hair. He dragged Betty in front of the family members. In other instance, he clutched her hair in his left hand. With his free fist, he pounded Betty again and again on the side of her head. He slapped her across the cheek with his open palm roaring "I'm going to kill you" (131). Betty also had to face the mental torturing like the separation from her family, the mental depression faced by her daughter Mahtob Mahmoody and the pain of separation from the home land. She once said, "I slipped further and further into melancholy" (81). Betty longed to see her sick father who was dying back in America. To see his daughter and granddaughter return to the United States, he was combating the disease to the fullest extent. Betty's query to Moody, "this story about the dying father ..." I cried. 'How can you keep me away from my father when he is dying? ...'" (183) conveys an indication that her father was battling the disease. Though Betty and her daughter Mahtob had a long period of struggle, they both managed to get out of Iran to America and went back to a happy life. Once Betty was able to control and regulate all her trauma bound emotions, Betty used writing as a tool to heal herself.

The association between trauma and story telling dates back to the inception of trauma itself. It is a widely acknowledged fact that the stories we tell about the individual and collective

challenges we face can be powerful healing instruments. This, of course, was the goal of Freud and Breuer's "talking cure," in which patient narratives help victims heal; as Ganteau and Onega point out, the talking cure helps the patient "give adequate expression to the shocking event, either in deeds or words, since, as they argued: 'language serves as a substitute for action; by its help, an effect can be "abreacted" almost as effectively'" (2014).

The 1970s witnessed the emergence of a group that allowed Vietnam veterans to share their experiences of the destructive war, as well as other domestic violence support groups where women discussed the abuse they and their children endured at the hands of their partners. Trauma and narrative are intertwined in each of these contexts and others. It is because of this when the trauma theory came into being during 1990s, the proponents of the theory argued that literature and literary narrative in particular have the power to communicate our deepest feelings with the external world. Geoffrey Hartman writes most precisely on this theme, pointing that literature can help us "read the wound" of trauma (1995: 537) and asking whether possibly trauma "can only be reclaimed by literary knowledge" (Caruth and Hartman 1996: 641). Thus, we can say that the creative nature of writing makes it ideally suited for conveying trauma. Any author's narrative will reflect the traumatic experiences he or she has endured throughout their lifespan.

The novel *Not Without My Daughter* focuses on the difficulties a mother and her daughter confront in a foreign land. Betty's spouse, Dr. Sayyed Bozorg Mahmoody, brought them to Iran in the name of 'a two weeks' vacation but later kept them under his custody in his hometown. Betty describes the trauma they endured during their eighteen-month sojourn in Iran in detail in the novel. During their time in Iran, they encountered both mental and physical hardships. She was placed under house detention for one and a half years. Her spouse severed all of her connections with the outside world out of concern that she would attempt to flee his custody.

Several accusations were levelled against the novel, claiming that its purpose is to present a distorted image of Muslims in Iran. In his review, renowned film critic Roger Ebert stated that the film made "moral and racial assertions that are deeply troubling" and that it "does not play fair with its Muslim characters. If a movie of such a vitriolic and spiteful nature was to be made in America about any other ethnic group it would be denounced as racist and prejudiced" (*Not without my Daughter Movie Review*). But Betty has made it clear that "Here, again, was evidence that Iranians could not be placed into a single category of fanatical American-haters. Miss Alavi was guileless in her approach, probably risking her life and certainly risking her freedom by even speaking with me" (Betty, 152). The author intended for the world to know what she has endured and for her to feel liberated from the trauma that her life experiences have caused.

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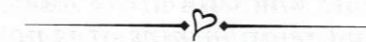
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NINE

TRAUMATIC GEOGRAPHIES: READING TRAUMA THEORY IN INDIAN SCENARIO



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Abstract : The word 'trauma' and the theory associated with it have gained importance in recent times. We have umpteen psychological, historical, social and literary illustrations that validate traumatic responses. However, this article tries to look at Trauma theory from an Indian perspective. Though the theory apparently seems to be inclusive, it is proved to be faulty since it employs a Eurocentric lens to look at experiences that goes beyond territorial boundaries. The lived experiences of the East not only make it clear that the theory is incomplete, but also calls for a radical social change. The article also aims to analyse a couple of traumatic incidents that occurred in the past.

Key Words: Trauma, Eurocentric, Kunan Poshpora, Political oppression, Religious intolerance.

Cathy Caruth, the renowned theorist on trauma, defines trauma as 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." (Unclaimed 11). Though it is almost impossible to study traumatic responses under some fixed standards and definitions, Caruth's definition has gained wide acceptance among critics and analysts and is now regarded paradigmatic.