

PORTRAYAL OF PERSONAL TRAUMA: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN TONI MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE* AND MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *DIVISADERO*

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Abstract: Using Technological terms, in this modern era, irrespective of the field, have become the part and past of the global culture. One can hear these terms from all the sort of society – from the poor and the rich, from the old, the young and even from the children. Psychology is no exception in this regard; the terms *stress*, *depression* and even *anxiety* are used in day to day life. The increasing usage of psychological terms in the day to day context unearths the alarming raise in psychological issues. This statement does not mean that the psychological issues had nothing to do with the pre modern era; mankind, it is true, has been suffering from psychological problems from the pre historic period itself. Devoting their life to machines, the modern men expose themselves to more and more psychological traumas.

Introduction: Trauma, as Cathy Caruth defines in her *Unclaimed Experience*, is '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 phenomenon' (Trauma Narratives and Theory n.p). Generally, a series of untreated traumas may lead to Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a severe state of psychological imbalance. The disorder has been resulted from an individual's exposure to one or more traumatic events such as witnessing the death of dear ones, serious physical injury or the sexual harassments.

Symptoms of Post-traumatic stress disorder can be classified into three basic types – a) Physical Symptoms, b) Intrusive Symptoms and c) Avoidant Symptoms. The first type includes Hyper vigilance, Startle response, insomnia, Memory loss and Mood irritability. The second called, Intrusive Symptoms, cover Distressing recollection of thoughts, nightmares and flashbacks. Avoidant Symptoms contains Avoiding specific thoughts, feelings, Activities or situations, reduced interests in significant activities and restricted emotions. (Flannery 11)

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Michael Ondaatje's *Divisadero* are the novels chosen for comparison. Since the selected works document the child abuse faced by young girls, it is justified that the novels can be given psychological approach. The researcher's primary aims are to trace out the personal trauma in the protagonists and to compare the portrayal of personal trauma and its impact on the victims.

Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* revolves around the sufferings of a young girl called Pecola Breedlove, who longs for the majestic bluest eyes before which her parents would hesitate to fight. Though racial discrimination is the predominant theme of this novel that comes under the category of historical trauma, the prime characters of this novel, especially the Breedloves, suffer mostly from their personal trauma. The story begins with the disintegration of the Breedloves, due to the insane act of Mr. Cholly Breedlove, who set fire to his own house. As a sequel, Pecola is sent to the Mac Teers, where she meets Frieda and Claudia, her true friends and innocent well-wishers. Her life is filled with traumas; ever scolding mother; never loving father; alien(ated) brother; sleepless nights; noisy days; muted sufferings. The girl is abused by her own father. The series of trauma leads to insanity. Mr. Breedlove runs away from his family.

Michael Ondaatje's *Divisadero* focuses on the character Anna, a young girl and her family- her father, Claudia and Coop. Both Claudia and Coop are the adopted children of her father. As Anna's mother died soon after the infant's birth, her father brought them up single handed (Ondaatje 9). Though her father dedicates his life in bringing up Anna, she longs for the presence of her mother, who is n more. The story starts with the narration of Anna, an eleven years old girl. The first part of her life is not as crucial as that of Pecola. But, Anna faces more or less the same personal trauma, after which her life is divided totally from her family.

On seeing Anna matting with Coop, Anna's father becomes more ferocious. With overwhelming angry, he beats Coop even after the later becomes

unconscious. Anna, who implores her father to leave Coop, gets annoyed. Knowing that her father will not stop beating Coop, Anna pierces a long piece of glass into his shoulder. The trauma, in fact, disintegrated the lives of all the four; Anna makes a quick escape from his father; Coop also runs away and becomes a gambler; Clair goes to work as an assistant to Mr. Veal, a famous lawyer. Though Clair visited her father often, she finds him so much isolated. As the author says,

Even now, he and Claire circled the episode that led to the absence of Anna in their lives, never speaking of it. It was as if the loss of Anna had consumed him and then exhausted him, until he had in some way concluded his emotion, the way he had probably done after the death of his wife, when his daughters were too young to know about it. And even if the pain and his fierce love of Anna were still somewhere, loose in his skin, he and this remaining daughter would be silent about it. The last time Claire had spoken of Anna, her father had raised his palm into the air with an awful plea for her to stop. There was no longer a closeness between him and Claire; whatever intimacy had once existed had always been engineered by Anna. (Ondaatje 104) Clair's life is, thus, fallen apart for no error of her. At last Clair identifies Coop with memory loss. She wishes to unite him with her father.

The selected novels, *The Bluest Eye* and *Divisadero* deal with the child abuse. Both the protagonists, Pecola and Anna, are presented, at the beginning, as a eleven years old children. They face more or less the same kind of trauma. Pecola is, in addition, a strong victim of racial segregation. The chosen novels have opposing perspectives on the same issues. In *The*

Bluest Eye, both Pecola and Claudia are Black girls, who are the victims of racial issues. Pecola firmly believes that white is beauty, whereas her friend Claudia hates the so-called 'white beauties'. In *Divisadero*, Anna's father takes her daughter's affair with Coop heavily, while Lucien Segura, the writer on whom Anna conducts research, considers the same issue as a part of nature. Though the fathers encounter similar situations, their responses are quite controversial. As the result of trauma, both the protagonists and the members of their family are disintegrated at first and later they are partially united. It is found out that the protagonists become avoidant personalities. As far as the depiction concerned, the authors make use of the same effective tool called flashback, one of the most mighty symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Toni Morrison does not want to manifest a character as a through villain. In her words, In exploring the social and domestic aggression that could cause a child to literally fall apart, I mounted a series of rejections, some routine, some exceptional, some monstrous, all the while trying hard to avoid complicity in the demonization process Pecola was subjected to. That is, I did not want to dehumanize the characters who trashed Pecola and contributed to her collapse. (Morrison X) Michael Ondaatje also does not want to dehumanize any character, even those with illicit affairs. Both Pecola and Anna long for their mothers' love. Toni Morrison and Michael Ondaatje portray the same personal trauma committed to the victims of same age and gender. Even some minor characters share the personal trauma. The invention of these similarities adds more curious color to comparative literature.

References:

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