Representation of Female Trauma and Voice in Khakhpour's Sick: A Memoir

Ghulam Abbas, Zahoor Hussain and Iram Rubab

Abstract--- Present study aims to illustrate the issue of female trauma and voice in the light of novel Sick: A Memoir by Porochista Khakpour. This study claims that there are some other issues in this novel as well and to lemmatize this novel merely as a memoir is wrong. The novel presents social issues how the females are considered in the male oriented society and how they are constructed. The identity of the females is exploited by the males. This novel has been presented by a female writer who belongs to Iran and who spent a great deal of her life as a sick woman and bore the jolts of life. She has also spent a great deal of money to cure the disease named as Lyme. Since this was the diseases related to the women so it was not dealt by the researchers conveniently. The novel presents a situation that is very grim in nature and depicts a grueling story of womanhood. It shows that most of the trauma that is with the females is created by the men and society. Both of them lemmatize the women merely to the four walls of their houses and the women cannot deny from this social action that is against them. The mental agonies which are faced by the women are very strict that deteriorate the health of the females. On the other hand, the novel also shows that there are gaps in the medical system of the world due to which people meet their eternal world. This novel is the story of the pain afflicted to the women due to being of woman. On the other hand the social, psychological, emotional impacts of this disease have been dealt in this study.

Keywords--- Trauma, Female Voices, Mental Health, Feminism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The novel *Sick* by Porochista Khakpour is considered to be a text loaded with the personal experiences of the writer as a sick person. It is considered to be the text showing merely the theme of being sick. The present study, however, claims that it is not merely a story of being sick or showing a sick person rather it is something else as well. It denotes the social constructs which are applied on the identity of a female. The novel is about the gap of identity that has not been given to the females and still it is meant to be filled. At the same time the study argues that the novel can be analyzed from the feminist perspective that has not been pinpointed yet. The novel is written by a female writer who is Iranian and remained sick in most part of her life. This is the novel that is solely based on the personal experience of the writer and her story. She spent a great deal of time as a patient, spent a great deal of money, and suffered a lot from a disease that has been named as Lyme. The writer was suffering from this disease and when it was diagnosed by the doctors it was on the last stage. It is the novel that shows an emotional journey but more than that it is a grueling story of womanhood and the sufferings that a woman has to face in society. Being a woman in a patriarchal society causes so many traumas in women where they have to be patient and lemmatized to their social bonds and cannot do anything on their own. Here, Porochista, at places shows that most of her sufferings

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are due to being a female. Her journey is emotional, but more than that it is mental in nature. The cure of the disease that she is suffering from is taking the drugs that may give mental relief. That is why she started taking benzodiazepine that further deteriorated her physical health. There are psychological impacts of this disease on the patient due to the drug that was being taken by her. It is story of the pain due to being a woman, a survival journey of a female and a story of transformation. The novel illustrates the colossal impacts of illness on one woman's life. The relationship between trauma and mental illness was first investigated by the neurologist Jean Martin Charcot (1889), a French physician who was working with traumatized women in the Salpetriere hospital. During the late 19th century, a major focus of Charcot's study was hysteria, a disorder commonly diagnosed in women. Hysterical symptoms were characterized by sudden paralysis, amnesia, sensory loss, and convulsions. Women comprised the vast majority of patients with hysteria, and at the time, such symptoms were thought to originate in the uterus. Until Charcot, the common treatment for hysteria was hysterectomy. In Salpetriere, young women who suffered violence, rape, and sexual abuse found safety and shelter, and Charcot presented his theory to large audiences through live demonstrations in which patients were hypnotized and then helped to remember their trauma, a process that culminated in the abrogation of their symptoms (Herman, 1992). The study explores the trauma faced by women generally and Porchista Khakpour especially in the novel *Sick*.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term trauma was formulated in 1880 by the impregnation of Psychology and Humanities. A French Neurologist, Jean Martin Charcot (1889) was the first one who developed the relationship between trauma and mental illness. These people have borne a certain grades of painful happening which are repeated and have left a permanent effect on the psyche of the individuals are normally taken as trauma. So far as trauma and psychology are concerned, it is asserted by Freud (1953) that traumatic events are often extremely harmful in nature and those events seem to occur again and again for the individuals who have faced them. Swandal (1975) is of the view that one of the themes of the novel is social and political responsibility. The individuals are baffled and horrified by the incidents which are troubling in nature. On the other hand, the individual is not responsible for the painful deeds rather they are sometimes outward and can be called the decree of their fate and he is unable to control them. Pennebakar (1992) is of the view that there are the situations called dissociation which means that children make a safety valve which makes the individual able not to die because of heartbroken situation. So, trauma does not deal with internal action rather it may be an external one. Kolk is of the view that there are traumatic engravings in the memory of the individual. He further argues that all these flash backs are in the form of abstract things like that of emotions, feelings, tastes, sensations of the body smell (Kolk, 1996). Hartman (1988) is of the view that traumatic situation is not only concerned with wounds only rather its circle is more than this. In traumatic situation there are so many other concepts such as misrepresentation, assimilation, colonization, disappearing of cultures, effects of catastrophe, repression, psychological consequences of war, holocaust, poverty and verbal abuse are categorized as traumatic in nature. It has move away from trauma related symptoms and they are part of normal human survival that is really the human instinct. He is of the view that trauma is "adaptive mental processes involved in the assimilation and integration of new information with intense survival emphasis which exposure to the trauma has provided" (Turnbull, 1998, Pp. 9-26).Sandra et al. (1999) argues that according to psychology trauma occurs when something unexpected occurs to the person and the result of this unexpected thing is that there is a sudden blow that is emotional in nature. However, the study agrees with this view and argues that mental condition of the characters in the mentioned novels become different and they live under a condition of constant stress that do not leave them and affect their psyche (Sandra, 1999). Prince (2002) there can be several cases which may cause trauma but there are few common facts such as there is often an assault of human rights and assault of the person's ideas about the world. So the utmost sense of confusion and sense of insecurity in the mind of the person. It can also be examined that in some situations the individuals are deceived and disenchanted, they are assaulted in an unlooked way. Perry (2003) is of the view that psychological trauma is more grievous than that of the wound on the body. Storr et al. (2007) is of the view that the tone of the novel is autobiographic as it depicts the traumas as well as the enharmonic situations in the life of writer. She, as a person as well as a writer, explains the futility of being a woman and living in that society where females are considered to be a low generation. Whitefield (2010) is of the view that Trauma is a deeply deplorable and agitating experience and psychological trauma hurts psyche as a result of the horrifying painful event.

Burshteyn et al. (2012) is of the view that the novel by Porochista Khakpur is about the boundaries and their collapsing due to the horrid realities that can never be falsified. Funda (2006) is of the view that the novel *Sick* is a memoir that is spiral through time rather than a moving straightforward. The nature of the novel is that it travels between past and present. Jeronemy (2013) describes that there is another theory that is called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) it says that the childhood trauma experience may enhance the threat for psychological disorder that cause mental stress and drug addict. Alizaet al. (2014) asserts that there are so many connotations related to trauma where different individuals define trauma differently. This is not an objective fact rather it is subjective experiences of the individuals. Neisser et al., (2018) is of the view that it is fact that the novel is an anecdote of female trauma and the writer is the victim of this trauma herself. Further it is illustrated that to mention Khakpour as an escapist is altogether wrong. Kaufman (2018) describes that there are so many traumatic situations in the novel where one of the factors is the acceptance of bitter reality, a social as well as personal.

III. METHOD

This research is based on Caruth (1996) model of *Unclaimed Experience*: Trauma, Narrative, and History. Caruth is a professor of human letters at the cornel university. *Unclaimed Experience* is splendid work, written with admirable clarity, power and economy. The work has been integrated for a number of different fields: for Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory, Theory of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Literary Theory, Literary Study, Cultural and Historical Studies and Ethical Study. This research study is based on Freud's *Beyondthe Pleasure Principle* and his views on trauma. Trauma theory requires the forms agony that remains lasting in the lives of certain people. These people have bear a certain grades of painful happening which are repeated and have left a permanent effect on the psyche of the individuals are normally taken as trauma. These events are often extremely harmful in nature and those events seem to occur again and again for the individuals who have faced them. The individuals are baffled and horrified by the incidents which are troubling in nature. On the other hand, the individual himself is not responsible for the painful deeds rather they are sometimes outward and can be called the decree of

their fate and he is unable to control them. So trauma does not deal with internal action rather it may be an external one (Freud, 1953).

Another theory that is called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), says that the childhood trauma experience may enhance the threat for psychological disorder that cause mental stress and drug addict. Childhood problems related to heightened neuroticism scores during adulthood (Jeronemy, 2013). Through the development of a child, there is a proper way of growth that takes to the least complex to the most complex. During this process, the neurons of the people are increasing and they get the information and make the signals according to the outer surrounding. In the same way, they are accumulating the information from the outer environment to make the decisions according to the circumstances. This thing allows the brain to react to the environment and also make survival (Bruceperry, 2003).

The selected novel would be analyzed thematically. The researcher mainly focuses on the female character which is the representative of migratory people for the present study. The main character is the writer herself. The researchers examined the traumatic and psychotic situation from which the narrator has to pass through during her stay in foreign country. The narrator has been the victim of Lyme disease throughout her life. By the analysis the researcher would be able to see the living experiences of the Diaspora in the foreign land. Further the researcher would be able to see that how the females are the victims of double standard constructed by male.

IV. DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

The narrator of the novel is of the view that she used to live in the continuous traumatic situation and the product of her life which she got from the experiences of the text of the novel that there were trains, planes around her and they left an impression on her life. She tried her best to distract her attention but it became a matter of routine to feel them that also left an impression and made her a person living in anxiety. The text of the novel depicts this factor in the following way:

My first memories are of pure anxiety, buses and trains and planes with my two parents, who I was cognizant, were just two clueless beings—a twenty-sixyear-old, a thirty-three-year-old, both often in a panic, occasionally in tears. Furiously I told stories to distract them, books the only toys we could fit into our two suitcases. (Khakpour, 2018, p. 1)

One of the basic thing narrated in the novel is the depiction of Iranian people as they are diasporic community when they live in the premises of California. The novel also asserts and depicts the situation of the Iranians as they are merely tools in the hands of those called as natives. Although they were settled there since a long time but the fact was that they were still diasporic and colonized in the strict sense of the word. This is nothing less than a trauma that the narrator thinks that she is regarded as diasporic community there in California. The text of the novel illustrates this fact in the following words:

No one who knows this study has ever let me forget this fact. Like most Iranians we ended up in Tehrangeles almost. The portmanteau referred to the enclave in the West Side of Los Angeles that had become home to an Iranian diaspora, mostly refugees on political asylum like us, but also many other wealthy Iranians who simply felt at home in the Southern California of luxury and hedonism, far before a siege on their homeland would force them out. (Khakpour, 2018, p. 2)

The text of the novel shows that there are things that damage the psyche of a person. The writer of the novel illustrates that revolution; poverty and war are the things which damage the personality of a person. All these factors are also relevant with the life of the writer as well. It is illustrated in the novel that these are the factors caused a damage to the life of the writer as well. in the text of the novel this factor which caused a trauma of memory and physical health of the writer has been illustrated in the following way, "Of all the things that could do damage—revolution, war, poverty in this new land—why would anyone think of a kaneh?(p.9)

Since the writer is an Iranian so she presents the view how her family was behaved when they used to live in California. She asserts that they had to live with the feelings of inferiority complex, when they were in California and all this was due to the difference of color. Everything was considered to be a blond with a shiny hair and beautiful rosy cheeks which her family did not have. However, the family of the writer was poor as well as anxious about so many things. The writer asserts in the novel that she had witnessed the wrinkles at the face of her brother when he was born. According to her those, wrinkles were the signs of old age or the poverty. This is what has been presented in the text of the novel:

Everything was tan in a way my brown skin could not compete with. Everything was blond in a way my bottleblond mother could not re-create, gilt upon gold upon gilt. Everything was carefree and smiles, gloss and glitter, and money to no end. We, meanwhile, were poor and anxious and alone. When my brother was born in our neighboring city Arcadia, California, in 1983, I watched his pink squirming body stowed into a giant felt red heart.(Khakpour, 2018, p. 10)

Khakpour asserts a different kind of experience as she got admission in a college. She thinks that there were feelings of aloofness at the college and she was thought to be lesbian students at college. Partly it was due to the low and poor health where everyone thought that she was the girl like that. This was a strange feeling that she was to live with. In the college there was a great deal of sexuality where there were sprouted the feelings of being alone and to explore her body. This was the freedom that she enjoyed at college but living the feelings of being different was a very sad and pinching. It swallowed her feelings of freedom like termite. In the text of novel this factor is presented in the following way:

And finally, I knew that it was known for its lesbians—I remember one of my first female crushes, a beautiful Middle Eastern punk girl named Kara who was the star of our school's jazz band, once mentioned wanting to go to "Sarah Lesbian College." There was much of sexuality I felt I needed to at least have the option to explore outside of the supervision of my parents. (Khakpour, 2018, p. 13)

The novel is nothing less than an anecdote of a struggle for survival. The novel's tone is tragic in nature. The novel shows that every step of life is an examination of life that either makes people learns. Life teaches lessons and at most of times the life looks to be miserable. Every step of life has got a new taste of its own. Life teaches more when there is poverty and one has to create the opportunities for his own. This is the thing that was happening to the

writer in the life of New York. Khakpour illustrates the story of her struggle when she was in her early twenties. The novel presents this situation in the following words:

Most of the following years of my twenties were miserable, a seesaw of struggling to survive in New York and then running home to LA and then escaping back to New York. I was always very thin, out of anorexia or poverty or something else, but didn't have the mind-set to think about it. (Khakpour, 2018, p.27)

Khakpour is of the view that it is a very traumatic situation when the parents of someone call him with the name of vagabond or a wanderer. The most pathetic situation is that when one is called with the different and very low names which are not only acceptable to the person only but also to the whole society. She tells that at times her parents used to call her with the names of a vagabond or a wanderer that used to leave an impression on her memory and more than that it used to leave a discomfort for the writer. The parents used to think that there was wonder lust in the writer that was actually not the part of her habit. During the time of her escape and exile, this situation left a great deal of effect on her psyche. The text shows this situation in the following words:

My parents always called me a wanderer and poked fun at my comfort with a sort of homelessness, while also realizing my wanderlust was something chronic, less leisure than discomfort. It dismayed them, and they blamed themselves, pinning it on the turbulence of my first few years of life in escape and exile. (Khakpour, 2018, p. 43)

The novel is presenting a traumatic situation with the help of situation called as homelessness. Having no property to buy the lands where they may develop their own dwellings. Although she has spent a great deal of life in the premises of United States but the feelings of homelessness was the worst of all. She was forced to live in a tiny compartment which she was to share with her brother. There was also a twin bed in the room. Overall the situation was very gloomy but she was left with no option but to live as if there is poverty and compromise with the circumstances. This factor of Khakpour has been presented in the text of the novel as follows:

Coming back home felt like something else altogether this time around. First of all, home was not home. My family had bought their first property since coming to the United States and we were no longer even in my hometown— instead of Pasadena, this was more affordable Glendale next door, and this was no longer the room I grew up in, but a spare bedroom that was a sort of compromise between my brother's and my rooms, a generic little space, with a twin bed and a sort of impersonal ambiance. The place was cleaner and more modern, but it was not comforting in the least. It felt like I had walked onto the wrong set. (Khakpour, 2018, p. 103)

On the other hand, the story of trauma with the writer does not end here, rather there are more worse situations in the novel that the writer has to undergo. One of the basic needs, as directed by the writer of the novel is to have an identity and name in the world that is missing in the wake of the writer. Porochista is of the view that in almost all parts of her life she has been craving for an identity that was missing in her personality. Her true identity was as a female and more than that as a victim of epidemic disease called as Lyme. At the same time, she was fed up of having the drugs at all the times to cure artificially from the pain. She needed more and more money to feed herself even the pills that were needed to cure her disease. However, in the text of the novel this factor has been represented in the following words:

I wondered about that. A part of me felt like it absolutely did need a name, that that had been a missing element of my life now for years—this odd sense that something no one had found was very off, that it might forever go unannounced. Another part of me thought I understood her—what would be the use? More doctors, more pills, more money, more roller coastering through the medical system? When did knowledge actually help in this area? I really didn't know what the right path was, but I decided to follow her alternativeone. (Khakpour, 2018, p. 70)

V. CONCLUSION

At the same time, the questions of the study have been answered and the objectives of study have been achieved. The first question of the study was to answer how do females deal with the traumatic situations in general and in the light of novel Sick in particular? This question has been answered aptly. In the study, the situations of the females have been dealt from both perspectives like an individual in the light of the novel and also in general. The study has come to conclusion that in general all the females are the victims of society. They are here to suffer the pains and hardships of life and all the comforts come in the part of a male. The females are meant for inner and the males are meant for outer. The female body is considered to be a burden of society or at least of family (see section 4.25). There comes a time when the body of a female becomes hateful for her. In so far as, the condition of the Porochista Khakpour is concerned, she is alive but from inside she is dead. She thinks that she is herself a loathsome figure who has arrived in the world to bear and suffer. This thing leaves her into an alarming situation that is called to be a traumatic situation. This thing leaves an impression on her mind and she becomes psychologically sick. There comes a time when she never feels any pain for the body but from mind. She becomes mentally weak and in this way, she becomes a victim of society. This is the thing that has been represented in the text of the novel Sick where it has also been claimed that one cannot be physically sick unless he is mentally sick. So the conclusion is that the females are made psychologically sick at first and then they are become mentally sick and this is traumatization of the situation. After the analysis of the text, the criticism on the novel and theory of trauma it is concluded that females are the mostly victims of society. They are always in search of an opportunity to raise their voice for different purposes where the most important is the quest for identity and equality of rights. Here, in the wake of this novel it is asserted that the disease which the protagonist is suffering from has not been dealt properly as it is the issue of a female. The writer asserts that if Lyme disease would have been having any concern with the male body then there would have been research on it and there would have been a solution or cure for it. This is the way that the females of society, not of Iranian society but most of the societies are victimized. At the same time, the amount of response which she gains from the doctors is somewhat different than that of the males. However, the novel concludes as a whole that it is meant for the equality of rights that leaves traumatic effects on the mind of a female if she is not dealt equally in society. The trauma here is that the each individual of society deals with Khakpour in a different way that is very pinching. The tone of the each individual with here is very sarcastic. Everyone is there to make fun of her and feels that she is a burden on the society.

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