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9/11 Trauma: Nostalgia and Psychic Health in Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and Delillo's *Falling Man*



Muhammad Haris *

Abdullah Hassan †

Sajeel Ahmed ‡

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Abstract: *The trauma of 9/11 makes individuals nostalgic and leaves indelible marks on their psyches. Their personal and political worlds are shattered. Rediscovery is an extravagant problem for them. 9/11 changed their definition of self. The paper analyses changes in their behaviour due to hysteria and its effects on their societal relations. Their distress and anxiety change their healthy relationships with each other into an unhealthy state. Now every individual is disturbed, feeling desperation on mental as well as physical level, having cracking headaches, and so on. This paper tries to study how the mental landscape of individuals changed due to catastrophic events. Mental health disturbance is equal in both Americans and Pakistanis, both the novels show us a story of traumatized people and how they become nostalgic.*

Key Words: 9/11, Trauma, nostalgia, psychic health, memory, stress, shattered self

Introduction

9/11 refers to four airplane hijackings by 19 Al-Qaeda terrorists for suicide attacks on September 11, 2001. Four aeroplanes were hijacked to aim at different targets in the United States of America. These attacks cost America heavy destruction of both infrastructure and humans. It is considered the most tragic incident in U.S. history. During these attacks, almost 3000 people were killed in New York. These attacks were also tough on police and fire departments of targeted sites. More than 400 firefighters and police officers died while tackling the destruction of the attacks. 9/11 had long-term psychic consequences in daily activities, work loss, functional impairment, nostalgia, trauma, and identity crisis for U.S. citizens and immigrants. It had severe psychological impacts on the minds of people which caused grief, loss, fear, anxiety,

depression, and emotional distress in them. This article is focused on the trauma, nostalgia, identity crisis, mental illness, and destruction in both East and West.

Literature Review

Peter Morey (2011) states that post-9/11 fiction deals with trauma narratives, and in Hamid's novel, *Changez* and Erica's relationship is based on Erica's fixation with her dead lover. Erica is a co-relative of America; her nostalgia is similar to the U.S. fixation with past cultural roots after 9/11. She becomes gaunter and their relationship falls apart when *Changez* finds himself unwelcoming in America. The role of imagination is so important while analyzing post-9/11 fiction. In an article (Gee, 2021) researcher states that imagination is one of the important aspects of an individual's

* BS English Literature, Department of English Literature, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

† BS English Literature, Department of English Literature, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Department of English Literature and Linguistics, University of Education, Faisalabad Campus, Punjab, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Haris (BS English Literature, Department of English Literature, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: mhharis842@gmail.com)

identity. In *Falling Man*, Lannie's remembrance of her father is a remembrance of pre-9/11 New York by Americans. Our capacity to remember past or present can be destroyed by mental ill health and 9/11 gives a destructive blow to American's imagination.

Behavioural changes of individuals after 9/11 are also discussed by many researchers and critics. Aziz (2018) observes that 9/11 brought a dire change in the dealings of local people with immigrants. Muslims faced an identity crisis and racism after 9/11. And due to one radical group whole Muslim community is being held responsible. According to the researcher, 9/11 started the process of religious radicalization as before Muslim families were living happily but 9/11 turned their society into a racist society. Nazneen and Chanu wanted to settle in a foreign culture by embracing a new order but 9/11 shattered their dreams of home and the rise of Islamophobia caused identity problems for them.

Racial discrimination and identity crisis play important role in the lives of individuals after the attack. Azeem (2016) states that due to 9/11 Pakistani American Muslims faced a new racial discrimination, intensified by exceptional security interventions in their personal and social lives. When all Muslim community is accused due to the 9/11 attacks the immigrant's delocalization takes place and due to this, they are deprived of their locality, deprived of their right to form and belong to a community. The researcher explains that it is not only political identity that has undergone shifts but their identity and their sense of being has been deeply impacted. Immigrants are tied to their past but they are unsure about their future as he gives the example of Changez from Mohsin Hamid's novel. Furthermore, 9/11 caused a clash between origin and adopted homeland and this clash created a gap in the personal identities of immigrants. The immigrants are victims of radicalized hatred and they are considered enemies of the U.S. in the eyes of natives. Rediscovery of self is a very important issue for the victims of 9/11 because the identity crisis paved its way in the lives of people.

Theoretical Framework

Human behavior is not learned but social patterns and childhood experiences shape it. Freud discusses that human behaviour is the result of three components of the mind. The first one is the Id, which operates in the unconscious mind and seeks immediate fulfilment of instinctual needs. The second component is the

Super-ego, which is related to the social and moral environment of the individual. An individual's conscience is developed by the super-ego. The third component is the Ego, a logical and conscious part of the mind. The ego plays a very important role in balancing Id and superego. The mind is a place where thoughts, emotions, and memories are stored and these lie outside the awareness of the conscious mind. The psychoanalytical theory explains that every behavior has an underlying cause and these causes take birth in the human's unconscious. According to Ferenczi (1921), psychoanalysis must be given first-hand in therapy as it draws a clearer investigation than any other method in the survey of war neurosis. An adult's thought process and actions are rooted in childhood experiences and an adult's personality is shaped by the internal and external environment. The primary source of an individual's behaviour is his unconscious mind. Freud (1948) states that an individual forgets real events but remembers only thoughts and dreams of the trauma. Trauma acts as a bridge to link an individual's understanding and cultural understanding because an individual's understanding is the result of a collective understanding of a trauma. According to a researcher (2021), trauma not only inflicts pain physically but it has dire effects on psychology too. He can't ignore the psychological effects of trauma throughout his life. Nostalgia has severe effects on psychological functioning. It divides human psychology which creates a sense of double consciousness in an individual. It is a psychological disorder which is very offensive in many cases. According to Roderick Peters (1985), it affects the overall personality of an individual and it involves all emotions which are associated with our psychology.

Humanistic critics state that psychodynamics is a very deterministic approach as it depends upon the unconscious mind. So, it is the weakness that it leaves no room for personal agency which is called free will. However, individuals have no power over disorder because conflicts that lead to disorder are unconscious, and there is nothing in their control. Psychodynamics is often compared with the crisis theory of Gerald Caplan (Caplan, 1964). According to the theory, any event or change which is threatening to the human mind is defined as a crisis. Freud implies that crises are turning points in mental health development. Crisis theory deals with stress and its impact on the human mind. If an individual's self-definition is always constructed about that of others, and an individual's behaviour is shaped by the inter-

subjective context, then how it was possible to describe a crisis as a personal event and not as one inextricable from the individual's environment." (Yerushalmi, 2010, p. 293). A crisis is a time when an individual wants to get back to his/her pleasant past and it creates trauma in the individual.

Traumatized Self

9/11 caused severe trauma for its bearer as people from America and Pakistan both faced its traumatic results. Erica in Hamid's *Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Hamid, 2013) passes through a difficult time of her life after 9/11. The incident causes many issues for her as she becomes a traumatized character and cannot sleep due to her trauma. Her psychic injury forces her to find other ways to live and she tries to seek escapism through writing. Trauma engages one to search for new ways of thinking and she tries to write a book as "[she] would love to remain alone, and have a separate place for writing" (p.21). Her stress due to the tragic attack on the towers forces her to be always at home, she cannot live alone. Loneliness causes more problems for her; she misses her home when she is not there as in the novel writer portrays her situation; "[she] would not stay here for long "because "[she] cannot live alone (p.21). 9/11 completely changed her behaviour. She questions Changez many times about his home to lessen her trauma. She surprises Changez with her behavior and Changez is unable to understand why her behavior is changed. In one place he assumes that Erica's behavior has changed due to the 9/11 incident. The attack on her city pushes Erica into a maze of problems. She is unable to find any solution to her distress. The attack creates an injury that makes her life uneasy and in the end, she decides to kill herself. Changez questions one of the nurses of the hospital where Erica was living her last days of damage. Her traumatized self becomes the cause of her death.

Changez himself is under the influence of psychological laceration due to the explosion in New York. At first, he was a very regular and punctual worker at the company where he works but after 9/11 his behavioral changes surprised his colleagues and company. He never goes to work late but: "Day after attack [he] is late from office and due to oversleeping he is suffering in headache too (p.114). After the attack, he feels stressed and unsatisfied. He is unsatisfied with his work and life. He wants to quit his job and a good salary for his home. His family tries to

stop him but he wants to "rediscover his past life" (p.199). 'Rediscover' shows that before his laceration he was satisfied with his life, he was in good condition but due to the catastrophic event he lost all his satisfactions. He tries to rediscover all the lost things but due to his psychological damage, he thinks himself a traitor. He yearns for his home as his university improves his personality, but "[he] could not forget the pleasure of tea which he enjoyed in Lahore"(p.15). Before the falling of the Twin Towers, he was satisfied with his life in America but now the disastrous event forces him to feel another way. Now he leaves America and comes back to Pakistan against the will of his family.

Likewise, Lianne in DeLillo's *Falling Man* (DeLillo, 2007) is living a happy life before 9/11. And after that, she experienced a psychological injury. All her happiness vanishes and she becomes a distressed personality. She always feels distress and stress. Her life before Falling of Towers was good but now, she is seeking satisfaction and she is unable to find: "some happiness, some relief, something. Show something" (p.108). She does not understand her situation due to stress. Her optimistic self is dead and she has lost all hope in life like Erica. She feels, "Nothing is next. There is no next. This was next" (p.12). She feels afraid and lost due to the falling of towers and now, there is no reason to be scared anymore because it was past. But the effects of the incident forced her to be afraid. She wants to erase the effects of that incident, she wants to make her past wrong, to reject her past and move on. She wants to disbelieve her past. Due to her traumatized self, she is unable to understand herself: "All she [demands] is an eye to share her feelings" (p.126). Lianne's trauma disturbs her so much that she is unable to sleep at times like Erica. Traumatic effects cause her mind's disturbance as "[she] wakes up in night" due to the disturbance of mind (p. 96).

Self-experience of the incident leaves a mark on Keith's memory. Before the incident he was living separately from her only child and wife but now after experiencing the incident and trauma he is back. He is in his wife's house, living to escape from his memory. Keith wants to forget his conscious past and tries to erase his memory. He is unable to forget his past, always looking into his memory and seeing the street out of the window. Due to his psychological injury, he is not thinking in clear units but his mind is in a raw motion, thinking day and night nothing but his past. 9/11 causes acute trauma for its observers. The incident causes serious damage which makes life

uneasy for those who experienced it and forces them to live in a lost state. Everyone feels lost and gone. Optimism dies in them and they feel pessimistic about their current situation. A black girl in *Falling Man* is feeling strange after the incident as "[she] thinks that all is lost" (p.44). She is unable to walk, feeling like a lost captain of the ship in a storm, and sitting in her room as an idol.

Nostalgia after Trauma

Nostalgia involves an individual's whole self, one's thoughts, memories, and moods are closely linked with nostalgia. It creates an ambivalent and confused self which distorts the pleasure of the present. Trauma and nostalgia are closely linked because it is one's trauma that forces one to think about the past. After the tragedy, individuals yearn for their good days. They lost their solid self. When Erica is passing through a nostalgic state, Changez questions her that did she feels solid. Erica can't identify her true situation; "sometimes, but not really" (p. 55). The attack; "agitate [her] past that had settled" (p. 94), and now her brain is mixed with what previously had been ignored. The tragic experience of 9/11 pushes her to think about her lost lover Chris: "[she] keeps thinking about Chris" and cannot sleep at night, her mind spins in circles and she assumes that: "[she] has been thrown back a year" (p. 92). It's her catastrophic experience that completely alters her into a weak and timid Erica. When she is experiencing nostalgic times Changez meets her. He says that she is changed, her vividness is absent, looks like a split person and "[she] looks like an outsider" (pp.116-117).

As Erica falls into her past to find lost Chris, same in the case, Lianne experiences nostalgia for her father. Her father was dead long ago, but after the attack, she starts remembering him excessively. Lianne is working with a doctor who is working on victims of 9/11. Lianne reads their writings about the incident and falls into her past. Furthermore, the fall of towers haunted her and marked a stain on her memory which is very difficult for her to erase. It looks like bits and fragments of towers are wedged in her so much that it is difficult for her to bear them, "[she] thinks that bits of bodies come with such force after the attack that they are trapped in the body of any individual who is near (p.16).

Changez's trauma makes him nostalgic for his native land. Now he thinks about his home, about his native meals, and confesses that America is good in

many senses: "but [he] cannot forget the enjoyment of tea in Lahore (pp.15-16). He realizes that he needs a proper base to stand but he doesn't know "either [he] belonged to New York or Lahore" (p.168). His self is divided into his present place and birthplace. It was his state of mind, his nostalgia that he thinks that America is also suffering with the disorder in which he is suffering. Similar to Changez, Kathie is haunted by the incident. He survives from his physical injuries but memory of the incident is always with him. Falling of towers, cries, and screams are still close to him and these all are haunting him like Changez.

Self and Psychic Health

The psychological self is the embodiment of our personalities, viewpoints, and behaviours. Psychic health is also disturbed when the physical body is affected by trauma. Erica is struggling with her mind, she is in a conflict and her illness is not a physical illness but, "Hers was illness of the spirit" (P.159). Her mental disturbance is the cause behind the stagnation of her thoughts. She wants to work on her book but, "every time [she] tries, [she] gets upset"(p.126). Changez knows her illness but he does not know how to eradicate it, "[he] desperately wants to erase her from the problems of her psychology" (p. 119). She is trapped in her mind's conflicts and it causes her to feel like, "an oyster" and gradually, "[she] turned into a pearl" (p.59). Now, the pearl has been taken from her and she feels a blank space perhaps she wants to live with her past for some time. Like Erica, Lianne is struggling with herself. She doesn't know how to proceed further because her inner self is bound by the incident. After that she is in a conflict of mind, she reads a line in which she is afraid of her being and "[her] own reflection is present in the sentence" (p.91). She considers herself dead in the outer world due to conflict in her inner world.

Changez's self is divided into two and he is unable to find his actual sense. Trauma forces him, to think about his situation because he is feeling twoness due to double consciousness. Internal conflicts are preying upon him and he is mingled in many affairs. In his conflict he tries to make, a "bridge to connect his personal dream and the destroyed world in his surroundings" (p.106). He is trying to cope with inner sadness which forces him towards his past and it creates double consciousness in Changez. He is in a state of war with himself, his mind is divided between present and past, and then, he decides to leave his

present (America): "Because [he] missed [his] home and pleasure of home where [his] ancestors lived" (p.58). Keith like Changez is struggling with his mind and memory. His mind is divided like Changez and he is suffering in double consciousness and he feels himself as a wrong thought or dream wrapped in falseness. He tries to talk with his wife, and tries to control his thoughts and memory because "it was a way to stop being double in himself" (p.125). Past incidents create trauma but trauma is always at work. It divides the individual's self and forces them to think about the past while living in the present. It creates a confusing state of mind and then starts a battle for survival. Distress situation of the mind and its division causes many psychological issues and one's psychic health is disturbed as a result.

Personal VS. Political conflict

Trauma's effects create a link between the individual's self and cultural group. One's personal and political world alters due to its effect. Because the self is not detached from its surroundings, human behaviour is shaped by their social environment. So, personal conflict often becomes political conflicts as after 9/11 Changez surprises his friends by saying that "[he] wishes to become head dictator of an Islamic country with nuclear power"(p.33) and it shocks his friend circle. As a result of inner turmoil, every character behaves controversially with others. When Changez goes to meet Erica's family, her mother meets him with a disgusting look in her eyes. He is just a friend of Erica but due to his Muslim background and beard her mother is offended; "[Erica] does not need a boyfriend. She needs a friend" (p.125) He is frightened by her beseeching look and desperate tone. He is lost somewhat and the absurdity of his situation forces him to think that he is living in a wrong space.

The incident causes many problems for Changez, and his psychic health is disturbed. He is thinking in two hemispheres and thoughts of the past constantly haunted him. As his self is crumbling his political views are staggering. At the start, he is so impressed with New York's buildings but now he is yearning for Lahore and its historical monuments. He does not show any sympathy for the casualties of 9/11 perhaps "[he] is taking the attack as a symbol that finally someone has succeeded in destroying America" (p.83) and Changez considers deaths and images on television as the character of a fictitious story. In the end, Changez concludes that reconstruction of self is

very difficult. He thinks 9/11 is a defeat for America like characters in *Falling Man*, are observing the same. Martin is very disturbed due to trauma; "we are sick of America and Americans"(p.145). Martin thinks America is a dangerous place to live due to his, "broadcasting of thoughts", he thinks America is an irrelevant place and in the near future, no one is going to believe in America as "[America] has lost the center" (p.147).

Conclusion

The in-depth analysis of *the reluctant fundamentalism* and *falling man* creates a vivid picture of 9/11 effects. The incident causes trauma, nostalgia, and psychic health issues for the characters. The incident causes severe trauma which forces individuals to think about the past. People consider themselves lost and depressed. Trauma disturbs their psychic health and mental illness creates personal conflicts. Before the incident, everyone is satisfied with their condition but the catastrophic event creates a sense of dissatisfaction in people. They start questioning their existence, want to redefine their self and yearn for their past.

Erica is happy with her life but after 9/11 she experiences nostalgia for her lost Chris. Her behaviour has changed and she is unable to focus on work. Her physical health starts decreasing due to her mental illness. The illness of spirit and nostalgia make her a distressed personality and due to traumatic effects, she kills herself. The same goes for Lianne, she is lost and distressed after the incident. Her father was dead long ago but 9/11 pushes her in nostalgia for him. She is always thinking about him, she wants to talk with him. A tragic sense trapped her and she is unable to define her existence. Psychic conflict is the same for Changez too. He searches for satisfaction and settlement in America after 9/11. He wants to rediscover himself. He is trapped in nostalgia for Lahore, its historical buildings haunt him continuously. He wants to quit his job and come back to Pakistan. He is trying to rediscover his lost self. Kathie is also the victim of the tragic incident. For him, everything is lost like all others. He recovers his physical injuries but mental injuries remain alive in him. He is still in his past, seeing images of falling towers, always thinking about the tragic day. His mind's world changes due to a disastrous experience that alters his physical world. He is a disbeliever of the world around him and it creates a sense of loss in him.

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