

## Post-traumatic Stress Disorder in Hanif's *Red Birds*

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### Abstract

*The present study endeavors to analyze the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Muhammad Hanif's Red Birds, focusing on the depiction of PTSD felt by major characters in the novel. The psychological approach along with a descriptive qualitative method, has been used for evaluating the signs of PTSD in the backdrop of Raymond Benedict Flannery's theory. The significance of this study is to appraise the individuals about the hazardous outcomes of trauma. If trauma shows the symptoms of arousal, intrusive, and avoidance, the result is a post-traumatic stress disorder. Using this mechanism, the novel has been analyzed, and then the relevant data has been categorized according to the tenets of the theory. The study discovers the required symptoms of PTSD, i.e., intrusive, avoidance, and arousal, experienced by the characters. Mother Dear develops more intrusive symptoms as compared to arousal and avoidance symptoms, whereas arousal symptoms are more influenced by Momo.*

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### Introduction

Since the inception of mankind, it has been a well-known fact that traumatic events like wars or disasters do change human behavior and activities. Many theorists claimed that contemporary fiction, to a large scale, is a fiction of trauma. The epoch of the twentieth and twenty-first century has witnessed many shocking tragedies like world wars, despotic mass terror, social and religion-based wars, civil wars, revolutions, and various other forms of terrorism. Henceforth modern society is continuously troubled with trauma. Fictions related to war and disasters provide psychological damages mostly. As such, fiction writers look into the minds of frenzied characters that went through during or after the devastating war.

According to [Caruth \(1996\)](#) trauma is not found in a sole intensity or early event in a person's past, but also in the intellect that its undigested being - the fact that it was not understood in the first place - comes back to haunt the victim later on. The roots of trauma are associated with Sigmund Freud's theories during

the end of 19th-century writings. [Freud \(1895\)](#) defines psychological trauma as the main reason for conditions of hysteria amongst the women they experience; this is mainly because women at a tender age were sexually abused. He further explains that the real trauma comes to the surface when the women reach puberty. Their trauma comprises two parts, in the former stage (juvenile) having voluptuous contents without sense, the second or later stage or in (adolescence) having no voluptuous contents but full of voluptuous meanings.

Freud asserts that due to the latency of feelings, women go through the real intensity of events. He calls this detention 'belatedness'. Following this idea of temporal detention, [Codde \(2010\)](#) emphasizes that Freud's concept regarding delay is related to the trauma of child abuse can also be applicable to other kinds of trauma too. Nevertheless, when soldiers returned home during World War I with a horror of war that made Freud adjust his theories. This phobia happened to some soldiers who had never been to the battlefield experiences. This paved the

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way for Freud to take place the traumatic flashbacks, but it is not compulsory for the survivors to have experienced real traumatic situations. In World War II, such a situation occurred once again, but during the Vietnam War, this disorder was formerly considered. In this way, this important phenomenon, which was not given preference, got formal status from the American Psychiatric Association in 1980 as a special term, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Before 1980 trauma was especially used for combat veterans, then it was examined and taken into attention. But in 1980, modern trauma studies came to the surface, and the American Psychiatric Association (APA) gave special status to PTSD and contained it in its certified Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III). The current trauma explorations got a reputation because of the complications confronted by Vietnam War heroes. Then, famous psychiatrist Judith Lewis Herman issued her book "Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror" in 1994. She did her best to include, especially war interrelated syndrome and other types of trauma triggered by war, terrorism, and internal and sensual violence.

After that, trauma studies have been getting more familiar with trauma and PTSD and have brought them under the same umbrella. Like trauma experiences triggered by violence, conflict, sexual and internal viciousness. Herman (1994) explores that sexual and war trauma pursue the same route if critically observed their way earlier. She declares that in the background of world war1, trauma was considered as shell shock or war phobias, but studies regarding Vietnam war veterans coined the term PTSD and replaced other terms.

An example can be seen during the 1990s when some noted writers took those subjects which were relevant to the Holocaust, World War II, and the Vietnam War. The indifferences from developed to lesser developed countries are the sheer violation of the discipline of trauma. [Caruth \(1995\)](#) calls this sort of attitude neither productive movement nor relevant to a peculiar group of people. She says mostly we are concerned about each other's serious issues. [Inayat \(2016\)](#), contrary to a certified description of the history, writings about war grief give detailed views about the mental ruins of war. As the fiction writers glance at the thoughts of those upset characters but the analysis of their literary pieces are no longer considered objectively.

Literature is one phenomenon in human life. It does not have any exact meaning. It can be read in diverse ways. Whatever the writer states in fiction is the image of actual life. In fictional work, a writer through language denotes the intellectual level of a fictional character which further shows the character's behavior and attitude. Fictional work is the representation of the author's emotions and thoughts. [Endraswara \(2011\)](#) states that human life is the favorite topic of psychology and literature; psychology studies humans in real life, while literature is all about the representation of humans in society. Similarly, according to [Sulaiman \(2014\)](#), there is a close relationship between psychology and literary work.

Furthermore, [Kennedy \(1983\)](#), for analyzing a literary piece of work, Psychology can be used as a support to it. Novels, besides drama and poetry, are such types of literary works, which express life. Reading a novel can enhance aesthetic values. A novel is a tale in prosaic style; the novelist strives to generate meaning during our reading, and we experience life.

The novel, one such type of text, attempts to provide a somewhat broad analysis of psychological issues related to trauma. In the story, the characters confront numerous occasions in life that are actually the psychological characteristics of characters. Associated with the approach of literature, trauma is one such inner aspect of humans. [Harvey \(1965\)](#), in one of his books, describes trauma, "A precise term denoting extremely inner and emotional reactions to the main losses, like the death of close ones (132).

A sensitivity that is ascended by the distressing experience can cause a life-threatening response to equally one's physique as well as psychology. In other words, trauma is certainly the incident that can probably occur over the loss of something very precious, like missing some dear one, the demise of a close relative, or those individuals who are close to your heart.

Though psychological action causes trauma, that affects us psychologically, and we react irrationally and emotionally in each situation. Such a consequence is called PTSD. This can result in a distressing incident that inflicts your well-being or takes you to a helpless end. The development of PTSD varies from one individual to another individual. Whereas PTSD symptoms commonly grow in the times or days following

the distressing incident, sometimes it may take more than months or ages before they come to the surface.

On the basis of the above illustrations, the researchers developed the investigation of post-traumatic stress disorder in Hanif's novel as the title of this study. Here, the researchers concentrated on the elements of PTSD confronted by central characters. The psychological approach is used by the researchers as it is associated with the psychological feature of the characters in the novel *Red Birds*.

[Harvey \(1965\)](#) though shock can be triggered by psychological action, the consequence is more ascended to somebody's thinking. Nevertheless, mental shock occurs. This is the tangible effect that will be confronted by somebody who has got a hurtful feeling. That result is acknowledged as PTSD or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder PTSD can progress subsequent distressing incidents that lurk your protection or make you feel abandoned. PTSD grows inversely from individual to individual. Whereas the signs of PTSD utmost normally mature in the hours or days succeeding the distressing events, in some cases, it can take months or even ages before they come to the surface. PTSD is in portion an ailment of pragmatic and emotive escaping, as people with PTSD effort to bound or evades experience to trauma-related indications and related emotive responsiveness (Boden 2013, p. 65).

[Galea \(2005\)](#) says PTSD is the utmost generally considered and possibly the recurrent and devastating mental syndrome that happens post distressing incidents and calamities. Herrmann (2012) defines PTSD, a serious syndrome that can grow after experiencing a life intimidating incident and is chiefly categorized by reviving the hurtful incidents, anxious overexcited provocation, and evading trauma-related indications. According to [Smith & Segal \(2008\)](#), PTSD is a disorder that can mature subsequent distressing incidents that looms your security or make you feel deserted.

[Flannery \(1999\)](#) defines PTSD as a distinct physical reply that is dissimilar from the conditions of chief despair and the physique's general biological answer to day-to-day life stress. [Smith & Segal \(2008\)](#) view those distressing incidents which can take to PTSD are rape, war, car or plane crashes, natural disasters, kidnapping, missing of a loved one, assault,

sexual or physical exploitation, and juvenile negligence.

Based on the explanations above, it can be determined that PTSD is a syndrome that comes post distressing involvement, which is distressing that ascends inside a human being. Traumatic events, violence, kidnapping, the death of a family member, and rape are the major factors that encourage PTSD. The one who has PTSD will get some ailments like flashbacks, nightmares, evading events, thoughts, places, or spirits that recapture the trauma and feel nervousness. It can appear as if you'll never get finished with what occurred or feel usual again.

### Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

According to Davidson (Etten and Taylor, 1989), PTSD is categorized by three groups of signs, which ascend after someone is vulnerable to hurtful pain. The groups are:

- a. Frequent reviving of the distressing incidents (e.g., memories, hallucinations, disturbing feelings)
- b. Evasion of trauma-related stimuli and distressing of overall receptiveness.
- c. Constant hyper-arousal (e.g., hyper-vigilance, overstated surprise reaction)

According to Herrmann, PTSD principal symptoms can be categorized into three groups: first, the reliving symptoms, which comprise repeated disturbing recollections of the incident in the form of disturbances and hallucinations as well as painful visions. Ecological indications retelling patients of the traumatic experience generally cause those reliving indications. The second symptom group includes avoidance and distressing symptoms: affected patients avoid feelings, opinions, events, or people connected with the distressing incident. Moreover, damage of memory of significant features of the occasion and emotional upsetting might happen in PTSD patients. Hyperarousal symptoms establish the third PTSD symptom group containing inter alia sleep complications and an overstated surprise reaction.

### Theoretical framework

Individual trauma is described as an incident, series of incidents, or collection of situations that a person perceives as materially or passionately detrimental or life-threatening and has long-term negative consequences for that person's working

and mental, social-emotional, or divine happiness or physical.

In this case, the researchers found Flannery's theory of trauma the most suitable theory to analyze by using a psychological approach based on PTSD, which is relevant to the discussion. This theory helps the researchers to find a deeper understanding of the effects of traumatic experiences that affect someone's behavior in the future. Prof. Raymond Benedict Flannery is a professor of psychology at Woods College of Advancing Studies at Boston College. According to [Flannery \(1999\)](#) every person undergoes PTSD in a different way; there are three chief kinds of symptoms:

### Intrusive Symptoms

1. Constant refreshing of the incidents in imageries, views, memories, fantasies, and hallucinations
  2. Performing and detecting as if reliving the occasion
  3. Suffering in the existence of figurative notices
- Avoidance Symptoms:
1. Escaping places and views figurative of the trauma
  2. Difficulties in remembering the events
  3. Loss of concentration insignificant events
  4. Constrained sentiments
  5. Sagacity of foreshortened future

### Arousal Symptoms

1. Hypervigilance
2. Overstated surprise reply
3. Sleeping disturbances
4. Striving for concentration
5. Bad temper or angry explosions

Based on the above-mentioned indications, the researchers reach the conclusion that the Intrusive, avoidance and arousal symptoms are all present in people who suffer from PTSD. The recalling of the incident in photographs, emotions, recalls, daydreams, and nightmares is one of the intrusive symptoms. Victims may behave or feel as if they are re-experiencing the incidents, and they may be distressed when confronted with situations that remind them of the events.

Avoidance symptoms include escaping places and feelings connected with the trauma, complications in the recollection of the events, obvious damage of concentration in other important parts of the individual's life, limited

sentiments, and the sense of a shortened future. Arousal symptoms contain problems with sleeping, hyper-vigilance, overstated surprise response, trouble focusing, and outrage. Their trauma will always distract them, and they always sense they are in the threat.

The information is collected while taking into consideration the elements of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder theory and arguments based on PTSD from the original text and research papers. To identify the symptoms of PTSD in various characters in the texts are discussed, analyzed, and arguments are developed. For the current study, the researchers have taken a Pakistani novel, *Red Birds* (2018), by Mohammad Hanif. The research questions described at the start of the research have been sensibly responded to in the light of conclusions acquired through text analysis.

As PTSD comes after traumatic experiences, it is because of happening traumatic incidents like missing or kidnapping of a loved one. The one who has experienced PTSD will get some ailments like a terrible dream, evading activities, flashbacks, thoughts that repeat of the trauma, and feeling nervousness. It can seem like one will never get over what occurred or sense usual again.

Hanif's novel "*Red Birds*," tells a story about the main characters that have PTSD and show the symptoms of PTSD. The dialogues and narrations are the objects of study that are used by the theory.

The researchers found that there are three symptoms of PTSD that are faced by the main characters, Mother Dear and Mutt, in the book. The signs are intrusive, avoidant, and arousal symptoms. The dialogues which are relevant to those symptoms are as follow:

### Intrusive Symptoms

The continuous re-experiencing of the experience in photographs, emotions, memories, daydreams, and bad dreams are known as intrusive symptoms.

### Mother Dear

"They should have taken me. Why did I agree to send him on his own? Why didn't I insist on going with him? ([Hanif, 2018, p. 219](#)).

"She wants to fall asleep while quietly listening to him snore. She wishes to smother his

bread in more butter and sugar.”(Hanif, 2018, p. 46 & 47).

They bombed our house first, then kidnapped my son, and now you're here to console us (Hanif, 2018, p. 48).

“If you do not give my son back, you will learn the meaning of loss”(Hanif, 2018, p. 47).

“You know why I am a really bad mother? I am a bad mother because most nights I lie awake and ask myself why we didn't send Momo?” (Hanif, 2018, p. 222).

"I am not just a bad mother; I am a monster. I have lost one son, and now I am wishing I had lost another one because he would have had a better chance of coming back. As if he deserved it more" (Hanif, 2018, p. 222).

### **Mutt**

"Yes, my leg is fractured, and I am dying of hunger and thirst and shame" (Hanif, 2018, p. 56).

"There is nothing to lick but sand. I can smell hunger approaching me. Yes, someone even hungrier than me is walking towards me.”(Hanif, 2018, p. 31).

### **Momo**

“They disappear into the kitchen. Yes, that same kitchen where Mother had a last chat with Bro Ali and shoved me out. She never told me what they talked about. I am not gonna ask because that'll bring more tears, and she'll start spitting God's names at me.”(Hanif, 2018, p.42).

### **Avoidance Symptoms**

Avoidance signs include a pronounced lack of concentration in other important facets of one's life, limited feelings, and a feeling of a foreshortened future.

### **Mother Dear**

Last year my Ali would wake up from a nightmare and sneak into my bed and hug me. Now he is a fully paid-up official secret(Hanif, 2018, p. 228).

Remember when you punctured Ali's football, and he hit you, and I hit him. I shouted at both of you (Hanif, 2018, p. 228).

'I'll hold on to my dagger, but I'll talk first. There can be no victory if I don't take my firstborn home (Hanif, 2018, p. 243).

### **Arousal Symptoms**

Sleep disturbances, hyper vigilance, and overstated surprise, focusing issues, and violent eruptions are all arousal signs.

### **Mother Dear**

“So, henna in my hair to keep a cool head and a rosary in my hand to keep my heartbeat steady”(Hanif, 2018, p. 248).

Major Ellie

"I'm surrounded by a howling wind. A million dead warriors appear to be cursing their adversaries

and the mothers of their enemies.” (Hanif, 2018, p. 57).

### **Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

PTSD is a distinct physiological response from serious depression and the body's normal physiological response to everyday stress. PTSD affects everyone in a unique way. The researchers explain the three key kinds of signs experienced by Mother Dear, Mutt, and Momo in the novel. They are Intrusive Symptoms, Avoidance Symptoms, and Arousal Symptoms: Mother Dear's dreadful memories that take her to despair. She admits now she is a failed mother. She faces inner critical conditions like desolation and despair. Her flashbacks, narrative tales, in her mind, active memory is combined with fantasy to convey her previous trauma from the encounter. She is currently going through a difficult time in her life and plans to go back in time to avoid painful circumstances. Her first trip into the past takes place when she meets her son Ali, who has been away from home for a long period.

This replicates the mother's dissatisfaction with her elder son in life. Thus, the novel normally brightens the involvement of trauma-stricken people. It also reflects the dilemma of Mother Dear's confused and unfair mind that establishes the process of revelation of actions. The mother does not struggle to avoid the dilemma that has contrived her. But she keeps on missing her son every passing moment. It looks; she had not a normal life out of her aching recollections. In her existing recollection, she reveals how her life was completely changed. She is haunted by a distressing incident of the



past that has deprived her of discovery and peace in her existing life.

### Intrusive Symptoms

The continuous re-experiencing of the experience in photographs, emotions, memories, daydreams, and bad dreams are known as intrusive symptoms. Victims may behave or feel as if they remember the incidents, and they may be distressed when confronted by situations that remind them of the trauma. Characters in the book experience the following intrusive symptoms:

#### Mother Dear

The researchers can describe the symptoms in many characters based on the findings above. Ali, Mother Dear's missing son, sprang to mind. She recalls the horrible experience, which continues to agitate her emotions, and she occasionally recognizes that her son is extremely difficult to locate.

According to this information, Mother Dear is suffering intrusive symptoms of re-experiencing thoughts about her missing kid. Her thoughts wander to an event that reminds her of her long-lost son. If she recalls the experience, she will be upset and powerless. It's a sign that she's suffering from PTSD, as shown by the intrusive symptom of re-experiencing feelings that trigger memories of the painful experience.

Momo remembers Mother and Ali forcing me to walk outdoors after they had their last conversation in the kitchen. I wouldn't inquire as to their topic of discussion. If you questioned her, she would reminisce about that event. Her feelings of nostalgia are caused by the consequences of her tragedy. It indicates that she has PTSD, as evidenced by the annoying indication, i.e., she acts as if she recalls the occasion.

Mother dear recollects her past memories of how she used to see his son snoring, applying butter and sugar on his bread. Whenever she sees anything related to her son, she remembers him and becomes more exposed to trauma. It shows that she has got PTSD in the form of intrusive symptoms, as severe stress in front of things that remind her of trauma.

Mother Dear has an intrusive memory that gives her great distress when she recalls how her son was kidnapped, and her house was bombed. After doing such sorts of damage, you are here to

make me all ok, I will not let you go until I come back home.

Mother Dear misses her son with such intensity she even threatens the visitor lady if she could not recover my son, I will go to any extent to harm you and your company. It means she has got PTSD and wants to do anything for his son's recovery.

Mutt, the philosopher dog, is angry over the maltreatment of family members, especially with Momo. Momo does not care when Mutt's leg gets fractured, and he has no access to food and water. In this way, the poor dog is on the verge of dying. Here Mutt possesses the elements of intrusive symptoms of trauma, thinking about the past how he used to help Momo, and now he treats him inhumanly. This sort of treatment gives great distress to Mutt.

Mother Dear curses herself thinking upon her decision because they did not send Momo instead of Ali. A mother re-experiences the trauma of how Ali was kidnapped, and she faced hardships. But even then, many times, she thought we should have sent Momo instead of him. This sort of thinking adds troubles to the mother; it shows she has PTSD in the form of intrusive symptoms.

Mother Dear intensifies her bad attitude as a mother as she has already lost Ali, and in the process of recovery, she might lose another son, Momo. The memory of such thoughts pricks her conscience time and again. It shows she has got post-traumatic stress disorder which is displayed by intrusive symptoms; she always thinks about how her son was kidnapped.

Mutt talks about the atrocities which are given to him by Momo's family. He is being deprived of food even though his leg is fractured. In the deep desert, he has nothing to lick but sand. So, he longs for food; wherever he smells food, he considers someone hungrier coming towards him.

### Avoidance Symptoms

Avoidance signs include a pronounced lack of concentration in other important facets of one's life, limited feelings, and a feeling of a foreshortened future. Characters in the book experience the following avoidance symptoms.

Based on the findings, the study interprets that Mother Dear remembers how his son, Ali used to wake her up silently, when she was a victim of a nightmare and then hugs her with

love. Now trying to avoid thinking that he has gone and getting handsome pay. The writer found that she has avoided symptoms though remembers the good time with him, but at the same time she consoles herself that my son got a well-paid job. In this way, trauma goes around her mind, although she tries to shun it. It shows that she has PTSD, which is shown by avoiding symptoms, i.e. escaping her thoughts associated with her trauma.

The analysis can explain the symptoms in this data. Mother Dear remembers how Mutt made Ali's football punctured, and Ali hit you, but that very moment I hit my son Ali. And then I taunted both you and my son Ali. Here, Mother Dear repents and recalls why she rebuked him for his slight mistake. The analysis of the data shows that Mother Dear has avoided symptoms as she remembers how she taunted and hit her son, Ali, but she tries to avoid saying that incident directly. That incident disturbs her; it shows she has posttraumatic stress disorder, which is displayed by avoiding symptoms like avoiding her thoughts related to hitting his son.

Moreover, it can be surmised that mother Dear threatened the Hanger officials; "I will put my sword ready but will prefer to talk first. I will go to any extent for my son's recovery. And there will be no victory if I could not take my firstborn back to my home: (97). This shows that Mother Dear has avoided symptoms since she wants to get her son at any cost, for which she will even pick up a sword. As she always remembers how her son was abducted. It shows she has PTSD, which is displayed by escaping symptoms that Mother is shunning wishes and feelings related to her trauma.

### **Arousal Symptoms**

Sleep disturbances, hyper vigilance, and overstated surprise, focusing issues, and violent eruptions are all arousal signs. Characters in the book experience the following arousal symptoms:

Based on the findings, the researchers found that Ellie has arousal symptoms that his trauma makes him afraid. His feelings are terrifying him and lead him to feel that he is in danger. His mind is not properly working because of his trauma. This is the result of her painful experiences, which bothers his mind. It shows that he has PTSD, which is shown by the arousal symptom, specifically a response which disrupts his mind

and makes him feel that he is in a difficult situation.

Mother Dear looks very angry and sad. She always thinks about her son and makes herself gloomy. To ease her sad behavior, she relies on things related to religion and Nature. It shows she has PTSD in the form of arousal symptoms, namely a victim of sadness.

The study concludes that the symptoms of PTSD are experienced uniquely by Mother Dear, Mutt, and Major Ellie based on their symptoms. The intrusive symptoms are more prominent than the avoidance and arousal symptoms. Intrusive symptoms may include up to ten data points, avoidance symptoms up to three, and arousal symptoms up to two. The novel mirrors PTSD through its key characters: Mother Dear, Mutt, and Momo. These characters represent individuals anguishing from post-traumatic stress disorder in the actual world. The study examines post-traumatic stress disorder mirrored in the novel together with the symptoms, reasons, and retrievals of posttraumatic stress disorder assisted by Flannery's theory. Through an investigation, it is identified that Mother Dear is a victim of PTSD after missing her son, Ali.

The traumatic events which Mother Dear witnessed while missing her son are the streaky of her PTSD. And it haunts her life until he gets home back. She experiences repeated terrible thoughts about whether her son is alive or killed by American soldiers.

Meanwhile, Mutt is passing through the amalgamation of negative thoughts and the inability to experience positive emotions; he has always a pack of complaints about his master, Momo, who treats Mutt cold heartedly. Such sort of treatments makes Mutt hopeless and a victim of PTSD.

To conclude, the novel *Red Birds* revealed the indicators of PTSD in major characters. The researchers attempted to shape these symptoms to simplify the experience after getting disturbing events. Moreover, the study discovers that Mother Dear and Mutt face the PTSD symptoms contrarily:

A. Intrusive symptoms are dominant in Mother Dear as compared to arousal and avoidance symptoms. The intrusive indications are displayed around five data consisting of daydreams, feelings, and hallucinations about her traumatic situation. And avoidance symptoms consist of data including thoughts and avoiding places connected to trauma. While

arousal symptoms contain three data: hypervigilance, response overstated shock, and peevishness.

B. Arousal symptoms are dominant in Mutt. Such symptoms are presented as many as four data comprising: sleeping issues, hypervigilance, response exaggerated startle, and concentrating

difficulty. While intrusive symptoms are three data including the insistent recalling of the incident in feelings, and day daydreams. And avoidance symptom is one data includes avoiding places.



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