

SILENCED MINDS: GENDERED TRAUMA AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FRAGMENTATION IN MODERN ENGLISH FICTION

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Abstract

Having a gendered oppressing and psychological nullification of women, their mental health image is most commonly shown in the English fiction of the modern period. This paper addresses social surveillance, heteronormative expectation and the patriarchal norms as the method of silencing and indentured disintegration of female subjectivity. Intersectional feminist perspective on the selected works, namely *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, and *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham, will be used to privy peep the critical examination of the chosen works to analyze the constructive narration of the trauma, depression and identity crisis against gendered structures of power. The study has found out the prevalent themes of silence, confinement, the dislocation of time and fragmented selfhood on close textual examination and the theoretical factor through the feminist and trauma studies. It also reveals how a form of narratives is even a manifestation of psychological discontinuity, which proves the thematic concern of fractured consciousness. The paper wraps up by claiming that the modern English fiction writing is a critical site of revelation of the psychological outpours of patriarchy and the offer of spaces where the other articulation of opposition to the marginalized female experiences can be made possible.

Keywords: Gendered trauma, psychological fragmentation, feminist criticism, mental health, modern English fiction, intersectionality

Introduction

The consciousness of the mental health in the recent English fiction has given more critical attention to the expression of psychological distress rooted so deep in the niche of gender, sexuality, and social power. Rather than viewing the mental illness in the context of the

personal biomedical phenomenon, the contemporary literary criticism recognizes the problem as a cultural mediated phenomenon, which is connected with the patriarchal imperative, heteronormativity, and voice/silence politics. In this respect, the subject of study of the modern English fiction is an exceptionally promising material of study of the way in which the interior of women is assembled, confined and pathologized. Literature, such as *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath and *The Hours* by Michael Cunningham also preconcert the permeable border of sanity and social acceptance and compliance, but they portray that female subject is most of the time ruined by gender expectations. The novels Plath created of her novel Plath use the main character Esther Greenwood to exemplify a crisis of feminine identity in the medium of the mid-20th century between professional ambition and the claustrophobic imperatives of household womanhood, and the interconnection of female characters of Cunningham demonstrate the legacies of such imperatives in other eras.

Gendered trauma seen through the lens of intersectional feminist criticism must be perceived not as an isolated event, but as a combination of states, which is constructed in everyday practice of domination and discrimination. Emotional invalidation, surveillance, morality, morally encouragement, and often their states subject to it are induced through small mechanisms, women are taught to be disciplined by their patriarchal societies to the level that they eventually become psychologically unstable. In literature, it comes as a major tool where these hidden injuries are created. The symbolism of silence is repetitive in the modern fiction that not only do not listen to women, but very often they are denied the right to give expression to their own feelings of distress among the dominating discourses of sanity and sanity. This silence is also reinforced by the fact that mental illness is stigmatised which has continuously been feminised and trivialized, therefore, consolidating the periphery of the female victims. The contemporary English novels expose cultural scripts as women are only prescribed a limited amount of emotional and social roles through performance of depressive, anxiety, dissociative and existential despondency scripts.

In addition, one of the factors when using a narration form to communicate the problem of the psychological fragmentation is significant on its own. The disrupted inner world of female characters is mirrored in the modernist and postmodernist devices that are scattered throughout the sense of time and space i.e. stream of consciousness, disturbance of time, and changing focalization. It is not just an aesthetic and politically charged experimentation with form when it comes to the belief in the coherent stable female self. It has been found that the fractured

narrative voice is an intractable territory where the inadequacy of the patriarchal language is demonstrated by the fact that it cannot retain all the lived experience of women.

The problems find even greater acuity in the Indian and the postcolonial setting in general. The accelerated social change, perpetuated gender inequality, and the changing rhetoric of sexuality have just intensified the need to discuss the use of literature, and how it registers psychological distress pertinent to women and queer issues, even further. Although the great outputs of this study belong to the western culture, their messages may be audible among the Indian community in elevated tones, and the discussion of mental health and gendered trauma is a very stigmatized or muted one. In placing these works into the context of an intersectional analysis, the purpose of this paper will be to demonstrate that the death of one is not only made embodied in the modern English fiction, but also is condemned through the thin narratives of social-cultural processes that make the latter possible and ensure that they are perpetuated. Conclusively, gender trauma and discontinuity of consciousness discussion reveals that literature has a lot to do when it comes to uncovering crises of the female mental state that is inaccessible to disclosure and offers discursive spaces where individuals can be empathetic, recognizing, and refining.

Literature Review

Scholarly interest of gendered trauma and psychological discontinuity can be impacted critically by interdisciplinary work in areas such as field of trauma theory, psychoanalysis and postcolonial studies of literature, etc. Theory The basic theoretical background is out of psychoanalytic explanation of hysteria which was articulated in *Studies on Hysteria* by Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer, and which characterizes hysteria as the manifestation of repressed psychoic shock. Produced through their work, the fundamental relationship between unspeakable experience and body or psychological symptoms was determined, which was further prolonged in the research on trauma. Keeping this tradition, Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* redefines trauma as something that cannot be represented wholes at all times and returns much later because of the disintegration of the narrative. The importance of the features of language as late, unvocalized and constrained, as emphasized by Caruth can provide a valuable theoretical insight into how gendered suffering is represented in literature in a feminine way.

The Partition literature, in the South Asian literary criticism, has taken Saadat Hasan Manto writings to discuss the presence of violence, sexuality and psychological discontinuity. Such articles as *Colder Than Ice*, *Odour* and *The Return* are extremely disturbing writings about sexual violence, personal collapse and physical trauma. Much of the critical agreement seems to be that the women characters which Manto invents tend to embody the unspoken horror of Partition, and serve in a sort of returning the part where national violence can be penned on cars, the gendered body. Psychological disintegration and moral unease is enhanced by the fact that the narration style of his work is under man and it is unique with sudden stop and emotionlessness.

As F. Sattar, T. Irshad, and S. Tariq (2009) emphasize, the theme of silence in the representation of Manto by the women is that gaps, pauses, and gaps in the narrative have a tendency to depict the most painful stories, rather than necessarily describing the psychology of the personalities. The fact that female suffering is structurally silenced is also predicted in the analysis because the socio-cultural silencing of women as well as the epistemological demands of extreme violence coverage. Similarly, A. Tickell (2008) situates Manto amid the generally popular literature on Partition and determines the gendered violence as an object where national anxieties were negotiated.

Further exploring the theme of investigation, N. Zargar (2010) expounds on the issue of female wounded body as a valuable locus of meaning of the fiction by Manto. Pain in the physical body of the same, argues Zargar, is a witness and a disappearance: on the one hand, there is a violated body, on the other hand, even a slightly receptive language, and the inability of social organization to adjust to its victims. This point of view is quite close to the idea introduced by Caruth, that of the unintegration experience disrupting the narrative wholeness. In the meantime, M. Ali (2024) proves that Manto is not how he is in the secondary position as his attention to moral hypocrisy, sexual repression, and social violence are too topical in modern realities and may even be actively promoted with references to the cultural discourse rather than weakened.

Despite all this academic availability, nonetheless, there is an extremely large gap in how the Western trauma theory is constituted with South Asian literary expressions of gendered psychological discontinuity. A big part of the existing literature is on the topic of Partition violence as historical or political trauma and does not consider the inner world of the female

and queer subject matter. Moreover, even though feminist reading has elucidated the silencing effect of female characters within the tales of Manto, there has been reduced systematic correlations of such matters with more broad practices in English fictional literature, whose such narrations contain parallel patterns of gendered mental sufferings.

These critical and theoretical grounds have given the current research its basis in which psychoanalytic theory of trauma, feminist theory of intersectionality, and close textual analysis have been synthesised. By reconciling the discourse between modern English fiction and a South Asian display of gendered trauma, the project will make the mode, silence, fragmentation, and psychological derailment, cut across cultural setting in significant ways.

1. Gender Trauma and Politics of silence.

The case of contemporary English fiction already demonstrated several times that the suffering of women in the form of psychological trauma can not be discussed in isolation of the socio-cultural frameworks that dictate the lives of women. What happens to be considered personal pathology later on, as we may observe in books such as *The Bell Jar*, is not a failure of will in my case as the Esther Greenwood crumbled, but an outcome of the oppressive gender rules, professional pressure, and alienation. The very metaphor of the bell jar represents stifling silence the glassy yet suffocating vessel that renders female pain quite evident and non-heard simultaneously. The theory of trauma with particular focus on the input of Cathy Caruth comes in handy to illustrate this type of dynamic by the fact that the traumatic experience is likely to struggle with articulation. This paradox of women that defines modern fiction is usually the role that they take about social being and psychological silence. The politics of silence is thus a structuring force; that maintains the distress as a framing, which is individualized and it does not rebuild the distress as is made structurally.

2. Psychological Fragmentation and Narrative Form

Experimentalism of the modern and postmodern fiction is significant to fracture the female subjectivity into fragments. Time and emotional dislocation of the female can be identified in *The Hours* in the face of three narrators, namely Virginia Woolf, Laura Brown and Clarissa Vaughan life who is interwoven with other women. The absence of continuity and inner monologue, focalization which is repeatedly alternated recreates the instability of the inner world of the characters. These approaches reiterate the psychoanalytic teachings of Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer who projected the experience in the repressive state onto the

symptomatic manifestation. Such fragmentation of narrative in these novels is not merely a means, however, of style; it is epistemological, revealing the issue of patriarchal organizations breaking down continuous womanhood. This broken voice of the narration is a literary device of exposing the inadequacy of the linear, rational speech when describing the experiences of women.

3. Intersectionality: Gender, Sexuality, and Social Power

In which the Western literature foretells the inner psychological disintegration, the South Asian literature (and especially Saadat Hasan Manto) increases the interdependence between the violation of the body and the trauma of the mind. In such books as *Colder Than Ice*, *Odour* and *The Return*, female body is turned into the central landscape where communal violence and patriarchal power is enacted. In contrast to the more internalized misery of the protagonist of Plath, the women of Manto are likely to experience the trauma following an open physical violence that, in its turn, results in mental absence, dissociation, or silence. It has been noted by critics also that Manto wrote in a spare form of narrative, which emptied abruptly, with no emotional discharge, compelling the reader even to grapple with the moral discomfort of observing gendered violence with no narrative release. This corroboration of body and psycho-traumatic transition can be seen to indicate the overlapping nature of sufferings as it is felt in postcolonial surroundings.

4. Intersectionality: Gender, Sexuality, and Social Power

However, an intersectional approach will allow viewing gendered trauma as not being solitary; it is mediated by the class, sexuality, and historical circumstance. The suburban jail of Laura Brown in *The Hours* signifies the domestic ideological of the mid-twentieth century of the homosexual identity of Clarissa Vaughan introduces it into an alternative dimension of marginalization. Similarly, women in the Partition stories by Manto are marginalised twice, one, by the society, and secondly, by the violence. These piled oppressions imply that occasionally you can find that the psychological fragmentation is an outcome of cross cutting patterns of control. The intersectional approach helps in moving forward beyond a concept of suffering of women through a generalization approach to a more elaborate concept of how power will be exerted in various ways.

5. From Victimhood to Narrative Resistance

Despite their gloomy composition of mental distress, this is not the sole opposition that can be discovered in these reading materials. This is the voice of the main character, Esther Greenwood of *The Bell jar*, in the narrative, which is broken, yet, there are occasions when she is shrewd and ironic of herself, as well as the medical and social institution. Much like this, the intertextual form produces *The Hours* in which the innerness of women is returned to as a literary subject. Even in narrating the unspeakable violence of Manto, a narration of this violence is in itself a sort of moral witnessing. All these works also suggest that despite the silence and fragmentation that come about by patriarchy, literature is also where one can bring out repressed experiences.

Conclusion

Avoiding answers to the question concerning the subject of gender and sexuality by stating that psychology trauma is rarely a single and pure commodity, exploring the issue of inter-sectional approach to English modern fiction one can discover that it is the phenomenon which is embedded in the socio-cultural regimes of power, surveillance and gender policing. The high level of interpretation of texts (*The Bell Jar*, *The Hours* and some stories of Saadat Hasan Manto) has made it clear that the mental distress among women, in the majority of cases, is the cumulative effect of pressure of patriarchal, heteronormative and past violence on them. All these literary works are in destructive battle with the tendency of individualizing female suffering through exposure of structural terms that give rise to silence, fragmentation and dis-identification of emotions.

A great takeaway of this paper is the understanding that literary form is also extremely important means by which gendered trauma can be brought into represented. the subverted psychic space of female and queer subjects is portrayed in broken narration, their chronological position, and interior monologism. These official art resolutions agree with the theory of trauma, in particular, the concept that over experience is quite inarticulate. In the meantime, the resistance of Western interiority of psychology and corporeal violence expressed in the Partition stories by Manto makes us recollect about the culturally unclear situations of gendered suffering.

The intersectional theory adopted in this work also highlights that gender trauma overlaps are founded on the identity axis such as classes, sexuality, and historical location. The subjectivity of the female is represented as one that is suppressed by forces necessitating conformity and

precludes agency be it the suburbia of charming middle twentieth century America or the revolutionary factors of the Indian subcontinent. It is worth mentioning, however, that these are not texts that just describe victimhood. The other spaces of resistance they create are using irony, narrative self-consciousness and by resorts to literary witnessing. Such process of narrativising the trauma itself is the obstacle to the silence surrounding the culture of mental health of women and the inefficacy of mainstream patriarchal discourses.

These insights in literature are extremely applicable in the present societies particularly and Modern English Fiction has also evolved in such a setting as India where the stigma in the discussion of the mental illness, gender nonconformity and sexual independence is still stigmatized. Finally, the paper verifies that literature might be rather useful in leading the invisibility of the costs of patriarchy and discursive space where the marginalized experience of trauma may be identified, understood, and, perhaps, transformed.

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