

TRAUMA: OVERCOMING BIPOLAR DISORDER IN PREETI SHENOY'S LIFE IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT

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ABSTRACT

Good family relationships and bonding are very essential in our daily lives. Lack of it leads to social and psychological issues of varying degrees in affected individuals. Moreover, it causes disharmony in the family. This paper investigates the traumatic elements in the national bestseller Indian English novel, Life is What You Make It. It portrays the imaginary characters created by the novelist based on a real-life incident thereby conveying the importance of relationships and mental well-being. It depicts the protagonist's traumatic condition caused as a result of certain issues from her past. This paper will concentrate on the repercussions of the psychologically disturbing incident that occurred in the protagonist's life and the way she bravely handles the situation by overcoming suicidal tendencies with the support of her loved ones. Also, with confidence and determination, she leads a normal life thereafter. The paper compares character trauma to Freud's Trauma Theory. After reviewing a greater number of articles, books and theses it has been found that with the love, understanding and support of the family any situation could be overcome. Also, we can understand, that though there is no cure for bipolar disorder, it can be brought under control.

Keywords: Trauma, Psychological, Bipolar Disorder, Relationships, Love.

Introduction

Trauma is a very well-known and vital aspect of human life. Every individual undergoes trauma of varying degrees at some point or the other in their life. Trauma is an emotional response to a situation experienced due to a certain incident in a person's life affecting the person either directly or indirectly. It refers to a "state condition induced by such a stress or blow "rather than a "stress or blow that may produce disordered feelings or behaviour".

Trauma Studies is one of the recognized subfields of Cultural Studies. Trauma Studies, which were first formed in the 1990s, investigate the negative effects that trauma has on both individuals and societies. It examines its cultural, literary, and psychological relevance. Several well-known cultural studies theorists including Raymond Williams, Richard Hogarth, Stuart Hall etc. have contributed a great deal in this field of study.

Trauma Studies is based on a number of theories. It was initially based on Freudian In Studies of Hysteria in order to create a deeper understanding of trauma that transcends language, shatters characters' psyches, and distorts meaning. In his early writings, Freud makes the case that reprocessed sexual assault experiences and gave rise to traumatic hysteria. Freud always viewed sexuality in relation to psychosomatic sickness. He claimed that suppressing memories of sexual assault can result in panic. In Studies of Hysteria (1895), Sigmund Freud and Breur emphasize that the trauma of the original event was not its memory rather than the event itself.

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Objectives

The Objectives of this paper are listed below:

- To understand trauma and analyse the theories related to it.
- To examine the psychological condition of the protagonist in the novel.
- To explore the relationships between the characters in the novel.

Related Works

Emmett Marder mentioned in her study that the word "trauma" comes from the ancient Greek word meaning "wound." Although the precise definition of the modern concept of trauma varies according to context and discipline, there is a general consensus that if trauma is a wound, it is a very peculiar kind of wound. Also, trauma provides a unique set of problems to understand as there is no particular set of bodily signs defining trauma and it nearly always creates recurring, unpredictable, and incalculable repercussions that endure long after its ostensible "precipitating cause." Additionally, trauma has an inherent political, historical, and social component because traumatic events frequently result from social forces and occur in the social environment.

The talking cure is required to comprehend the impact of the past and release oneself from its symptom because the initial incident still causes harm. To release repressed emotions, the psychoanalyst uses talking therapy. Later, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and other socio-cultural theories were combined with psychological approaches in trauma studies. All of these methods are now used in trauma studies. For the first time, Jean-Martin Charcot looked into the connection between trauma and mental disease. Pierre Janet was one of his pupils. Hermann Oppenheim also carried out research on trauma. Another contemporary of Freud was Morton Prince.

The impact of trauma on identity and memory is examined through trauma theory. It examines how trauma shapes each person's views of the world and interacts with others and how language and depiction shape and are shaped by trauma. Writers like Abram Kardiner wrote on war trauma. Also, in Manju Kapur's "Difficult Daughters" and "Binding Vine, we see the passing down of trauma from one generation to the next. Other innovative works on Trauma Studies are Roger Lockhurst's "The Trauma Question," Cathy Caruth's *Trauma Explorations in Memory*, Geoffrey Hartman's *Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies*, Testimonies: Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's critiques of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history, etc.

Trauma, Narrative, and History, Cathy Caruth's unclaimed experience, served as the foundation for the study of trauma in literature (1996). In this essay, Caruth claims that trauma is now a universal and perplexing experience and a topic of study. Our view of history likewise gets more complicated and contradictory as a result.

In her groundbreaking 1995 book, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading Literature of Trauma*, Kali Tal reviewed hundreds of academic publications and featured hundreds of interviews with trauma survivors. Postcolonial studies and gender studies both benefit significantly from the study of trauma.

There are various types of trauma and a few of them are listed below:

- **Psychological Trauma:** According to one perspective, psychological trauma obstructs language and renders pain unrepresentable. There is also the argument that the irrepresentability of pain is an effect of trauma rather than its primary characteristic. Hysteria was the starting point for studies on psychological trauma, which later expanded to include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), developmental trauma disorder in children, and trauma related to war, terrorism, gender, rape, racism, and illnesses, among other symptoms.
- **Cultural and Collective Trauma:** It refers to the social processes that occur when groups go through terrible experiences that permanently alter that group, and is studied by cultural sociology. Examples include war, the Holocaust, and other mass murders. Ann Kaplan examines how trauma affects individuals and entire cultures and countries in her book, *The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. Another illustration is William Staron's *Sophie's Choice*. Holocaust representations are examined in Michael Rothenberg's book *Traumatic Realism*.
- **Medical Trauma:** It is defined as a combination of psychological and physiological responses to hurt, damage, illness, medical procedures, and horrifying treatment experiences.

Plot

Life is What you Make it, the cited novel, is primarily set in Kerala in the 1990s. The protagonist of the story is Ankita Sharma, aged twenty-one. She is a bright and charming young woman. Her parents brought her forcibly to the National Mental Health Institute. She feels ignored by the individuals residing in her immediate surroundings and is keen on screaming at them and letting them know she has succeeded. Looking back at her past, she had a fabulous college career and wants everyone to be aware of her achievements as the Arts Association's secretary and of winning the college elections. Also, she pursued management in one of the leading business schools. Even though she had an extraordinary college life, she landed as a patient in this mental hospital. As the doctor starts a conversation with her, we learn about her past.

Vaibhav was her childhood friend, and both were very fond of each other. Despite having exceptional grades, Ankita's orthodox parents forbid her from enrolling in the same program as Vaibhav at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. She enrolled in St. Agnes College for Girls in 1989 and missed Vaibhav, who was very special to her.

Ankita was eager to hear from Vaibhav and used to wait for his letters. But as time passes, Ankita begins adapting to her new environment and forgets Abhi. She was an outstanding student performing well in academics and extracurricular activities, and was well-loved by everyone. Due to her popularity, she acquired many friends and was nominated as the Arts Club Secretary. She is introduced to Abhishek, a plump lad who excels at public speaking and guitar playing. He's also reasonably good at icebreakers. Ankita enjoys his company, and their bonding for each other grows stronger.

They spend much time together, and Ankita's life seems to be picture-perfect. As her feelings for Abhi grow more robust, her love for Vaibhav fades. No doubt, she and Abhi were in touch with each but not as before. She had missed his calls because she was so preoccupied with Abhi and other things going on in her life. A kind of fond affection for each other replaced the love between them.

Years pass, and Ankita is obsessed with a new agenda: getting into one of the top institutes in the country offering an MBA program. She gets an interview call from four of them, one of which is the most well-known in Bombay!

Coincidentally, Ankita's father is promoted in his company at about this time, which means that all of Ankita's family will be moving to Bombay. She tells Abhi that she will go there even if her family is not moving to Bombay. Her relationship with Abhishek is nearing its end. Abhi considers her proud, but Ankita doesn't bother about him and considers him an emotional fool.

They break up acrimoniously, and the very next day, Abhi's body is found; it is discovered that he drowned due to an excessive amount of alcohol in his body. And that it may have been a suicide. Only Ankita knows that this is undoubtedly related to her. Abhi is unable to tolerate this undergoes after separation. He is affected very deeply and ends his life.

Abhi's grandfather was aware of their relationship and cautioned her by saying, "never belittle love." These wise words had a profound impact on Ankita.

In Bombay, Ankita does her best in academics and writes poetry but is not happy from within. She is unable to share her feelings with anyone. Her parents get the love letters she had been exchanging with Vaibhav and Abhi. They destroy the notes and reprimand her for her behavior. Ankita is morose and tries to end her life by slitting her wrists. With timely help, her life is saved. But Ankita doesn't stop here. She tries to commit suicide once again and is protected by her father. So, she is brought to this mental hospital.

Ankita is talking with Dr. Madhusudan, who diagnoses her with bipolar disorder. He explains that what she went through is expected and that there are two sides to it: euphoric and despairing. As Dr. Madhusudan explains to Ankita, it is a disorder closely associated with creativity, which Ankita excels at. After some time, Ankita recovers from her depression. She returns to her usual self once again, acquires six academic degrees, and marries a sensitive and loving person.

According to Freud's affect-trauma model, hysterical patients' symptoms had hidden psychological interpretations related to major emotional traumata that the patient had bottled up. This is the root cause of psychiatric illnesses. We see here that even though the protagonist excelled in almost everything, she was lonely from within. She represses her feelings and begins to crumble from within. Abhi and Vaibhav who adored and loved her were ignored by her at a later point of time leading to her downfall. Listening to our heart and mind is very essential else the consequences will be very traumatic.

Conclusion

We still place very little importance on our mental health even though we are in the twenty-first century. It's important to realize that a person's mental health can fluctuate throughout time and cannot stay constant from childhood to maturity. This study focuses on understanding Ankita's behavior through the perspective of Freudian theory. Future research could be done by studying various psychological theories, the need for recognition, migration, etc.

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