



EXPLORATION OF OVERWHELMING CRISIS OF PTSD THROUGH TRAUMA NARRATIVE OF ROXANE GAY'S AN UNTAMED STATE

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century is a tech world undergoing surplus fluctuations, familiarizing the new era, literature reflects real life changes, challenges, problems and chaos. Though complications like famine, pandemic, accidents, failures, physical abuses, wars etc., physically gets alright, mind and the repressed memory finds a way out and the individual faces the psychological tremor, recollecting and re-living the traumatic moment that causes anxiety and waves of panic. The main objective of this paper is to explore the overwhelming emotional crisis of an individual affected from PTSD and the ruptured life after the traumatic incident through the interesting narrative of Roxane Gay's *An Untamed State*. The plot revolves around the character Mireille, a lawyer abducted for a huge ransom undergoes severe physical and psychological torture. The real horror of her life and unspeakable trauma explodes when she was released after 13 days. Her devastating bitter experience starts to shake her life stripping her identity and affecting her remarkable life altogether. The novel and the psychological study credibly portray and put forth the intricacies of rape trauma syndrome stricken life and surviving its fierce pangs.

KEYWORDS : Trauma, PTSD, RTS, Trauma Studies.

Travelling the research journey of Freud, Trauma Studies developed during 1990's with several pioneers of the field including Erik Erikson, Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman proved trauma is a 'psychological injury' with remarkable scars throughout the life of victim. Trauma and PTSD are interrelated due to variations and troubles in brain chemistry caused by traumatic incidents. Numerous traumatic events may lead to PTSD. According to, *The Recovery Village*,

"49 percent of rape victims ... Nearly 32 percent of victims of severe physical assault

... 16.8 percent of people who are involved in serious accidents, such as car or train

accidents ... 14.3 percent of people who suddenly and unexpectedly experience the

death of a close loved one ... 3.8 percent of people who experience natural disasters

develop PTSD." (Updated June 01, 2022)

Literature through various forms projected the problems of society, as such approaches trauma and trauma theory started to mark a rising tide in the humanities from the era of world wars till date. According to Ferenczi, "What is traumatic is the unforeseen, the unfathomable, the incalculable ... Unexpected, external threat, the sense of which one cannot grasp, is unbearable" (*The Clinical Diary of Sandor Ferenczi*, 171), these words make sense through Mireille's life in the novel *An Untamed State*.

Happy vocation of Mireille's family to her native land Haiti turned to a serious nightmare when she was abducted by local goons for a huge ransom from her wealthy father. Her wealthy father, a determined and hardworking man wavered to pay the ransom – his hard earned money. He supposed if he pays the ransom he will be again disturbed for same reasons. His firm principles ruined the prominent life of his daughter altogether. The devastating words to the 'self' of Mireille as a captive before her release, "Once upon a time, my life was a fairy tale and then I was stolen from everything I loved. There was no happily ever after. After days of dying, I was dead" (*An Untamed State*, 207) depicts the ordeal resulting emotional crisis that led to hopeless and helpless future ahead.

Post Traumatic conditions develop into various lifestyle difficulties ensuing alienation, identity crisis that creates a fluctuation between life and death. Though PTSD a potential

psychological dis-ease, trauma after rape is more efficacious to breach the existence of the victim is evidential when the Commander of the goons released the protagonist after sexual abuse for a period of 13 days, she was running to survive from the stale situation so exhausted and loathsome "I was not a person. I was no one. I was nothing" (211) portrays the severity of the physical and psychological trauma she has undergone that led to her dissociative amnesia. Mireille has totally forgotten who she was when she asked for help to reach her home, after thinking for several minutes she recalled her name and informed to be rescued.

According to Psych – Mental Health Hub, Rape Traumatic Syndrome was developed by Ann Burgess, a psychiatrist and Lynda Holstrom, a sociologist during 1970's after interviewing 92 adult female victims. After undergoing traumatic sexual abuse the victim undergoes panic outbursts, recollection of the traumatic event, guilt, shame, acute stress disorder, triggers flashback, and excessive anger.

Mireille isolated from herself whom she was before and after the abduction and the distressing event. "I became, no one (212) ... I was no one, a woman with no name, no family" (215) reflects the emotional wound that made her to forget whom she was, where she belonged to. She started to escape the reality by reminding herself multitude of time that she was no one... she became none... she doesn't have a husband, child, father, mother and a beautiful life. When Michael, Mireille's husband was calming her after a panic attack she remembered the person who tortured her sexually, "Panic wormed through my body so sharply I doubled over. I wanted to hide". (231)

Whenever she was sharing a closed space or meeting with some man including her father, husband or any family member she feels the sharp pang inside her physically and emotionally. Mireille started to hallucinate that she was tied to a leash and she is locked up inside a cage though she was free to move in her home after her release, revealed through her painful outburst, "the leash was heavy, choking me, reminding me I was still inside that room, alone, with angry men" (232) and "it still hurt to breathe. It hurt to think. It hurt to be in this new cage. The leash wrapped itself more tightly around my throat". (233) Mireille's mother Fabienne relaxed her daughter and encouraged that she will come out of this torment with all the might, Mireille's reply shows her

irreversible mental state, she replied, "I will never move on. I am still where they kept me; I am in that cage." (241)

The overwhelming traumatic experience controls the mind by repeatedly re-living the same moment leads to haunting life, in case of Mireille, she in a process to survive the unbearable moment decided to end her life instead. She threw the filthy clothes bearing the gruesome memories of torturous 13 days into the fire, "I knew what it meant to be burn, how it felt, ... and how the pain rises with your skin ... when the pain... spread, it becomes easier to endure" (236). Michael caught his wife when she fell into the fire, Mireille's words and suicidal thought explicates the excruciating traumatic horror and shows her fearlessness towards death, ultimately considered death was a relief from the pain she was enduring.

Mireille's terrifying vocation came to an end after several emotional tremors and she decided to return her home in Miami. When she left her home, though she could talk to her mother she could not even see her father, "All I could see in his face were thirteen days spent in the company of seven men who undid me". (246) The anger towards her father is also seen in the anger reflected to all the men she encounters in the airport when she thinks, "there's no one you can trust in a country run through with anger". (247) She started to assume each and every man in that place is waiting for her to kidnap her to end her life which is already over. When she was at the plane she felt insecure though she knows she is safe with her husband, she want to hide from everyone, Mireille's mind set can be understood when she confesses she was safe when she hide behind her sunglasses.

The traumatic incident made her to feel "He was a man. He was dangerous. I was not safe" became the mantra whenever she encounters a man alone - for instances, checking officer at terminal, and police officer in the highways. Mireille's psychic condition can be observed when she was asked to eat at the plane, says she forgot how to eat. Her words signify her acute amnesia due to RTS, "I tasted nothing, felt nothing, was nothing" (255) when her husband fed her some food.

Mireille, to escape the horrendous reality ran from her home and drove waywardly and reached her mother-in-law's farm in Georgia. Lorraine, her mother- in - law supported in several ways to improve and heal her emotional injuries. After five years of emotional crisis Mireille survived the trauma, still hiding behind sunglass in the public. Once she met the Commander who ruined her life in a hotel, the bruises came to the surface, "my throat locked ...I could not speak. The leash around my neck tightened". (357) Mireille followed him and expressed her anger by physically attacking him shouting, "you should have killed me" (359) shows her suffering from obsessive fears due to her traumatic phase.

The other crippling impacts of trauma are fright to go out alone, crying spells, rage, trust issues and distress. Such suffocation shadows for the victim's lifetime until they overcome trauma and post traumatic environments which reminds their bitter past. The throttling trauma and overcoming process is exquisitely woven in the plot of *An Untamed State* through the character of Mireille and the ancillary characters.

Recovering from the sexual assault related PTSD is very challenging for an individual, and recovery is possible only through the help of close relationships. Trauma, PTSD, RTS are not only faced by females but also affects males and LGBT communities, though it seems to be the problem of an individual or a small circle it is a sociological issue to be alarmed of. Trauma inflicted by fellow humans doesn't mirror the constructive societal development. Each and every human should care for the augmentation and harmony of fellow human's life.

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