

Augmenting History through Trauma Narratives: Analysis of Selected Afghan Cultural Writings and Implications on Pakistan

InayatUllah*
Rubina Kamran**

Abstract

*Globalization results in a complex set of interconnections among people across the world. General migrations, media exchanges, capital travel, and culture's mobility, brings forth 'civilization of clashes' between people. This clash causes trauma, which may seem too minuscule or ordinary to be recorded under the spectrum of the official account, called history. Using the trauma theory related works of Cathy Caruth and Dominic LaCapra, this study aims at analyzing the selected Afghan narratives in English to see how cultural productions from this war-torn country are still haunted by the flashbacks of traumatic experience, they encountered during the Soviet invasion from 1979 to 1989. This analysis of Rahimi's *Earth and Ashes* under the theoretical framework of literary trauma studies, shows that fiction has the potential to use the flashbacks of trauma-hit characters to bring forth*

* Assistant Professor at Mohammad Ali Jinnah University, Islamabad, Pakistan; and PhD candidate at Air University, Sector E-9, Islamabad, Pakistan. The article is based on the researcher's PhD work and will be included in his final dissertation.

** Professor and Dean at the Department of Humanities, Faculty of Social Sciences, Air University, PAF Complex, Sector E-9, Islamabad, Pakistan.

their memories, use them as witnesses to the event of the actual incident of trauma, and record their statements to build a history that can amend for any possible erasure of the official historical accounts. Living in an era which, in the words of Stolorow, is 'an Age of Trauma', the study of trauma narratives becomes all the more important as it brings to the fore how pervasive the haunting of a traumatic war experience can be and how psychologically impossible it is for a historian to record the all-inclusive impact of a traumatic incident upon occurrence.

Introduction

This research endeavours to investigate individual traumas, portrayed by Afghan writer, Atiq Rahimi, in his novel *Earth and Ashes*. The study, thus, tracks and records the sufferings of the traumatized Afghan people, through the individual accounts of the characters, during the Soviet invasion in 1979. Using the theoretical and critical framework of trauma studies, this qualitative study investigates how traumatic experiences flash back in fictional narratives and makeup for the erasures of historical records in the same way as a victim of trauma, in the words of Caruth, comes forth with a delayed reaction to whatever he/she has witnessed.¹The aforementioned delayed reaction phenomenon in trauma came under investigation and has been discussed by many researchers.²Similarly, a number of empirical studies which were carried out in this field also endorsed the value and importance of this deferred

1 Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1995.

2 A. Young, *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); D. Fassin and R. Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victim-Hood* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), R. Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008) and G. Bistoien, S. Vanheule, and S. Craps, "Nachträglichkeit: A Freudian Perspective on Delayed Traumatic Reactions," *Theory and Psychology* 24, no. 5 (2014): 668-87.

action.³Moreover, a comprehensive analysis came to the conclusion that, on average, 38.2 percent and 15 percent of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) cases in military and civilian samples respectively have proved to come up with delayed reactions.⁴It is also pertinent to mention that an individual's experience right after an incident does not qualify him/her as traumatized until the conditions outlined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) are fulfilled.⁵⁶⁷⁸⁹This novel has been selected for the study because it presents the trauma of the Afghan people who, just like the writer of the novel, witnessed the ravages of war during the Soviet invasion.

Background to Trauma Studies

Trauma studies came to fore as an area of cultural research during the early-to-mid-1990s. It investigates how traumatic incidents are portrayed through fiction. Trauma theory helps in comprehending the variety of modes through which

-
- 3 B.Andrews and *et. al.*, "Delayed-onset Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review of the Evidence,"*American Journal of Psychiatry*164(2007): 1319-26. ; J.Carty, M.O'Donnell, and M. Creamer,"*Delayed-onset PTSD: A Prospective Study of Injury Survivors*,"*Journal of Affective Disorders*90 (2006): 257-61, R.Yehuda *et.al.*, and "Ten Year Follow-up Study of PTSD Diagnosis, Symptom Severity and Psychosocial Indices in Aging Holocaust Survivors,"*Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*119(2009):25–34, A.Berninger and *et. al.*, "Longitudinal Study of Probable Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Firefighters Exposed to the World Trade Center Disaster," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine*53(2010): 1177–85 and Bistoën, Vanheule, and Craps, "*Nachträglichkeit*," 668-87.
 - 4 Andrews, and *et. al.* "*Delayed-onset Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*,"1319–26.
 - 5 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (3rd ed.), (Washington DC: 1980).
 - 6 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (3rd rev. ed.), (Washington DC: 1987).
 - 7 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.), (Washington DC: 1994).
 - 8 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th rev. ed.), (Washington DC: 2000).
 - 9 American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.), (Washington DC: 2013).
-

traumatic incidents are portrayed or repressed in literary and historical texts. Investigating and analyzing the accounts provided by the survivors of trauma, this field of study endeavours to look into the history not recorded in the official accounts. These narratives provide readers with an insight into a traumatic experience. According to Caruth, who is considered a pioneer in the field of trauma studies, this approach will provide us with a unique access to history.¹⁰ She adds that the investigation of the accounts of trauma provides possibility to rethink and reinvestigates whatever happened in the past. This will enable us to understand history as it actually occurred. Putting forth the trait that differentiates trauma studies from other fields, Caruth says that in “a catastrophic age trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures.”¹¹ Thus, the very foundation of trauma studies is laid upon the concept of establishing a link between seemingly nonrelated traumatic events. Listening to the trauma will not only bring forth the real history but it will also create harmony among different cultures.

However, the aforementioned commitment to create harmony among cultures by means of cross cultural studies is not found in the works of the pioneers of trauma studies. Stef Craps and Gert Buelens assert that the works of the founding members of trauma studies, such as those of Cathy Caruth deal with the experiences of trauma of “white Westerners and solely employ critical methodologies emanating from a Euro-American context.”¹² They stress that this approach of ignoring the non-Western trauma will lead to widening the gap between the West and the non-Western world.

10 Caruth, *Trauma*.

11 Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

12 Gert Buelens and Crep Stef, “Studies in the Novel,” *Introduction: Postcolonial Trauma Nove* 40 no. 1 and 2 (2008): 1.

Rationale of the Study

Criticizing this Eurocentric blind spots of trauma theory, Craps goes on to assert that trauma theory emerged in Europe and the United States in the 1990s, and since then, has been discussing traumas like the Holocaust.¹³ However, he adds that trauma with equal, if not greater regularity has been seen and experienced elsewhere.¹⁴ Following a detailed discussion on trauma theory, Craps investigates literary productions which concern the trauma of racial manipulations in the Caribbean, and then goes on to find resonance between partition of the Indian Subcontinent, Colonialism and the Holocaust.¹⁵

Following Craps's recommendations for a more inclusive and culturally sensitive trauma studies, this study endeavours to explore an important aspect of Afghan fiction in English, namely, how the writing and portrayal of trauma in fiction contribute towards bringing to fore the history of Afghanistan, during the Soviet invasion. It argues, in conjunction with certain noted literary theorists in the field of trauma, fiction and history that the history of a traumatic incident is incomplete, if taken merely as a record of events without catering for individuals' accounts of trauma. The individual accounts of history are pertinent for consideration; else, the world will be limited to the binary categories of the ones who are considered as powerful and thus the makers of histories and, on the receiving end, the ones who are no more than just objects of those histories.¹⁶

It has become well known that the official accounts which are termed as 'History', with a capital 'H,' are the records of incidents, put together and saved, from the vantage point of the ones who were in power to write

13 StefCraps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*(Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 9.

14 Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*.

15 Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing*.

16 AijazAhmad, *In Theory Classes, Nations, Literatures*(London: Verso Press, 2000).

History.¹⁷ As a result, these official accounts of Histories include details which were considered to be of interest to the ones in power, and thus disregarded the accounts of the traumatized people, who, being traumatized and thus powerless, were never heard or taken a note of. All narratives, as Foucault stresses, are in one way or another discourse of power.¹⁸ Thus, the accounts of trauma, portrayed in fiction, are all the more important, because this is where the survivors of trauma come up with the 'real history' of a nation and a society.¹⁹

The present study attempts to explore the effect of war trauma of the past on the present and its representation in Afghan fiction in English in the backdrop of Cathy Caruth and Dominic LaCapra's theories of trauma studies.

Trauma, History and Memory

Trauma came into existence as a theory. In other words, with its warped temporality and inquisitive structural expression, psychic trauma caters for the re-enactment of experiences which went missing from getting recorded. The very history of trauma theory is termed, as Herman puts it, as that of episodic amnesia because this has time and again guided researchers and critics into realms which were considered unthinkable in the past.²⁰ She adds that denial, dissociation and repression have long been considered essential parts of the individual as well as of social conscious, and that trauma theory is related to addressing complications arising from this phenomenon.²¹ On the same note, Tal observes that the penalty on a social as well as an individual level for this act of repression is repetition, which is

17 Sheenadevi Pachay, *The Struggle of Memory against Forgetting: Contemporary Fictions and the Rewriting of Histories* (Diss. Rhodes University, 2007).

18 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 1972).

19 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

20 J.L.Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992).

21 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

termed 'flashback', 'acting out' etc. in trauma theory. It becomes clear that putting trauma incident in framework of history cannot separate theory and events from each other. Caruth highlights the same phenomenon in the following words:

Once the notion of traumatic temporality has been introduced, it is no longer simply possible to place this notion within a larger and more traditional temporal framework (i.e., to place the conceptual event of the theory of trauma within the framework of the empirical, institutional, and cultural histories that are its context), since that would disavow the central insight of the theory, which suggests that our more traditional conceptual histories may have to be rethought.²²

Caruth, while explaining this interconnection between theory and trauma asserts that history re-enters theory in the temporal conception of trauma. Drawing from Freud, Caruth emphasizes that Freud, while trying to escape the neurosis, accidentally meets Katharina takes on her all-important case study, suggesting, in the words of Freud himself that it is "as if the theory itself emerged as the interruption of a forgetting."²³ Thus, as the victim of trauma is hit by the memories of the incident long after the threat has vanished. Similarly, the investigation into trauma is usually not carried out at the moment of the traumatic incident but after some time, when the conventional method of recording events, namely, history, fails to grasp the intensity of the shocks felt by the victims.

An upsurge of publications has been visible in the field of psychological trauma and its representation in literature, during the last 20 years or so. These mainly concern and depict events which cannot be grasped and portrayed through historical accounts. The union of literature and trauma attempts to investigate how these stories are represented and what aspects, which went missing from the historical accounts, are highlighted. Such is the extreme and unusual nature of the concept of 'representation' in these

22 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

23 Caruth, *Trauma*.

events that it geared up researchers for the great interest in trauma studies during the last couple of decades.

This need for the new concept of representation led to tremendous publication of trauma narratives in both fictional as well as non-fictional streams in 1990s. As a result of this emergence of literary trauma, the importance of the relationship of literature and trauma grew manifold. At present, as Rivkin and Ryan and Wolfreys declare, trauma theory has emerged as an important critical category in the field of literary studies.²⁴ The coordination of literary studies and modern trauma theory has grown due to the increasing traumatic events across the world. This has resulted in the tendency for a number of contemporary authors, such as Ann Whitehead and Vickroy, to discuss this relationship in unison, terming it 'Trauma Fiction'.²⁵

The reference of trauma through literature comes under scrutiny for a start due to the curious spatio-temporal structure of trauma that cannot be represented through the traditional ways of representation. The question arises that how literature can represent trauma when it resists narrativization due to its incomprehensibility upon occurrence. If, as Caruth asserts, trauma eschews being recorded through language,²⁶ it means that it cannot be represented in any form that is linguistically recognized. However, Caruth further explains that although trauma cannot be expressed upon occurrence it does not mean that its references should be ruled out altogether. She adds that the victim's experience of the incident of trauma is termed an unclaimed experience, because it is inherently non-representable due to its disruptive referentiality. Caruth's explanation of the phenomenon is in line with what

24 J. Rivkin, and R. Michael, *Literary Theory: An Anthology* 2nd ed. (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2004); J. Wolfreys, "Trauma, Testimony, Criticism: Witnessing, Memory and Responsibility," in *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 126-48;

25 A. Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); L. Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

26 Caruth, *Trauma*.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub say. These authors argue that the survivor's failure or inability to make sense of the event lies at the base of trauma.²⁷ Explaining flashback in the post-trauma stage, Caruth says that the flashback cannot be taken as a representation of the event, adding that it is the impact of the incident of trauma that is disrupting the mind of the victim.²⁸

To address the issues of witnessing, memory and representation, the questions of referentiality need to be intrinsically literary. This is the reason Freud, referred to in literary productions while discussing his theories of psychoanalysis. Even in contemporary research, theorists take a perusal of literature in a bid to culturally understand the trauma-related problems, look for its effects and analyze its aftermaths.

The ideal status of literature for the representation of trauma has been acknowledged by both Caruth and Felman. The unclaimed moment of trauma finds a place to work as a witness to the actual incident of trauma and thus arrange for its belated enactment. The very oft-quoted definition of trauma that Caruth provides, according to which trauma is like a wound "that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available,"²⁹ shows how Caruth incorporates literary or metaphorical language to explain the very phenomenon of trauma itself. She argues that as Freud occasionally referred to literature to support this phenomenon, the language that is used in the depiction of trauma is literary. Further, she maintains that the commonality between psychoanalysis and literature is the fact that both look into the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. She asserts that trauma's epistemological crisis of (non-representability) not knowing and the possibility of belated enactments (knowing) work as

27 Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

28 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

29 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

a commonality between trauma between psychoanalysis and literature.

Discussing the relationship between literary language and the representation of trauma, Felman and Laub state that a belated figurative and literary representation of traumatic experience displaces referential truth.³⁰ Besides, way back in 1895, Freud showed his surprise at the case studies that he wrote, saying that he felt impressed while reading his case studies because they sound like no less than short stories.

According to Douglas and Voglereds, the introduction of trauma studies into humanities has 'the real, in the form of a trauma event, has come back to the discourse in the mainstream', adding that the traumatic event is similar to referent or signified phenomenon that is always absent from the poststructuralist approach.³¹ They assert that the traumatic event, in this case is always supposed to be referred to retrospectively and that what highlights the exceptionalism of this inclusion is the fact that it brings forth the real without using the historical discourse that is discredited notion of transparent referentiality. What they stress is the fact that 'the real' can be experienced only when it is represented in literature. In other words, "[t]he real—the empirical or historical origin—cannot be known as such because it presents itself always within the resonances or field of the 'traumatic'."³² He stresses that, literature and art have the ability not only to represent the culture with its violence, but the study of trauma also has something quite inherent that enables the reader to transcend to the real world through the written text.

Trauma-related works of literature present a social critique by analyzing the root cause of a certain social abuse. Literary productions which depict trauma deal with

30 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*.

31 Ana Douglas and Thomas A. Voglereds, *Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

32 Geoffrey Hartmann, "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," *New Literary History* 26 (1995): 537-63.

issues and functions which in essence are historical, cultural, socio-political, ethical and pedagogical. Trauma fiction, while depicting an event, performs an ethical task by highlighting the causes and consequences of that event from an integrated and more personalized angle that is broader in scope than it can be carried out by any other discipline dealing with trauma.

Literary studies on trauma in no way attempt to replace examinations on trauma carried out by psychology, scientific research and historical investigation. Rather they benefit from research carried out in other fields, while contributing to the stock of knowledge on trauma. According to Vickroy, trauma related literature, by providing a socio-cultural critical analysis, also provide a window of knowledge for readers to see how people live the ideology and public policy, adding that literature draws on research carried out in the fields of psychology and history, and helps to provide necessary supplement to other fields of study.³³ Endorsing this role of trauma literature, Horvitz argues that trauma fiction, by highlighting the cultural or socio-political setting that caused the traumatic incident in the first place, unmasks the oppressive ideologies which either produced or legitimize the incident.³⁴

Several trauma scholars stress the authenticity of the depiction of incidents in fiction. Writers and theorists such as Granofsky,³⁵ Vickroy³⁶ and Whitehead³⁷ assert that the depiction of trauma is more effective and authentic when it is done through more stylistically innovative methods. Vickroy, wrote on the portrayal of trauma in colonialism. Subjugation related narratives written by Larry

33 Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*.

34 Deborah Horvitz, *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory and Sexual Violence in American Women's Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York, 2000).

35 R. Granofsky, *The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

36 Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*.

37 Anne Whitehead, *Trauma History* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

Heinemann, Dorothy Allison, Pat Barker, Marguerite Duras and Toni Morrison, argues that fictional narratives, through innovative techniques of portrayal, have the ability to portray incidents of trauma in an authentic way. The use of techniques such as symbolization brings into the structure of these works takes into consideration the processes, rhythms, and uncertainties of the incidents of trauma. He also asserts that the use of these innovative techniques makes trauma accessible to the readers of the narratives. Indeed, through the use of figurative language, these authors portray trauma and its relationship with fragmented memories, shattered identities and feelings of dissociation in post-traumatic settings.

In the same vein, Whitehead also suggests the need for a fictional representation of trauma. She stresses that in order to portray trauma through literature. It is imperative for writers to disenchant themselves with the traditional literary realism. She advocates for the novelists to replace the aforementioned traditional method of portraying reality with more experimental forms being used in postmodernist and postcolonial fiction. Stressing the need for an intensification of the traditional modes of narration in fiction, she advocates the need to use devices such as intertextuality and repetition on the levels of plot, narrative and reference in trauma fiction.

This qualitative study, through the textual analysis of the novel, uses trauma theory with special reference to the works of Cathy Caruth and Dominic LaCapra to track the symptoms, usually found in the survivors of trauma, and also to analyze the characters to see how they provide an insight into the unrecorded details of the traumatic incident. Moreover, this research uses the mechanism provided by Judith Lewis Herman to see if the survivors of trauma follow the three stages of coping with trauma, highlighting how, and to what extent, the reaction of the survivors is in accordance with Herman's mechanism.

Summary of the Novel *Earth and Ashes*

Earth and Ashes tells the story of the elderly Dastaguir, the protagonist, whose village has been destroyed by the Russian tanks during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. He, along with his young grandson, Yassin, who has gone completely deaf due to excessive bomb blasts, is travelling to the mines where his son, Murad, works. These two are some of the few survivors of an attack during which Russian tanks turn the whole village into rubble. Dastaguir, amid all the flashbacks of destruction that he witnessed, travels to see his son in order to tell him what happened to his family and the village. While waiting for the bus at a checkpoint, the protagonist, Dastaguir, and his grandson meet the incommunicative guard, Fateh, and a well-educated and kind MirzaQadir, with whom he shares his trauma-filled account of the destruction that he witnessed. Here, Dastaguir recalls how his wife and daughter-in-law Zaynab were humiliated and killed, and how the village was destroyed. This is where both Dastaguir and Yassin share the flashbacks of trauma with MirzaQadir, and thus give an insight into the unrecorded history of the trauma of war.

Trauma and the Temporal *Elision of Memory*

The novel starts with a description of Dastaguir journeying with his grandson to see his son, Murad, to tell him the story of the destruction of his village. The Russian tanks have destroyed his village, demolishing all the houses and killing almost everyone present, but he is on his way to see his son and inform him of how the Russians turned everything into rubble. This is typical of the reactions to trauma where, according to Uytterschout, a person, who witnesses a traumatic incident, either represses the memory, or makes an endeavour to remember the episode and tries to fit it into the scheme of things.³⁸ The *Elision of Memory* that Cathy Caruth mentions while saying that a traumatic incident can

38 Sien Uytterschout and Kristian Versluys, "Mourning and Melancholy in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*," *Orbis Litterarum* 63 no. 3 (June 2008): 216-36.

result in the loss of memory for a while, and which is also termed as 'the latency of trauma',³⁹ is evident in the character of Dastaguir when he feels as if he is losing his memories altogether. The experience of seeing the destruction of his village haunts him so much that he almost forgets about his surroundings as he exclaims, in front of the guard, "My God, you remember everything ... It's me who is losing my memory."⁴⁰

The inability to express a traumatic incident is the hallmark usually found in the behaviour of survivors of a traumatic incident, as put forth by Freud and Caruth, it is also visible in the character of Dastaguir. When asked by MirzaQadir about the purpose of his journey, he is simply unable to recollect his thoughts. Despite the fact that he has been waiting for someone to ask him about his grief, he is simply not able to speak his mind. The grief of losing his wife, daughter-in-law and the whole village is so big for him that he simply cannot express his feelings of grief. This inability to speak is symbolic of what Caruth terms the elision of memory.

This shell, however, is broken when MirzaQadir explains the unbecoming attitude of the guard, saying that:

It's sorrow that has ruined him ... You know, father, sorrow can turn to water and spill from your eyes, or it can sharpen your tongue into a sword, or it can become a time bomb that, one day, will explode and destroy you .. The sorrow of Fateh the guard is like all three.⁴¹

Caruth asserts that people are implicated in each other's trauma; therefore, the description of the sorrowed guard enables Dastaguir to speak his mind. Thinking about MirzaQadir and the guard as someone going through same agony of grief and loss as does he, Dastaguir musters up courage and describes the destruction, brought upon his village by the Soviet troops. He describes how he saw his house reduced to rubble, his wife going mad and then killed due to the destruction, how women were buried alive, how

39 Freud, "Project for a Scientific Psychology,"166.

40 A.Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*(Florida: Harcourt Inc, 2002),6.

41 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*,23.

his daughter-in-law was dishonoured and how she, while he sees her naked, disappears into the fire, and how his house had become a grave—a “grave for my wife, a grave for my son, his wife and their children.”⁴² It is due to this excessive grief, which is beyond usual human experience that Dastaguiris unable to initially speak his mind. It is only after he is implicated in the trauma of the guard that he is able to gather his thought together and start sharing his trauma.

Survivor’s Flashbacks and the Creation of ‘History’

The protagonist’s troubles are further exacerbated when he comes to know that his grandson, Yassin has gone deaf due to the excessive bombing by the Russian forces. Yassin, without knowing what ‘deafness’ means is suddenly unable to hear anything. He does not know that he has gone deaf; rather he thinks that the other people around him and all the things that he can see have lost their voices. He feels that the world, all of a sudden, has gone silent. There are no more voices in the world, but then he inquires: “Why are people moving their mouth?”⁴³ The only head and tale that the young Yassin can make of the destruction brought upon his village by the Russian forces is that they took away everyone’s voice. Yassin’s spontaneous reaction, whenever he sees his grandfather crying, is to say, “The bomb was huge. It brought silence. The tanks took away people’s voices and left. They even took grandfather’s voice away. Grandfather can’t talk even more, he can’t scold me ...”⁴⁴

This is typical of the videotape-survivor-analogy, which is drawn by Tal to explain Caruth’s assertion, according to which the accounts provided by survivors are very helpful in creating highly truthful histories.⁴⁵ This is also typical of Dominic LaCapra’s assertion, according to which the survivor of trauma will always have something that is from

42 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*, 31.

43 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*, 9.

44 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*, 32.

45 KaliTal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

the past, adding that this can be in the form of a presence that haunts the survivor's mind on a continuous basis.⁴⁶ He further adds that when the survivor mentions the traumatic experience, he/she, in his thought, goes back to the same scene of trauma and is thus caught up in the same situation.

Dastaguir, being a mature and more powerful person in terms of mental strength, compared to Yassin, has the ability to act out the trauma. But, for the more impressionistic Yassin, it is a very difficult incident to cope with. Hence, whenever triggered by the teardrops of his grandfather, he repeats exactly the same account that he witnessed during the Russian attack. Whenever, he sees his grandfather crying, he, just like a videotape, starts narrating whatever has been recorded on his mind.

Caruth's Notion of Survivor's Guilt

Dastaguir's enigma of survival haunts him so badly that he deplores his existence. His survival leads to feelings of guilt and unworthiness, which are the direct results of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. The paradox of the memory of destruction and the conundrum of testimony to relate the account of destruction entails a double trauma i.e., the trauma of death and the trauma of survival.⁴⁷ The survivors of war, as in the case of Dastaguir, repent their survival because the trauma that they are faced with is too big for their mind. Dastaguir says: "Why wasn't I killed before I reached home? What wrong had I committed to be condemned to witness ...?"⁴⁸

This guilt of survival is so pervasive in war-torn Afghan society that MirzaQadir also regrets the very existence of the living people around him. This chain of traumas where one's trauma reminds others of their own traumas and thus enables them to feel for each other is quite evident. As Caruth (1996) says, "[w]e are all implicated in each other's

46 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

47 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*.

48 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*, 30.

trauma.”⁴⁹ MirzaQadir, after listening to the full of grief account of Dastaguir, says, “[v]enerable father, these days the dead are more fortunate than the living.”⁵⁰ This shows how pervasive the experience of trauma has been in the novel. Although, trauma is associated with individuals, the overall portrayal of characters, like MirzaQadir and the guard, whose experience of traumatic incidents are not covered in the story, are shown with the typical symptoms of the survivors of trauma. This shows how the writer, through the portrayal of individual characters, constructs the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a societal trauma for the people in Afghanistan.

Coping with Trauma

In order to cope with the debilitating effects of trauma, Herman, one of the pioneers in the field of trauma studies, came up with a coping mechanism to treat the survivors of war.⁵¹ The study uses this mechanism to track characters in Rahimi’s *Earth and Ashes*, which portrays individuals, who went through a traumatic experience.

Herman asserts that the first stage to cope with trauma is that the survivor should be sure that safety has been established in his/her life. This sense of safety should include not only physical safety but also a sense and consciousness of safety in one’s surrounding. This is important, because this sense of safety should alleviate fear on the part of the survivor.⁵² As portrayed by Rahimi, the protagonist, only when he is out of the danger zone can recollect what happened to his village. He tells the story of destruction only because he feels secure .

After giving an apple to Yassin to eat, he puts ‘a pinch of *naswar*⁵³ in his mouth and then looks into the mirrored lid of his *naswar* box to examine ‘the web of sinuous lines’ around

49 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*, 24.

50 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*, 23.

51 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

52 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*.

53 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*, 3.

his eyes. This shows that he had the sense of safety that Herman recommends as the first stage to survive trauma. In the case of Yassin, it is evident from the novel that he considers his grandfather's presence to be the biggest sense of security one can have.

The second coping stage is that Herman recommends the act of remembering and mourning. At this stage, it is very important that the survivor provides an account of the traumatic incident. Typical of this second stage of coping with trauma, Dastaguir, after having some trouble relating the devastating account thought, is able to share with MirzaQadir. Dastaguir remembers the traumatic incident and mourns over the destruction as he says that the Russians did not spare anyone and reduced the village to dust. Dastaguir further recollects and describes, "...the Russians came and surrounded the village. I was at the mill. Suddenly, there was an explosion. I ran out. I saw fire and clouds of dust."⁵⁴

Contemplating about how to tell his son, Murad, about the incident, he says, "My son be strong!... If she was your mother, she was also my wife. She's gone. When death comes, it makes no difference whether it is for a mother or a wife... My son, death came to our village..."⁵⁵

Yassin, being too young to understand the gravity of the incident, does not mourn but does remember in a photographic memory what happened in front of his eyes. Each time he sees his grandfather crying, he says, "My uncle's dead, Mother's gone... Qader's dead, Grandmother's dead... The bomb was huge. It brought silence."⁵⁶

Through continuous mourning over, and remembering the trauma, the survivor "transforms the traumatic memory, so that it can be integrated into the survivor's life story."⁵⁷

54 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*,30.

55 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*,54.

56 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*,32.

57 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* 175.

The third stage to cope with an incident of trauma is to reconnect to everyday life.⁵⁸ As the novel covers a very short span of time, the characters undergoing the trauma are still haunted by the second stage i.e., remembering and mourning. Dastaguir, until the end, is haunted by the ravages of this attack. The naked body of Zaynab, his daughter-in-law, who went into the fire, still haunts him. He still thinks, “Zaynab threw her naked body headlong into the fire. She was burnt alive. She was burnt naked.”⁵⁹

Being possessed with these flashbacks of trauma, Dastaguir has not yet reconnected to everyday life. The trauma of the destruction of his whole family and village and then the mysterious reaction of his son, Murad, still haunt his mind. The third stage of reconnection to life will definitely take long. However, despite the fact that Dastaguir does not reconnect to everyday life, he behaves normally even when he is possessed with the idea of telling the story to everyone. The survivor mourns the losses as a result of the trauma and begins to construct a new life with self and with others. This depicts how this new history shows the Afghan people going through the traumatic incidents and is then left with no option but to reconnect to everyday life.

Implications for Pakistan and Conclusion

Rahimi's *Earth and Ashes* is indeed a work of fiction and cannot be considered as an exact account of a traumatized people who underwent the ravages of the Soviet invasion. However, this novel and accounts of trauma portrayed in other forms of literary productions are used as a heuristic meta-framework that guide the investigation of the Afghan people's trauma and allows us to go beyond the knowledge encompassed in the official accounts of History. Characters like Dastaguir serve as the mouthpiece for the representation of the societal trauma of the nation as a whole. Following the individual accounts of trauma, the overall societal experience of trauma is best judged when it comes to incidents, like war, which takes into its folds the society as a whole. Rahimi's *Earth and Ashes* provides insight into the condition of people in Afghanistan who went

58 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* 175.

59 Rahimi, *Earth and Ashes*, 60.

through the trauma of the Soviet invasion. This is all done through the lens of the writer who casts himself into the role of an eyewitness of this whole tragedy.

Further investigation into the traumas of additional individual characters, portrayed in literary pieces from Afghan writers should be carried out. This endeavour and others of this sort are in place for they are the past that flows into the present and then the present makes inroads into the future. Thus, the novelist, portraying the past, has invariably got a stake in the future. From bringing forth 'true histories,' as Caruth coins the phrase, and clarifying the people's view of the past, there is the possibility of a hopeful and just prophesy for the future.

Keeping in view the importance of fictional narratives dealing with trauma in the study of history, and in light of this study, it is recommended for other researchers to use trauma literary theory to investigate other works of literature which deal with incidents of trauma in Pakistan. Like Afghanistan, Pakistan has also been hit by suicide attacks and bomb blasts, carried out by terrorists. Similarly, civilian casualties have also been witnessed in attacks by unmanned aerial vehicles in the areas along the border with Afghanistan. Therefore, it is pertinent to mention here that researchers can carry out studies of fictional narratives which deal with natural disasters as well, such as the havoc caused by floods, destruction resulting from earthquakes, and the overwhelming impact of other disasters as portrayed in literature. Trauma analyses of Pashto literature, emanating from the war-hit areas along the Pak-Afghan border, where people have been witnessing the ravages of war, will greatly augment the historical accounts about this region. Researchers should pay special heed to trauma analysis of literature coming from these areas which are not in that much limelight as the technologically-advanced countries are.