

Literature or short
term depending upon
the catastrophic



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Literature has allowed us to explore beyond the limits of this world and also the human psyche.

Among that are certain literary works which is capable of posing a social challenge by setting out to explore the pain, suffering and trauma through self narratives, testimonies and flashbacks. Mythesis will throw sufficient light on the self narrated traumatic experiences of children under various oppressing situations. Trauma is an emotional shock caused by a deeply distressing or disturbing experience, it involves feelings and emotions. The consequences of a trauma may be long term or short term depending upon the catastrophic effects it left on the victim. Trauma caused by discrimination, sexual abuse, insecurity, domestic violence and particularly experiences may affect the minds of characters. Trauma and trauma theories can be very well related to history, war, politics, psychology, sociology and particularly literature.

It can be evidently said that both Trauma theory and Testimonial narratives have a very close relation. Testimonial writings prove themselves as a classic expression of trauma as the writers can retrieve themselves as active participants and witnesses of the history they went through.

Moreover Testimonial narratives make the reader to get acknowledged of the prevailing social challenges, injustices and the need to render a helping hand to those who suffer. A new literary method that considered traumatized children was developed in American literature towards the end of 19th century. A keen study on those traumatized children paralleled the research on child development studies, child psychology, PTSD and many other theories. This new tradition gained its significance when children started to

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narrate their own traumatic experiences through testimonials and self narratives.

Danielle Bernock, an American author has famously quoted that: "Trauma is personal. It does not disappear if it is not validated. When it is ignored or invalidated the silent screams continue internally heard only by the one held captive. When someone enters the pain and hears the screams healing can begin" (Danielle Bernock, *Emerging with Wings: A True Story of Lies, Pain, and the Love That Heals*). It can be obviously said that any traumatic condition is the result of being continuously tortured. Unless or until someone is willing to hear their screaming in silence, their trauma will remain personal. Both body and voice are recognized as opposites in trauma.

This is because of situations like; insecurity, confusion, betrayal and brutality that make the victim to remain dumb in spite of the unbearable pain the body is subjected to. "Trauma therapy, at least the best trauma theory, aims to turn trauma into voice, so that the traumatized person can speak, and finally transform his or her trauma into narrative. The broken fragments of experience are made whole" (Alford, *Trauma and Forgiveness*).

And that is how trauma is strung with testimonials and narratives to voice out their silenced sufferings and unheard cries, thus giving birth to a new literary technique. Most of the Trauma theories are concerned with the traumatic experiences of authors and how it has affected their literary works. Testimonials or narratives can also be conceivably recognized as a representation of traumatic experiences. It's essential to remember Freud, who wrote that childhood traumas were the source of most neuroses and psychoses.

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And so this dissertation will present a detailed study of traumatized children in narratives and testimonials by the application of various trauma theories. In my thesis, children testimonials are broadly classified into five different categories and trauma in that particular aspect is studied using theories that connect the study as a whole. As for War Testimonials, *Dear World: A Syrian Girl's story of War and Plea for Peace* by Bana Allabed and *Tamil Tigress* by Niromi de Soyza discuss the brutality and terror that engulfed the young minds. It is vividly expressed in their words which resonates their plea against the stupidity of war and the trauma caused by merciless deaths and destructions.

The characters of these novels are in a search to find a let out or an escape out of the traumatic events that tangled their lives. Also, it discloses the innocence of a child trying to explain the plain truth by simply placing hope and peace as their requests. Both these novels expose the dark reality of wars and the stirring traumatic impressions it leaves upon the victims. *Aboriginal Testimonials or Testimonies of Australia's stolen Generations* survivors is about children who were born of mixed race. My place by Sally Morgan is often specified as a milestone in Aboriginal literature and *Is that you Ruthie?* By Ruth Hegarty is a black Australian testimony that accounts the lives of aboriginal girls in a dormitory at a notorious aboriginal institution. Sally Morgan as an indigenous writer, historian and activist speaks about her bitter childhood experiences, erased identities, falsely framed heritage and the trauma it conceived in every aspect of her life. Ruth Hegarty illustrates her experience in a dormitory with other girls of the same age group. She registers her resentment on the harsh government

policy that broke family bonds and friendships by consequently putting them in an incessant search for relations they lost.

As the Healing

Foundation noted:

“ The trauma experienced by Indigenous people as a result of colonisation and subsequent policies, such as the forced removal of children, has had devastating consequences. The disruption of our culture and the negative impacts on the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has had lasting negative effects, passed from generation to generation. The cumulative effect of historical and intergenerational trauma severely reduces the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to fully and positively participate in their lives and communities, thereby leading to widespread disadvantage” (Healing Foundation). Holocaust Testimonial novels afford in providing a detailed historical account of what the witnesses personally experienced and also it contributes a speculative account of everything that happened so long before. *I am a Star: Child of the Holocaust* by Inge Auerbacher elucidates her wistful childhood that intervened at the age of seven and how her death was defied at the concentration camp for three years. *Upon the Head of a Goat: A Childhood in Hungary 1939-1944* by Aranka Seigel covers the five years of life from the perspective of a Jewish girl up to being delivered to the concentration camp at Auschwitz. These novels provide a gripping account of trials the Jewish families had to undergo at the concentration camps held at Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The girls in the novels portray the aftermath of

the world wars and also about the ghettos where the Jewish families were thrown in to a confined quarters to await an unknown fate.

Both these novels detail the plethora of emotions and how they handled it as children going through this traumatic ordeal. Child abuse or child maltreatment is a universal problem and children who have been sexually abused are always at the risk of developing a whole lot of symptoms like insomnia, inferiority complex, depression which at extreme conditions may lead to trauma. Testimonials written on Child abuse is really heart breaking and reveals many awful truths that are secluded by closed doors. Two such Testimonial writings are Sickened: The Memoir of a Munchausen by Proxy Childhood, written by Julie Gregory and Street Kid: One Child's Desperate Fight for Survival by Judy Westwater.

Sickened unfolds a young girl's messed childhood dealing with Munchausen (MPB or induced illness) at the hands of her mother. This can be regarded as an invisible kind of child abuse as she suffers invariably at the hands of both her father and mother, enduring countless physical and mental abuses. It shocks the reader as she gets battered psychologically and gets nudged into a state of irretrievable trauma. On the other hand, Street Kid: One Child's Desperate Fight for Survival is truly a moving constructive story of a girl who is made to suffer under the inhuman treatment of nuns. This thought provoking testimony is truly an eye opener in making the readers to be get aware of the social evils that is happening around us and the society. The development of Slave narratives or Testimonials from autobiographical accounts made it to be accepted as one of the widely read

literary genre that is made up of the written account of enslaved Africans and West Indians belonging to British Colonies.

At the beginning of 18th and 19th centuries, these narratives were published in pamphlets and some were recorded as oral histories. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs addresses those who weren't completely aware of the evils of slavery. She also explores the physical abuses and sufferings faced by her and the other female slaves at the plantations. Harriet Jacobs renders a heart-breaking picture of the traumatic events she underwent to save her children from the cruel clutches of slavery.

History of Mary Prince, a West Indian slave, Related by Herself is a firsthand description of the barbarism of enslavement. She reveals her anguish and pain as she talks about the incessant and painful labor they were forced into without any rest. The book also makes a candid reference to the political scenario that existed during their period of slavery and the harsh laws which spilled hatred and discrimination on the slaves. My thesis would analyse the select novels of these Testimonial writers using the following theories as a diagnostic mechanism. 1. Survival and Victim Theory by Margaret Atwood would explore the central image of a trauma victim and also would analyse and compare the four 'Victim Positions' as stated by her.

2. The Theory of Logotherapy and Existentialism by Viktor Emil Frankl would do 'a special existential analysis' on the traumatized child thus elucidating the primary motivational force of the individual to find a meaning in life in spite of the brutalities they were subjected to. 3. The theory of Trauma: Exploration in memory by Cathy Caruth, affirms that memory play a

significant role in trauma as it holds within unbearable horror and intensity. It brings back those dark remembrances, which are usually considered as unrecognized truths. This includes trauma caused by wars, historical barbarism, child abuses, discrimination, etc.

.. And also she claims literature to be a window for traumatic experiences as it guides and teaches readers in surprising and indirect ways. 4. The Limits of Autobiography Trauma and Testimony by Leigh Gilmore studies the limitations of autobiographies in which trauma takes a major role. It compares and contradicts a testimonial writing as it differs within itself in testifying and also in providing a sufficient amount of literary knowledge.

And also it demonstrates how and why the author deflects from the necessities of an autobiography when trauma coincides with self representation.

This dissertation would further explore the psychological and physical trauma a testimony can discover. And also this would definitely be a great leap in the literary field, offered for those children whose voices are silenced by trauma and torture. It can be possibly regarded as a pioneer step in analyzing the psyche of children not only to kindle their dreadful memories but also to provide them the courage to hike and a reason to exist.