Trauma And Human Psyche: A Study on Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*

Ebisha Iyni S.

PG Student,

Department of English,

Lady Doak College, Madurai.

Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University.

Jenifer S.

PG Student,

Department of English,

Lady Doak College, Madurai.

Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University.

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the concept of trauma and the human mind is discussed based on *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story* by A. Revathi, translated by V. Geetha, through a theoretical framework of Trauma Theory by Cathy Caruth. The argument expressed in the paper is that trauma in the life of Revathi is acute, chronic, and complex. Acute trauma manifests itself in instances when one is mocked and humiliated unexpectedly in front of crowds. This is manifested as chronic trauma due to the recurrent instances of discrimination and constant fear. Constant rejection by the family and society leads to complex trauma. Complex trauma upsets the self-identity of Revathi, warping the memory and compelling silence and

invisibility. This paper examines a significant gap in Indian transgender literature studies where the Trauma Theory is not applied. It looks at how Revathi transforms her personal misery into self-identification and empowerment. It adds to our knowledge of the trauma, identity, emotions, and strength within the Hijra life.

Keywords: Fragmented memory, Trauma theory, Hijra, Identity crisis, Testimony and healing.

A. Revathi is a trans-feminist, trans-activist writer and actor. She was born a boy, and her family addressed her as a boy. She experienced girlhood since her childhood. She was born in a village and moved to Delhi because she had to run away to avoid the violence of her family. Her autobiography unfolds her pain, trauma, suffering, violence, loss of identity and self-searching, and reflects her life and reality.

Cathy Caruth, in her the trauma theory, examines that it is not the complete experience, but the fragmented and haunted memory that causes a person to undergo trauma. The theory of trauma is an interdisciplinary area of literature, psychology, and cultural studies. It also concentrates on the manner in which trauma shapes the human mind. According to the theory, testimony and storytelling become the critical means, through which people can heal themselves after their psychological trauma. This theory is primarily concerned with the influence of external factors on the individual, that is, abuse, violence and oppression. This research shows how Revathi experienced pain and suffering in the hands of society, which, in turn, becomes the cause of her trauma.

"The woman trapped in a man's body was how I thought of myself" (Revathi 15). According to Cathy Caruth, trauma leads to a fragmented self, since human beings are unable to fully transmit the traumatic events to their conscious memory. The metaphor of being trapped is applied in the line to depict

gender dysphoria, as well as a traumatic existence that involves fighting with individual identity. The trauma theory exposes humiliations, rejections, and violence as the factors that cause trauma.

"We wanted to live as human beings do, with dignity" (Revathi 30). Trauma involves physical violence as well as destruction of values and personality. By referring to her suffering as 'we', Revathi relates her individual suffering to the sufferings of a collective community. It illustrates how the Hijra community is denied their basic human rights. They are perceived as less than human beings by being ridiculed, abused by the police, as well as socially, and excluded economically.

"By this day next year, you must make a woman of me, just like you. If you can't at least make me into a man completely" (Revathi 57). This is her prayer, and it shows her anguish. Revathi pleads with God to give her a way out, one that will release her as a woman. The scenario goes to show how individuals are subjected to extreme cases of emotional distress when their physical looks and societal obligations collide with their actual self-identity.

"Mumbai Dadar, Chennai Central, the things I saw at these places filled me with sorrow. Men and even women stared at us and laughed, and heckled us. I realised what a burden a hijra's daily life is. Do people harass those who are men and women when they go out with their families?" (Revathi 83). At the railway station, Revathi experiences the life of pain and sufferings of the Hijra community. Repeated humiliation is an important aspect of trauma, and it is evidently depicted. "I desperately wanted to be a woman. I put up with a lot for that, got beaten by all sorts of people, got abused, grew my hair, and today I am a woman. I even agreed to have my cock cut off. I felt that even if I am to die, let me die after having been a woman for a day at least. Now, for property's sake, I'm not about to become a man, or cut my hair. None of that, please!" (Revathi 169).

Revathi was beaten, abused and humiliated by people. This develops traumatic feelings because the mind gets affected by violence. Violence and rejections, when experienced repeatedly, lead to psychological trauma. The psychological distress is caused by continuous bullying, family violence, as well as social exclusion. The trauma theory proves that repeated rejection leads to loss of self-esteem, which causes fear, shame, and isolation of emotions. Hijras encounter violence or abandonment from their own family, which severely affects their lives.

"I could not think of myself as a complete woman. But now, all that was gone, the fear, the sense of unease that haunted me. Deep within myself, I recognised that I was now a real woman" (Revathi 92). These lines explain the relief that Revathi experiences by being a woman, after the operation. The emotions of suffering, trauma and self-identity seeking are reduced. The human psyche and bodily discomfort change as the prayer is answered. Constant humiliation and rejection by the other community are no longer threats, as she has now fully become a woman. She feels a sense of having re-taken her identity. But Revathi still feels the effects of social rejections, that she has experienced for the major part of her life. It causes her anxiety.

This autobiographical piece of work allows for defining three significant forms of trauma: acute trauma, chronic trauma, and complex trauma.

Acute trauma is associated with a psychological and emotional response to an unexpected and intense event, that is perceived as a threat to the safety or the existence of a person. It usually leads to instant emotional and physical reactions such as shock, fear, confusion or numbness. The experience may lead to memories that are not desired or even result in anxiety. "We noticed the auto drivers were pointing at us and sniggering. Some other people, too, were laughing" (Revathi 78). This line displays sudden

mockery and severe trauma. The surprise laughter and pointing produce instant shock, humiliation, and emotional hurt. This abrupt humiliation might overwhelm an individual, which is one of the major aspects of acute trauma.

The brain begins to associate social places with death and humiliation, and develops fear, anxiety, and emotional detachment. Although the moment of the incident may be brief, the impact is still felt, which affects future behaviour and image of the self. The fact that people cannot do anything to respond or protect themselves during the event, demonstrates that trauma may paralyse the mind at that moment.

This incident indicates that ordinary ridicule can be detrimental to health since it destroys self-esteem and dignity. It also emphasises that trauma in Hijra lives is not only due to extreme violence, but also due to being constant objects of public humiliation. This humiliation slowly undermines the mind and leaves one with a feeling of insecurity at all times.

"Watching people stare was also exhausting." (Revathi 79). The human mind is affected directly by acute trauma. Such attention from others at all times causes mental exhaustion, heightens self-awareness, and disrupts emotional balance. This is an extreme condition, which leads to the replacement of hope and confirmation with uncertainty and remorse. The mind is overwhelmed with trauma that affects one temporarily, making them lose confidence and balance. The episode reveals the impact social hostility may have on the psyche, breaking the logic and undermining the self-image of a person, even when he or she should get well and retrieve the meaning of life.

Chronic trauma is observed when an individual suffers over time, due to the recurrence of distress or suffering. It is not a result of some particular incident, but the experience of constant violence, discrimination, or humiliation, which occurs daily. The trauma recurs; therefore, there is a lack of time and

safe space to recover. This sustained pain in the long run leads to emotional fatigue, terror, worry, and deep internal anguish.

The effect of the trauma on the life of Revathi is evident in the line that says “We knew the police would give us no support” (Revathi 107). Fear is ever-present when the institutions relied upon fail to do their duty of safeguarding citizens. This fact contributes to the constant anxiety because danger is a part of life. According to the trauma theory, in case of the safety systems' failure, people remain alert all the time, and this state slowly damages their emotional state.

The absence of institutional support keeps the mind in permanent alertness. The psyche begins anticipating danger everywhere. This gives rise to constant worry, emotional depletion and distrust. This state of mind complicates the process of relaxation and getting a recovery, because an individual does not expect any external assistance. The constant fear over the course of time hurts emotional stability and reinforces the perception of being isolated and helpless.

Revathi has a personal, social, and systemic trauma in her life. Her inner psyche is impacted by the failure of protective institutions, transforming her perception of safety, authority and survival. Consequently, her mood is slowly undermined. This vividly depicts the long-term psychological scars brought on by the institutional betrayal, that go way beyond the events themselves.

The line, “Many such things happened in a day, and we lived in constant fear” (Revathi 107) signifies the repetition and durability of chronic trauma. It suggests that abuse and humiliation are not one-time phenomena, they occur many times a day. This results in constant fear, without time to rest in between, and it causes exhaustion of the mind and emotions.

Complex trauma comes as a result of experiencing a number of traumas that are recurrent, and these can be either in personal relationships or in powerful systems such as family, society, or institutions. It is complex since the trauma is stratified and affects different areas in the life of a person. It may destroy their identity, relationship and self-worth. The impact it causes takes strong root in the mind of a person. This does not happen by a sudden act. It is a result of recurring behaviour of emotional negligence in intimate connections in the family. These relations are supposed to provide protection, affection, and a feeling of belonging.

When a person is driven out of the parents' house, it leaves an imprint on the individual as unworthy and displaced, thus harmful to the sense of self. The trauma is complex. It involves feeling beaten out, deprived of shelter, and not being accepted by the very people who should protect them. These recurrent wounds eventually get internalised in them, leading to continuous insecurity, fear, and isolation.

This sophisticated trauma, caused by the sustained and compounded sufferings, is expressed in the line where the speaker suggests "I lived in the silent shadows, half hidden" (Revathi 119). Life in silent shadows implies fear, invisibility, and being an outcast. The loss of self-expression and identity is revealed when one is half hidden. This quote illustrates how abandonment by relatives, society, and institutions causes Revathi to conceal herself. This is one of the significant elements of complicated trauma in the life of Revathi.

"But if family scorns us, who do we turn to?" (Revathi 186). From the perspective of complex trauma, continuous abandonment by loved ones may be damaging to the sense of personal safety and inclusion. The question is an expression of desperation, loneliness, and the deprivation of family support. It can lead to a prolonged psychological problem.

The life of a Hijra is a life of continuous struggle that is influenced by family rejection, social humiliation, violence, and financial marginalisation. The text is a reflection of the psychological symptom and self-disconnection, under the trauma theory. The narration by Revathi is also a way of protest. She transforms the personal suffering into a statement of self-value and a request for the community to be heard.

The Indian literature that addresses the topic of transgender narratives talks about social marginalisation, the caste system, patriarchy, religious regulations, and legal marginalisation. Although these research studies demonstrate the oppression of transgender communities by society, they mostly never delve deep into the psychological impact of the same oppression.

Further studies may be done on transgender literature in other regions. The future of the trauma theory is in the fact that it will be expanded globally and interdisciplinarily. Some of the first studies on trauma involves experience during wartime and the Holocaust, and the current ones evaluate postcolonial trauma, caste oppression, gender-based violence, queer and transgender experiences, and migration. Neuroscience is a study area that involves the researcher exploring the memory and brain impact of trauma alongside, trauma theory. In the future of trauma research, the discourse must work towards a more collective, culturally oriented, resilient, and communal healing discourses. This might be of assistance in comprehending trauma, resilience, and transforming social and legal environments.

Works Cited

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

Revathi, A. *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*. Translated by V. Geetha, Penguin Books, 2010