

Hypnogogic Hallucinations in Atiq Rahimis *Earth and Ashes* and *The Patience Stone*

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Abstract

Dreams are guided by the emotions of the dreamer and it has connection with the experiences in life. Dreams provide an explanatory metaphor for the dreamer's emotional state. Hartmann analyses that traumatic persons are more prone to scary and tortured dreams. Rahimi pictures the emotional trauma of Afghans and how they are struggling to cope with insomnia. War is deadly, in Afghanistan generations have grown only war. War affects the psychology of children in number of ways. In war the sufferers are the poor civilians. War ruins their confidence and their survival is on threat. They witness the death of their loved ones in bomb blasts or they are brutally killed in front of their eyes and it result in various sleep related traumas like hypnogogic hallucinations and nightmares.

Key words: War, trauma, dreams, hypnogogic hallucination.

“Great things can happen in dreams, great discoveries in science and art. The French chemist August Kekule discovered the structure of benzene ring in a dream. Elias Howe invented the sewing machine based on a dream. Robert Louis Stevenson reported that his novel *Dr. Jekyll And Mr Hyde* came to him directly from a dream. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart claimed that many of the themes for his music came to him in dreams” (Hartmann 1).

Dreams are common. But what will be the dreams of persons who experience death in every minute. War has a catastrophic effect on the health and well being of people. The civilians are physically and psychologically affected by war. They are living dead, scatter by the loss of their loving ones. Their minds are trample when they witness the death of their loving ones. They find great difficulty in getting sleep. The dominating traumatic experience of their life appears in troublesome views before their eyes in the form of dreams, nightmares and hallucinations.

Dr.Earrest Hartmann is one of the world's most famous researchers in dreams. He is a professor of Psychiatry at Tufts University School of Medicine. He is the author of nine books and has written more than 350 articles on dreams. Hartmann successfully weds the psychology of the human mind with the biology of brain and uncovers the sources of dream. He believes that dreams are neither meaningless nor simply wish fulfillment, but an amazing biological and mental process trigger by most stressful internal forces.

In his book *Dreams and Nightmares: The Origin and Meaning of Dreams* Hartmann proposes a new theory of dreams. He believes dreams are guided by the emotions of the dreamer. Dreams are connected with a person's experience in life. The dream images contextualize the dreamer's dominant emotion. According to Hartmann dream provides an explanatory metaphor for the dreamer's emotional state. In his life time experience as a psychiatrist he finds out that traumatic patient are more prone to sleep related disorders like hallucinations and nightmares.

Hallucinations are perceptions of seeing, hearing, touching or smelling something that isn't actually there. Hallucinations are sensations that appear real but are created by the mind. They can affect all the five senses. For example a person may hear a voice that no one else in the room can hear. Hallucinations occur in a state between waking and sleeping. The two

forms of sleep related hallucinations are hypnogogic hallucination and hypnopompic hallucination.

Hypnogogic hallucinations are vivid and frightening episodes of seeing or hearing or feeling phantom sensations that occur in the period of drowsiness between wakefulness and sleep. Hypnogogic hallucination does not happen when the person is asleep. It is the terrifying conditions of being half awake but unable to move. Hypnopompic hallucination is an unusual sensory phenomenon that occurs during the transitory period between a sleeping state and wakefulness. A person can prone to sleep hallucinations if he/she does not get enough sleep over a long period of time. Depression, social isolation, seizures, high fever, drugs and epilepsy also causes hallucinations.

Having experience the horrors of war, Rahimi painfully narrates the psychological traumas of helpless civilians. His *Earth and Ashes* is a psychological drama that pathetically depicts the trauma of an old man, who sees the death of his family. Dastaguir, house is exploded by a Russian bomb. He runs towards the house and see his whole family being buried alive. His son Murad's pregnant wife Zaynab is in the bath house. She comes out nakedly shouting like a mad woman and throws herself into the flames. His house has become a grave for his family. Only his grandson Yassin survive, but he too lost his hearing in the bomb blast. This traumatic experience of his life appears in troublesome views before the eyes of Dastaguir. He is unable to sleep or to awaken himself sufficiently to banish the views. The only emotional reaction is a feeling of irritation with restlessness. When sleep does come it is often troubles by hallucinations. He is mentally occupied with the horrible scenes he has seen. Rahimi emotionally pictures the condition of Dastaguir in second person narration.

Your eyes open, you feel your skin is covered in cold sweat. You're not able to sleep in peace. It's been a weak now since you've had a restful sleep. As

soon as you close your eyes, it's Murad and his mother or Yassin and his mother or fire and ash or shouts and wails.....and you wake up again. Your eyes burn. They burn with sleeplessness. They're exhausted. Out of exhaustion and sleeplessness you keep falling into a half sleep-a half sleep filled with visions. It's as if you live only in those images and dreams. Images and dreams of what you have witnessed and wish you hadn't.....maybe also what you yet must see, wishing you didn't have to. (8)

Hallucinations are re-experiencing a traumatic event. Hartmann believes that the phenomenon of hallucinations is a product of repressed traumatic memories entering the conscious mind. Intrusive memory of the traumatic events, likely to arise in the form of visual images. These memories may form the basis of the voices and visions associate with the person. Hypnogogic hallucination is a vivid dream like sensation that an individual hears, sees, feels or even smells and that occur near the onset of sleep. *Earth and Ashes* gives vivid examples of hypnogogic hallucination. Dastaguir felt dishonor to see his daughter in law nakedly. Whenever he closes his eyes the tragic events in his unconscious monstrously peeps out and haunts him in hallucinations.

In *The Book of Job* when Satan strikes Job, one messenger is left alive to tell the bad news to Job, like that Dastaguir is left alive to announce the sad news to his son Murad who's working in Karkar coal mine. He feels he is going to plunge a dagger into the chest of his only remaining child. His heart is weak, heavy and trembles. He doesn't have the strength to reveal the truth. His torment heart is not letting him to sleep. Whenever he closes his eyes he is tortured by hallucinations. He tries to open his eyes as wide as possible because he doesn't want to doze again, to see the horrible pictures in dreams. He is waiting for a truck to take him to the mine. After a long wait he gets into the truck. The truck speeds to the mine. The bouncing of the truck makes him feel tired and he closes his eyes for a while. He starts to

hallucinate. In dream he saw Murad's wife running naked in front of the truck. Dastaguir shouts

Zaynab! Get out of the way of the truck! But his voice is not heard outside. He tried to roll down the windows but he doesn't have the strength. The apples he is carrying turns to coal. He wants to ask about the mystery of the coal apples to the driver. But in the place of driver his son Murad is sitting . . . Zaynab continues to run in front of the truck. The dust gradually settles to her white damp skin. A veil of black dust covers her body. She is no longer naked... (39)

He opens his eyes in fear. His body is covered with sweat and his hands trembles. He glances at the driver Murad is not in the driver seat. He checks the apple, it hasn't turned coal. He nervously looks in front of the truck Zaynab is not there. Rahimi remarks in a war zone the dead are more fortunate than the living, because the living are burning in the fires of hell.

Matthew Green author of *Aftershock: The untold story of surviving peace* is a journalist who works on conflict zones of Iran and Afghanistan. He tells the horrible tales of soldier's lives. He has spent two years listening to the distressing stories of former soldiers struggling to cope with post traumatic stress disorders like flashback where a sufferer re-experience in vivid clarity, a life threatening horrific event, as if it was happening again. Green says the soldiers are still fighting war in their minds even after the war has come to an end. Similarly Dastaguir family has died once, but he is dying every day by re-experiencing the pain that will be with him till to the end of his life.

Another important feature of hypnogogic hallucination is it often causes confusion, because it is hard to distinguish hallucination from reality. They create strong intricate visual images in the mind that may be distorted in an unrealistic way. As a result these

hallucinations cause fear. A person perceives the presence of an object or an event through any of the five senses without the existence of actual object or event. A person may wake up in extreme fear that their dream is real.

Rahimi's heroes and heroines are victims of tragic life and tortured psyche. *The Patience Stone* unfolds the psyche of the tragic women of Afghanistan. The unnamed woman unravels her past to her comatose husband, she tells about her heartless father. Her father loves and cares his fighting quails than his children and wife. "I often saw him kissing those quails, but never my mother, nor us, children. There were seven of us. Seven girls starved of affection"(57). Once he loses the quail fight and to save his honour in the bet, he gives his twelve year old daughter to live with a man of forty. She is scared that next will be her turn so she opens the cage and let the cat to eat the quail. Her furious father dumps her in a dungeon without food and water for days. Years passes but that traumatic experience is still fresh in her heart. When she faces another scary situation, her subconscious kindles her past traumas into hallucinations.

In the morning, at dawn, just before it started raining, the wind opened the window...I was cold....and afraid. I felt a presence behind me. I didn't dare look. I felt a hand stroking me. I heard my father's voice. I gathered every ounce of strength and turned around. He was there with his white beard....In his hands he was carrying the quail I had given to the cat. He claimed that everything I told you yesterday had bought his quail back to life! Then he embraced me. Stood up. He wasn't there. Gone taken by the wind...Was it a dream? No...it was so real! His breath on my neck, his calloused palm against my skin... (69)

When a traumatic person dreams, the dream reality seems to be more real than reality itself. They become prisoner of their dreams. When they repeatedly getting a dream their mind has gone completely blank and they take hallucinations for reality.

In *The Patience Stone* the woman's husband is impotent to produce an offspring but she is blamed and her mother in law is making arrangement to take a second wife for her son. If her husband family sends her out, she has to become a whore like her aunt. She doesn't prefer such a nasty fate, desperately she counsels her aunt. At her advice she mates with a stranger they has blindfolded and gets pregnant. She feels guilty and her soul is torturing her in the form of nightmares. She is haunted by the same dream every night. She says

I had the same nightmare every night. I saw myself giving birth to a boy; a boy who had teeth and could already speak...The child used to tell me that he knew one of my biggest secrets. That dream terrorized me, tortured me.....The first night he wanted my breasts. I didn't want to give him because of his teeth....so he started screaming...I can still hear his screams today. (116)

That dream made her afraid to go to sleep. But the dream gradually worm its way into her waking hours as well. "I used to hear the child's voice in my belly. All the time. Wherever I was. At the baths, in the kitchen, in the street...The child would be talking to me. Harassing me" (131). She prays for a miscarriage. But she is so relieved when she gives birth to a girl because she believes a girl will never betray her.

Steve Taylor, a senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University and the author of the book *Waking from Sleep* postulates trauma is an injury to the soul, and therefore finding a way to heal the soul is the most promising way to help people to recover. Steve Taylor points out an experience that happens to somebody when they reach their lowest point, when it seems that there is no other way. It is at the darkest point a breakthrough takes

place. It's about understanding this breakdown not so much as a dysfunction. The trauma forces them to undertake a journey of self discovery that they would have missed otherwise. This is certainly true to Rahimi's heroine because she says "I'm going to tell you everything, my sang-e-sabur. Everything Until I set myself free from my pain, and my suffering "(74). She finds herself free from all restraints.

Rahimi's novels tell about the distressing life of Afghans. Death, desperation, pain and fear debilitate them. In a war zone there is no hope for pleasant dreams. As Freud says dreams are wish fulfillment, the only dreams of Afghans are peace and security. Their dream is to breathe freedom and to inhale the fresh air of peace. If dreams are wish fulfillment the only wish fulfilling dream a reader can find in all Rahimi's novels is the dream of the fatherless child Yahya Who in his dreams fulfill his wish of seeing his father whom he don't remember. Yahya is told that his father is dead but his mother tells him that his father lost his way in Pul -e- Charkhi (literally means the bridge that spins around). The boy is waiting hopefully because he doesn't know that Pul-e-Charkhi has another meaning. It is a large pentagon shaped prison near Kabul with a fearsome reputation for torture and murder. So Yahya hopefully tries to see his father in his dreams.

War and terrorism are men create acts of violence, having emotionally and psychologically affect humans for the rest of their lives. It is estimated that one out of three living in war zone could be vulnerable to mental disorders. In Afghanistan generations has grown up knowing only war. Civilians live in a state of constant fear, because of the violent environment they are living in. Exposure to war and terror has clearly been found to cause high level of psychological problems like depressions, nightmares and hallucinations.

Among the many consequences of war, its impact on mental health of the civilians seems dreadful. Women, children, elderly and disable are more vulnerable to mental disorders. Nearly half of the Afghan population has experienced traumatic events. The WHO

estimated the people who experience traumatic events will have serious mental problems, they develop behavior that will hinder their ability to function effectively. The other common conditions are depression, anxiety, and insomnia. WHO attributes to deal with the psychological traumas of war. The World Health Assembly passes a resolution in May 2005, which urges member states to protect civilians from armed conflict. It implements various programmes to repair the psychological damage of war by providing moral and psychological support. It also plans to use the role of religion and cultural practices as ways of coping with the conflict situations to reduce their scars.

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