

The Healing Power Of Trauma In Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

PAVITHRA C

M.Phil English,

Auxilium College (autonomous)

Vellore-06.

ABSTRACT

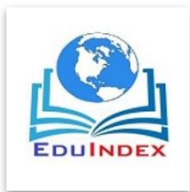
The aim of this study focuses on the healing of trauma using narrative as a therapeutic agent. A person who is affected by trauma suffers a lot with their traumatic memories. The excruciating pain of trauma makes a person mentally weak, multiple characters in the novel are affected by traumatic memories. Each character in the novel struggles a lot to come of their haunting past, many possibilities are found in the world to negotiate traumatic memories and this act as the central concept of the study.

Keywords: Traumatic memory, Talking cure, Narrative, Healing therapy, verbalization.

Trauma can be healed using narrative as a therapy, many traumatic victims have a pessimistic thought that, their trauma will last forever in their lives and there is no possible way to eliminate it. There are many possible ways to recuperate from traumatic memories and the psychiatrists suggest that the best way to liberate oneself from traumatic memory is to put them in words. They also believe that the narrative has a healing power, when the traumatic event is narrated to someone then the supremacy of that actual event is condensed which leads to the healing of trauma.

Trauma can be narrated in different forms, victims can verbalize their traumas to the therapist. Some victims cannot share certain things explicitly with others, so they can verbalize their trauma by writing personal diaries or else by writing letters to their beloved one. Many writers use the technique of narrating their personal memories in the course of putting them in words. The psychological theory and memory study assists the reader to analyze the personal memory of the writer.

The healing of trauma attained using verbalization as a mode of cure is known as "talking cure" which is a technique of treating psychological disorders or other emotional difficulties, where the victims discuss about their stress, anxiety, depression or relationship problems with the therapist and they learn about their psychological conditions as well as how to handle those conditions. There are different types of talk therapies found in the clinical line, humanist therapy, group counseling, psychodynamic, interpersonal therapy, psychotherapy, and cognitive behavioural therapy. The best talk therapy that works on the individuals and their needs are psychotherapy and cognitive behavioural therapy.



**Two-Day National seminar on
"Artificial Intelligence, Multimedia and ICT in Teaching,
Learning and Acquisition"**

sponsored by

Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi
on 23rd and 24th September 2019 at **Department of English,**
SRI S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Tamilnadu, India



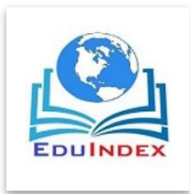
The process of talking cure is frequently scorned as a relic of the past but it must be celebrated as an enduring and valuable search that can help countless people to come out of their psychological problems. It is argued that the healthier way to confront traumas is to put them into words. In the novel BEM the characters use the technique of storytelling to eliminate their trauma, through this they attain solution for their traumatic memories. The journal of the American Medical Association supports the efficacy of talk therapy in psychoanalytic treatment.

Traumatic memories construct harmful effects in human lives, but it can be overcome through therapies. "Caruth, too, articulates concerns that the traumatic 'cure' implies a dilution of the experience into the reassuring terms of therapy" (Whitehead 116). This shows that the magical power of language can ease out the heavy mental burden of the trauma victim. The female characters in the novel carry trauma with them, they create stories about their traumatic past and deliver them to ease out their trauma. Tante Atie and Grandme' Ife' narrate numerous folk tale, the tales are packed with melancholy through which they indirectly voice out their inner agony.

A person can liberate themselves from their traumatic memories by narrating their life story to someone, it is believed that it will ease out their psychic pain. In the novel BEM, the Caco women in the novel accept their traumas and live happily with it for decades without any destructive effect. Cathy Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in memory* says that:

... the inaccessibility of trauma, of its resistance to full theoretical analysis and the understanding, they also open up a perspective on the ways in which trauma can make possible survival, and on the means of engaging this possibility through the different modes of therapeutic, literary, and pedagogical encounter ... notion of traumatic experience as a neurotic distortion, ... back continually to the ever-surprising fact that trauma is not experienced as a mere repression or defense, but as a temporal delay that carries the individual beyond the shock of the first movement. (10)

Caruth states that there is a possible survival for trauma victims, which can be attained using different modes of therapeutics. In BEM the characters widely use talking as a cure. The term "talking cure" was coined by Bertha Pappenheim, the subject of the first eminent case recorded in the history of psychoanalysis, who diminished her psychic pain by narrating her life story. Freud got fascinated by her technique, later he used this technique in his therapeutic study and theories. Many contemporary trauma theories and theorists are concerned about whether trauma can be narrated or represented. This topic is also closely concerned with the possibilities of a 'cure', because narrativization is seen as a vital cure in the context of Post-traumatic stress disorder.



**Two-Day National seminar on
"Artificial Intelligence, Multimedia and ICT in Teaching,
Learning and Acquisition"**

sponsored by

Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi
on 23rd and 24th September 2019 at **Department of English,**
SRI S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Tamilnadu, India



Victims should revisit their past life in order to articulate their trauma to others and there they will reexperience the traumatic event all again and many victims deny to put them in to words, Cathy Caruth in *Trauma: Explorations in memory* says that:

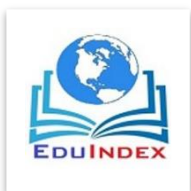
The trauma is a repeated suffering of the event, but it is also a continual leaving of its site. The traumatic reexperiencing of the event thus *carries with it* what Dori Laub calls the “collapse of witnessing,” the impossibility of knowing that first constituted it. And by carrying that impossibility of knowing out of the empirical event itself, trauma opens up and challenges us to a new kind of listening, the witnessing, precisely, *of impossibility*.(10)

Martine refuses to seek out for help, as she fears that the psychiatrist will take her to the past life and there she will “reexperience” her traumatic event with the same impact of the original. So, she denies seeking help from a psychiatrist, but Sophie comes out of her comfort zone and articulates it to others and by it they are enable to achieve a possible cure.

The first person narration of the novel suggests that Sophie is narrating her life story to the unknown readers. Danticat says that “I wanted to write a kind of fictional autobiography for Sophie, an “auto fiction,” as the French might call it, by someone who has trouble remembering or doesn’t really want to remember her certain parts of her life” (BEM 251). The novel is autobiographical as the author represented by Sophie, recollects her past in fragments and delivers it to the readers. She also attends therapy session meant for victims of sexual abuse and her therapist advices her to have a confrontation to free herself from her traumatic past and in the end she also confronts to her grandmother about the painful testing and with all these tactics, she is able to tackle her trauma. The confrontation helps victims to come out of their traumatic past and it acts as a possible cure.

Many Holocaust survivors, war veterans used writing as their escapist strategy. The Holocaust victims like Charlotte Delbo and Primo Levi, represented their traumas in the form of words. They created narratives out of their life stories by which they started writing. They wrote comprehensively about their correlation with Auschwitz, this helps them to come out of their traumas. When the actual event is narrated the original essence of the event is mimicked, and this leads to the dilution of their past experience. Through writings and narrativization the traumatic memory of victims gets weakened and this helps them to overcome their traumas.

There are some traces found in the novel, where the writing is used as a curing agent of trauma. In the group sessions with the sexual phobia patients Sophie, uses writing as the healing agent of trauma. When all the victims write letter to their abusers and then burn them to ashes, Sophie says at the end of the session “I felt broken at the end of the meeting, but a little closer to being free” (BEM 207). The writing heals the psychic wounds of the victims.



**Two-Day National seminar on
"Artificial Intelligence, Multimedia and ICT in Teaching,
Learning and Acquisition"**

sponsored by

Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi
on 23rd and 24th September 2019 at **Department of English,**
SRI S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College, Sattur, Tamilnadu, India



The novel BEM is a semi-autobiographical novel of Danticat, where she narrates her life story using a fictional character, Sophie. Danticat narrates the painful story of her life which haunted her very much in an interview recalls "... pain and trauma can definitely be a powerful muse. They can force us to sit down and express something from very deep within ourselves." Trauma summons the writers to narrate their stories in the form of written words. The confessional writers Sylvia Plath and Kamala Das verbalized their personal suffering through their works, but some writers never wanted to project their narratives as their own so they choose to be objective in narrating their stories by using a fictional character to make it impersonal as Danticat used Sophie.

In the novel Sophie confesses her story to the unknown listener, who is reading the book. The first person narrative affirms that Sophie is trying to liberate her-self from her traumatic memories. Danticat says "I wanted the reader to feel as though Sophie is nearly out of her breath as she's telling us all of this, as though the actual telling of the story is saving her life" (BEM 251). Sophie narrates her story in order to be liberated from her traumas.

Many confessional writers narrate their individual experiences, personal trauma, mental illness, traditional taboo, sexuality and their suicidal thoughts in their writings. When they express their inner agony in the form of words, the original event is witnessed again and they get reconciled to their trauma and the pain created by it. The confessional writing is also considered to be the best cure to the trauma victims. In Christianity there is a traditional way of confessing sins to the priest, it is believed that when someone confesses their sin, the healing of the soul and mind is attained through it.

REFERENCES

- [1] Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*.
<<https://hemi.nyu.edu/hemi/images/courses/spring-2009/caruthintro.pdf>.> Web. 10 January 2018.
- [2] Danticat, Edwidge. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. New York: Soho Press, 2015.
- [3] Whitehead, Anne. *Memory*. Routledge Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2008.
<<http://www.tandfebooks.com.iproxy.inlibnet.ac.in:2048/action/showBook?doi=10.4324/97802038888049>.> Web. 13 august 2016.