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Trauma and Socio-Political Concerns: A Study of Selected Modern Post-War Narratives

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Abstract- Modern literature is significant for its various human, political and philosophical concerns. The present paper aims to study trauma, history and different human concerns of modern society. The word trauma is defined in different ways. But in a general sense, it can be defined as an extreme painful experience that causes severe emotional shock and also have serious impact on human psyche. It also causes a very serious emotional rupture. Trauma has strongly influenced the literary imagination. The present paper studies trauma, past interaction and human concerns in the selected post World War narratives of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), and Amos Oz's *A Perfect Peace* (1982). These writers are the twentieth century's most original literary voices, whose novels offer the kaleidoscopic visions of a modern world, people and their concerns along with political and social issues in the global scenario. The selected novels are the masterpieces of the world literature, later translated into English. Moreover, another reason for choosing these writers is that they were shortlisted for the Nobel Prize for literature, who are representing different world with common concerns for human beings. They have presented grim realities of human world with detailed description of crimes of their respective country, history, brutality, treachery and more seriously miseries of modern human beings. The present study focuses on psychic history of individuals and their responses. It explores the selected novels within the context of local histories, politics, cultural patterns and their relation to different forces. The political and contextual reflection is also examined carefully.

Keywords: Trauma, history, brutality, socio-political concerns etc.

Trauma narratives have significantly influenced the literary narratives of the modern era. There are different theories of trauma. So, it becomes difficult to include all voices together in a single theory. There are various aspects of trauma discussed by Cathy Caruth, Judith Butler, Soshana Felman, Ann Kaplan, Freud and Lacan along with an emphasis on dissociation and the linguistic effects. The present study incorporates diverse experiences together into the broader trauma theory which could help to study different ways and methods of expressing trauma and its impact on individual and society. Cathy Caruth has defined it as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearances".

Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day*, third novel won him the Booker prize, is a post-imperialist work. It narrates the story of an English butler named Stevens from the first person point of view, who recalls his past in the form of a diary. The novel describes his personal life, but more significantly focuses on the relationship with his colleagues, loyalty to his master and dignity. The protagonist is nostalgic for the British way of life before World War II. The issue of colonialism is also connected to the story of human beings though not merely a political concern; hence, it is a postcolonial novel in a limited sense, where author's Japanese heritage has limited significance to the plot. The novel is more concerned about human beings than any heritage or identity.

The Remains of the Day is a historical novel. It is one of the most popular post war British novels. It is set in the mid-1930 to 1970 in England. It presents the decline of the British aristocracy that can be linked to the Parliament Act in 1911 which constitutionally governed the relationship between the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The novel, acknowledged on the back cover page, is "beautiful and haunting evocation of life between the wars in a Great English House". It is also a profound study of person, class and culture. Much it is concerned with Stevens' professional life as a butler at Darlington House and his relationship with his former colleague Miss Kenton. It takes place at the backdrop of the World War-II. The international affairs and influences of war on the lives of people are quite evident. World War II becomes a trauma, always available in the minds of people. It has not only influenced their personal lives but also has a long lasting impact on their minds.

The reminiscences of the war and its influence on individual's memory and life are often noticed in Ishiguro's novels. After the war, it becomes difficult to find people as staff in the houses. The major section of the novel is covered by the past memories or life of the narrator and his loyal service. Steven's memories of luxurious life style in the past and references to British and German agenda before the war, the ideology of Nazis etc. are simultaneously occur throughout the narratives. The ending is symbolic. Stevens instead looking at the remains of the day focuses on his future service and what is left of his own life. Stevens is much conscious of his inward as well as outward sense of dignity that becomes his identity which have layers of social constraints, politics, loyalty and love and relationship. The sense of loss of humanity and personal self are also the important concerns of the novel.

However, in the novel, we come across the structural devices of memory and perspective. Past is narrated from the protagonist's point of view that engages readers and invites them to look beneath the facts of the incidents beyond public face. Moreover, the novel also refers to the decline of British aristocracy. The increase in the tax especially after World War II emphasizes on the breakup of the established system and power. The novel is also significant for its narrative techniques.

Amos Oz, a professor of literature, is one of the famous Israeli writers, whose works have been translated into various languages and has received many honours and awards. He also advocates the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *A Perfect Peace*, originally published in Hebrew in 1982 and later translated into English by Hillel Halkin in the US by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich in 1985.

Oz's *A Perfect Peace* is set in the backdrop of the six-Day war in Israel. It portrays life on a fictional Kibbutz, where the founding generation and their children are struggling for their land with each other. The ideological tension within Israeli society is at the heart of the narratives. The novel depicts the conflict between the socialist dream and the strained realities of life in Israel. Moreover, it is also a mystical tale of different human beings, who live together as family. Through these characters Oz has evoked strikingly universal drama with the inner and outer transformation of his country and people. The novel narrates events from the six day war fought near the Syrian border between 1965 and 1967. Along with war and other conflicts, Oz has introduced various other domestic issues such as conflict between different generations. Moreover, the novel also examines the disjunctions of history and transcendation of such divisions by people.

The novel narrates the story of 26 years old protagonist, Yonatan Lifshitz, who lives among the claustrophobic, inquisitive people and must bear or feel with the older generation's beliefs. In the winter of 1985 he decides to start a new life. He plans to leave Kibbutz, where he was born and brought up. But the entry of Azariah Gitlia brings dramatic changes in a society, struggling with changing realities. Earlier he longs for going at urban places but later he realizes that he can attain harmony in the desert. Yonatan Lifshitz, son of Kibbutz secretary Yolek, reconciles from all the native values. Being working in the truck shed he feels as trapped by family and society. For him marriage is also a sort of burden, hence decides to leave.

Amos Oz has explored the psyche of Israeli people. Like other novels, in *A Perfect Peace* Oz highlights the generation gaps, socio-political conflicts, ideological crisis with domestic issues within the Israeli population. The title reflects the mood of the novel. It is a tale of redemptive headlong journey, emphasizes on characters, simultaneously, appear ordinary from outward but bizarre and fantastic from inside. The inner turmoil and exterior outline is presented very sharply.

Thus, these novels discuss important considerations in the development of trauma theory, history and different socio-political human concerns. It fosters ethical as well as positive political responses and also has broadened the theory that could accommodate multiple experiences. The novels are not only studying the past interaction and human concerns but also focus on the narratives of suffering that help us to understand the planetary humanism. More significantly, it helps us to study the post-colonial world and explore the practices, experiences and the influence of power on the local settings.

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