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## The Portrayal of Traumatic Impacts of 9/11 in Fiction: A Counter Discourse of Third World's Female Trauma in Waldman's The Submission

### Abstract:

*The incident of 9/11 opened up new challenges for the Americans and people of the world. As the terrorists were men, the incident of 9/11 was generally seen as a masculine event thus erasing the traumatic sufferings of women. The present paper is aimed to trace the impact of Western culturally constructed trauma against the third world women. The major theoretical insights have been taken from Kaplan (2003)'s Feminist Futures: Trauma, the Post-9/11 World and a Fourth Feminism. The analyzed data reveals that the identity of Asma Anwar as representative of third world women remains unstable. She has been represented as an object of no significance in the American society. We see that Asma Anwar as a woman of the third world had to bear the burden of history as well as her body.*

### Key Words:

Female Trauma, Third World Woman, Post 9/11 fiction and Fourth Wave of Feminism

### Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century witnessed the catastrophic event of 9/11 which opened up new challenges both for the Americans and the people of the Third world. It was difficult for American to decide who were innocent and who the perpetrators of this tragedy were. Simultaneously the Americans were unable to see the suffering of those who were not American citizens. Since, the incident of 9/11 a large number of novels were produced with a major focus on analyzing and narrating this catastrophic event. [Borges \(2013\)](#) establishes that in post 9/11 fiction the central theme was trauma rather than the war against terror. Post 9/11 fiction majorly started dealing with the traumatic suffering of the Americans both on a psychic and cultural levels. Post 9/11 fiction could not resist from the burdens of national and political ideology. Thus we see a serious halt in American fiction towards those who were considered the perpetrators i.e. the Asian by the American media and think tanks. Moreover, as the planes hit the world trade center and the majority of the victims were men, the incident of 9/11 was taken as a masculine phenomenon. The American media projected it as a tragedy which brought sufferings for the American men by the barbaric terrorists who were also men. The American media attempted to portray the victims of the tragedy as the innocent people. [Conte \(2011\)](#) elucidated that the image of the falling man symbolizes the fall

of American political history as well. While in reality the victims of the tragedy includes both men and women, the Americans and the non-American including Muslims. Among these Muslim sufferers the women of the third world were also included among the victims of 9/11. They had equally suffered this social crisis but American media could not sense their feelings of loss. It was a difficult time for America to differentiate between "Terrorist and Freedom Fighter" in Structuralist terms. The American Stirred with the feelings of nationalism erased the sufferings of the Muslims and people from the third world taking them as perpetrators of the tragedy of 9/11. The incident of 9/11 has continuously been represented as a threat to America by the barbaric men of the Third World. Among this noise, the suffering of the third world women remains muted

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and unattempted. There is much need to trace the suffering of people from the third world with Muslim identity particularly the female. The present study is aimed to analyze Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2012) from the perspective of a female from the Third World with Muslim identity. Asma Anwar as a representative of third world Muslim woman and victim of 9/11 has been taken for analysis. She was from Bangladesh and was living in America at the time of the tragedy of 9/11. It is an attempt to explore how the authoress represents and deals with the trauma of Asma Anwar- third world woman.

### Literature Review

According to [Greenberg \(2003\)](#), the distressing trauma of 9/11, shattered the Americans' sense of psychological unity and tore the individuals into fragments. The Americans were no doubt the victim of such horrible event but were not totally innocent. America even prior to the incident of 9/11 had developed a binary of discrimination and hatred against those who were the potential perpetrator of this incident. Initially, the incident of 9/11 took its roots as a psychological trauma but later on it established as culturally traumatic as the Americans took it as a threat to their nationalism. The American media projected the victims as martyrs. But among these victims of 9/11 the Muslims residing in America were also included. The American media under official/ national stance erased their sufferings.

[Khushi \(2019\)](#) opines that the incident of 9/11 added the dichotomy of the "West vs. Terrorist" in the existing binary of the "West vs. Rest". In the Post 9/11 era, particularly the Muslim identity became stigma and label of discrimination for the Muslims around the world. The world always keeps on changing but how did it change on September 11, 2001 was unparalleled and unprecedented. On this day, the world was stunned into silence challenging the notion of American exceptionalism. The attacks of 9/11 on the surface level destroyed buildings and killed thousands of innocent people. But on a deeper level, these terrorists' attacks "shattered a sense of security and perceptions of invulnerability among residents of the United States" ([Silver 2011, p. 247](#)). In other words, terrorists did not only collapse the highest buildings of America, but they also "destroyed an icon in the household imagery of the American nation" ([Borradori 2003, p.28](#)). This chaotic situation opened new discussions of the sufferers. So, in a very short time, the tragedy of 9/11 took the status of cultural trauma. Among these sufferers were included the men and the women of the third world whose suffering remain unnoticed by the American media.

### Post-9/11 World: Construction of Cultural Trauma and Identity of the Perpetrators

[Scanlan \(2012\)](#) provided that the incident of 9/11 radically affected the sense of the world as a shattered place with conflicting identities. It projected the contrasting paradigm the American as the most innocent one and the people from the third world i.e. the Muslims as the perpetrators and potential enemy of the Americans. This conflicting social situation established the world as a small place with national antagonisms. In the post 9/11 scenario the American society developed a strict situation of social exclusions and discrimination. American media exerted its maximum potential to the representation of the barbaric identity of the terrorist. Furthermore, American media majorly focused that these terrorist were from the third world and were the Muslims. So the third world and Muslim underwent derogatory representation by the western media. Among the sufferers of the tragedy of 9/11, male and female from America and the third world were included. The feminist critical discourse analysts have been challenging the patriarchal constructs and structures of oppression against women since Sappho to present. Women have moved from seeking their right to vote to the freedom of the female category in the form of womanhood. But consistently there has been the issue of authenticity of experiencing. Theorist like [Spivak \(1988\)](#) has argued that how Euro-American white women can represent the experiences and sufferings of the third world women. The woman of the third always has been marked with the sanctioned identity of ignorance by the western elite women.

[Spivak \(1988\)](#) explored how major works of European metaphysics i.e. Kant and Hegel not only had a tendency to exclude the subaltern from their discussions, but vigorously thwarted non-Europeans from occupying

positions as fully human subjects. Simultaneously, the women from the third world are at the double marginalized position and their voice has been ignored by the Western Discourse i.e. in media and fiction. With the evolution of the discourse of 9/11, the people of the third world were represented as subalterns. As the Americans have failed to cross the deluge of nationalism, the discrimination against the residents of America from the Third World developed a panorama of an unhappy ending. While America should have to keep in mind that until the strict and dehumanizing treatment to the other will remain in practice, the chances of violence and resistance would continue. Regarding the incident of 9/11 and war against terror, [Kaplan \(2003\)](#) proclaims that their response to the tragedy of 9/11 the sufferings of euro-centric women even went unresolved. This signals to us that what attention would have been paid to the suffering of the third world women who were already at a disadvantageous position in American society. The condition of the third world women is more adverse i.e. cultures in which women are living, are acting as a site of exploitation for them and are repressing their bodies and demolishing their identity. While projecting the future concerns of the feminist movement, [Kaplan\(2003\)](#) asserts that it is the dire need of the time that we should re-organize our priorities so that we could help women in winning the battle of our times, namely terrorism.

### **9/11 and the Suffering of the Women**

[Kaplan \(2003\)](#) suggested that “fourth” feminism in the wake of 9/11 is a crystallizing moment” (p, 55). It is the time when the feminist concerns are in need to be more comprehensive and non-spatial. The fourth wave of feminism should address the challenges faced by the women of the first and the third world. Presenting the men as the sole victim of 9/11 is again parallel to patriarchy and unrealistic. She further opines that the incident of 9/11 changed a lot what had already been produced by the first and the second wave of feminism.

In post 9/11 times, in the destabilized social and political world the feminist concerns become more widening as well. Bush administration claimed that by bombing in Afghanistan, America would be able to liberate the women from the atrocities and oppression imposed by the Taliban. But as a result of the American bombing in Afghanistan a lot of women have to suffer. Thus the American political and will of war added to the suffering to the women from the third world i.e. Afghanistan instead of liberating them from the clutches of Taliban.

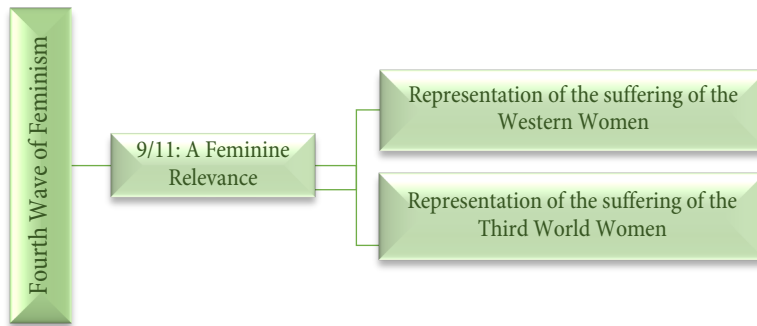
The worst impact of 9/11 was that women lost their jobs globally. Kaplan provides one of the means through which, in the fourth wave, responding to terror as international feminists, women can learn about each other’s traumatic experiences, can appreciate the damage brought about by repressive regimes, can transform themselves, and can determine to build a future world in which such traumas are rare rather than the stuff of daily life. This new reality ideally cuts across racial, ethnic and national divides.

### **Conceptual Framework**

[Kaplan \(2003\)](#) suggested that feminism is not monolithic and static. As a movement for the representation of women, it should keep on adopting the new political and social scenarios at local and international levels as its agenda. She contends that currently feminism is taken as a movement for the rights of western women. While regional feminisms have their adjectives with them which limit and demark their scopes i.e. Islamic feminism, African feminism and black feminism. She questions that feminism as a movement has to come up for voicing the suffering of the women both from the first and the third world. She makes a call for all types of feminisms to join in hands for the multidimensional representation of women in the wake of 9/11. She says that the sufferers of 9/11 had an adverse impact on the women globally. So, she calls for the fourth wave feminism to address the sufferings of third world women by tracing its feminine relevance.

For this model, the major theoretical insights have been taken from [Spivak \(1988\)](#) critical insights of the status of third world women in parallel to the Euro- Centric feminisms. Spivak the time and often had spoken that feminism as a movement is Euro -centric and it lacks the representation of the third world women. The

proposed model of the fourth wave of feminism would address the trauma of the third world women in response to the suffering caused by the incident of 9/11.



**Figure 1:** Adopted from Kaplan, E. (2003). *Feminist Futures: Trauma, the Post-9/11 World and a Fourth Feminism?*

### Textual Analysis

The novel, *The Submission* by Amy Waldman is about a memorial of the victims of 9/11 after ten years of the incident. The anonymous submissions are taken by jurors. Muhammad Khan, an American Muslim, submitted his design for a garden in the memory of the victims of 9/11. Two designs were selected for the final competition: the garden and the void. The garden was intended to be a tribute to the victims of 9/11 with sweet and happy memories, while the void was intended to remind of the worst pain and suffering through which the victims of 9/11 had to pass. The void reveals the clouds of smoke rising from the World Trade Center and scattered, bleeding body parts of the victims of 9/11. Claire, who is among the jury members, prefers the design of the garden over the void. Later on, when American media and other jury members come to know that the garden design is by Muhammad Khan, a Muslim, Muhammad Khan is threatened to withdraw from the competition. Claire is pressurized to review his decision. Asma Anwar, a Bangladeshi immigrant whose husband is among the victims of 9/11, is killed for speaking the rights of her husband in a public gathering. After the death of Asma Anwar by unnamed murderers, the jury members suggest to withdraw from the competition as a correcting strategy of the sufferings of 9/11. Here we are concerned with the suffering of the third-world Muslim women which they had to face in post-9/11 times against the American-constructed situation of cultural trauma.

### The Third World Muslim Woman as the Victims of the Headscarf Crisis

Meanwhile, the 9/11 literature narrating the trauma of this catastrophic event attempts to facilitate healing from a post-traumatic stress disorder and the horrific aftermath of the tragedy on an individual's traumatized psyche. Experiencing 9/11, "Americans who had felt invulnerable, discovered that their government had been lax in detecting and intercepting terrorists alighting on U.S. shores" (Flynn 2002, 63). After 9/11, Americans have found themselves and their homeland fragile and vulnerable in various areas such as trade, airline and transportation, and national security. To tackle this vulnerability and to overcome the trauma of 9/11, numerous writers addressed the issue in their fiction. A good example is the novel of American authoress Amy Waldman's *The Submission* (2011). In response to the incident of 9/11, a serious situation which the Muslim women from the third world had to face was the situation of headscarf pulling by the Americans. The scarf as a symbol of Muslim identity proved a symbol of discrimination and hatred against the Muslim women of the third world. Asma Anwar challenges that what sort of liberal and democratic country America claims herself.

It's dhimmitude: non-Muslims aren't allowed in Muslim neighborhoods anymore. Whose country is this?" The headscarf-pulling itself she defended: "In Iran, Saudi Arabia, they force women to wear headscarves, to

submit. This is America. What these men pulling off the headscarves are doing-it's an act of liberation.(Waldman, *The Submission*, 2012, p 170)

### **Voicing Trauma of Third World Woman**

Waldman's novel has a well-craft about the reaction of the American nation struggling to cope with grief and loss. But we see that jury members are the Americans. So here question raises the question of the issue of authenticity. Jury members are unable to feel the suffering of those who were not the American. Asma was equally a sufferer of 9/11 as her husband was among the victims of the tragedy. Asma purports to the jury members

I think a garden is right," she continued, "because that is what America is-all the people Muslim and non-Muslim, who have come and grown together. How can you pretend we and our traditions are not part of this place? Does my husband matter less than all of your relatives?

But her stance goes unheard by the Americans. This is what makes the jury members partial. Exclusion of the suffering from the third world proves that American media aligned the suffering of the tragedy only to the Americans. Claire- an American and jury member had also lost her husband in the incident of 9/11. Her loss is sensed by her other jury members while in parallel Asma who lost her husband had to counter this question, "How could you be dead if you did not exist?" (Waldman, 2012, p, 70)

In comparison with Claire, Asma, an illegal immigrant from Bangladesh, is introduced only in the rising action of the story. Unlike Claire, who is relatively impoverished and lowly when compared with the affluent Cal, Asma is married to Inam, a much older man from a poorer family working as a sanitary worker in America at the time of tragedy. However, like Claire, she too is a widow struggling to come to terms with the loss of her husband to the tragedy of 9/11. Furthermore, Inam is very much like Cal in the sense that both men have a pleasant, calming effect on their wives.

We see that near the end of the novel Asma Anwar before her death was reluctant to leave America. Even after husband's death she was able to maintain her life in America with Mrs. Mahmoud. But on hearing the remarks of the governor in LouSarge's show, she started disenchanting her more life in America. "What was her husband doing in those buildings, anyway?" The governor invoked the attack: "I feel for Asma Anwar, but she represents a serious problem. When we don't watch who's coming through our open door, thousands of Americans die."(Waldman, 2012, p, 251). Any neutral opinion can sense the American official stance on the death of those who were not American and died in the attacks of 9/11.

### **Religious Counter Narrative**

As Asma is a Muslim by her religious identification, she is taken as marginalized one by the Americans. The Americans in their religious understanding also consider Christianity superior to Islam as the religion of the third world. Asma counters the American dominant national ideological stance over the victims of the 9/11 that "God had forbidden the use of fire on His Creation, or so Asma had been taught. Then why had God allowed these men to cremate her husband -And claim to have cremated him in God's name, no less? Where would Inam's soul go? Would this leave him outside paradise?" (Waldman: 2012, p. 92)

Asma's constant state of being haunted by the memory of her late husband is a post traumatic experience in itself. Asma supports Khan's memorial because in her temporal moments of solace, that is where she believes Inam has found his after life reward. "She had no doubt that Inam had been taken into the gardens of paradise. He gave zakat. He always fasted during Ramadan. He prayed, if not five times a day, as often as he could." (Waldman: 2012, p. 92)

However, it is through her unusually bold yet heart-warming speech at the hearing for Khan's defense of his Garden that Asma has finally managed to overcome her trauma of losing Inam because without any memorial, "it would be the final repudiation of his existence - as if he had lived only in her imagination". Being

her stubborn father's daughter, she is adamant that "he had to be named", "for in that name was a life", and her speech is, after all, in support of the Garden, a symbol of healing from the collective trauma of loss of a loved one as well as the blissful resting place for the pious.

### **Redefining the Muslim Identity through Loss**

In post 9/11 time American enlisted all the Muslims as terrorists. By this understanding, the American jury members did not count Inam- Asma's husband among those who lost their lives in this incident. Asma redefines the Muslim identity with which she and her husband were being recognized in America. The Americans took a monolithic and stagnant view of Islam as a religion that promotes violence and terror. Asma counters that my husband was a man of peace because he was a Muslim. That is our tradition...The gardens of paradise are for men like my husband, who never hurt anyone (Waldman 2012, p. 296)

Asma's process of healing begins with her standing up for Khan's Garden in honour of her late husband's memory. Although she is unfortunate enough to face deportation and even lost her life. The way she was stabbed to death is the most traumatic and turning point in the novel.

She was on her back, her eyes were closed. In the dark streamers that spread from beneath her, Nasruddin saw the blood that flowed in the streets back home on Eid al-Adha, when hundreds of goats and cows and sheep were slaughtered for the festival (Waldman, 2012, p, 256).

Her death nullifies all American claims of being a promising and democratic in post 9/11 times. In reaction to 9/11, America turned into a hostile state for minorities and the Muslims. Muslim women were in the most disadvantageous position. Asma Anwar is the representative of atrocities narrated and practiced against Muslim women from the third world in the post 9/11 social scenario.

### **Third World Woman: A Creature in Trans Spatial Traumatic Situation**

In the novel, we see Asma Anwar at the most disadvantageous position. Her husband is dead without procuring any value of his death from Americans. The American contractor who had employed him had denied that there was no Inam Haque as his employee. She could not claim the compensation amount of her husband because she and her husband are declared as illegal immigrant. She is killed by unnamed murderer. Her son Abdul has to move back to Bangladesh not knowing that the incident of 9/11 has taken his both parents and he was expelled from America without any claims and rights. While in her life she had planned "to create for herself and Abdul a Little America back home" (Waldman, 2012, p 250)

We see that in the novel the murderer of Asma Anwar remains unnamed and unidentified. Waldman seems to suggest that racism and intolerance in post 9/11 America as an unnamed enemy took the life of many people. Until such a situation prevails in America, America could not attain the status of a humanitarian state.

### **Conclusion**

By the analysis of the novel, we can establish the conclusion that post 9/11 fiction majorly focused on the suffering of the white American and erased the suffering of the victims of 9/11 from the third world. The analysis reveals that the women characters in Waldman's novel *The Submission* are equally the victims of the tragedy of 9/11. As the novel is the story of the loss of those who lost their lives in the attacks of twin towers and those who were affected by social chaos and discrimination of 9/11. Their personal battles with PTSD are instrumental in bringing the story to its unexpected turning points and resolutions, thus making it all the more of an intriguing read. Unlike many other post 9/11 literary productions and particularly novels, in *The Submission*, Waldman does not merely portray the trauma of the American characters but also the sufferings of the characters from the third world particularly the women. Her characters despite their heavy losses to the carnage are in a constant struggle to find peace and consolation.

- Waldman's female character from the third world in the story attempts to overcome her trauma and embrace it by accepting the bitter and harsh reality of 9/11. She seeks solace in remembering her dead husband. This may be considered a promising aspect of the novel *The Submission* that it take into consideration the suffering and sorrows of the Muslim woman from the third world. We can establish that the authoress truly represents 9/11 trauma in her fiction and intends to provide avenues for healing of the said trauma.
- Waldman in her novel provides the counter narrative from the perspective of the woman from third world. The analysis reveals that the suffering of the 9/11 did not end rather the incident of 9/11 aggravated the situation of social scrutinization against the people from the third world. Waldman suggests the essential strategic agenda which could address the issues and challenges faced by Third world woman.
- Waldman further suggests that women of the third world were more prone to the atrocities of trauma caused by 9/11. The construction of American cultural trauma proved as a parallel to Western patriarchy for third world women.

So we can conclude that there is a dire need women are still suffering in the first world like America. Feminism as a movement should still have to move forward to mitigate the suffering of the women as a result of the 9/11 attacks. For feminists, it's not the time to save the brown woman from the patriarchal bearings of the brown man, but still it's time to save the brown woman from the atrocities the white and first world- the American, who as an example stabbed Asma to death on her speaking that her husband was equally important among the dead ones of the attacks of 9/11.

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