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Research Article

Traumatic Impact of Female Genital Mutilation on Individual Well-being in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

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Abstract

This paper discusses the psychological trauma faced by people due to the practice of Female Genital Mutilation in Possessing the Secret of Joy. Specifically, the project explores the life of some female characters who were victimized by the ritualistic practice of infibulation in Africa. This research uses the concept of psychological trauma given by Cathy Caruth as the theoretical tool. The research examines the life of Tashi also known as Evelyn, the protagonist of this novel, who undergoes through different psychological phases. She is depressed, terrorized and often had fearful repeated dreams. Later on she is able to recognize the cause of her trauma and the trauma faced by her whole community. The significance of this study is to bring to light the effect of trauma, which could be harmful for the well-being of individuals and for the whole community. It can lead the individual to be violent and even a murderer. In this novel, Tashi feels anxiety and depression in her family life. In the novel, the life of other female characters like Dura, Amy Maxwell and Ayisha is also shown to be affected by the practice of female genital mutilation. This paper concludes that ritual of genital mutilation has devastating effect on life of people by showing several negative impacts of traumatic experience on health, family and social life.

Keywords: Acting out, female genital mutilation, flashback, nightmares, trauma

Introduction

This study analyzes the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* from the perspective of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a concept in trauma theory. The novel was written by Afro-American writer Alice Walker. She is a writer, poet, and activist known for her insightful portrayal of African American life and culture. She generally has written literature on themes like activism, feminism, relationships, race relations, nature and heritage, such as *Color purple*, *Meridian*, *The Temple of My Familiar*, *Finding the Green Stone*, *To Hell With Dying*. She is the first Afro-American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for her novel *Color Purple*. The novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* shows the traumatic life of Afro-American woman Tashi also known as Evelyn as she has to go through practice of female genital mutilation, which is indispensable part of native

Olinkan African society. Tashi became the victim of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder due to her cultural practice and her life becomes extremely difficult and unlivable. Tashi also narrates the story of her sister Dura, who was also the victim of Female Genital Mutilation, and eventually dies. Cultural values are deeply rooted in Olinkan women. Luckily, at young age, Tashi was able to escape from mutilation and she was saved by the Christian Missionaries. Later she began to think this practice as her cultural duty of being an Olinkan and had her genital mutilation ritual done due to urge from others. It later on affects her mentally and ruins her survival. The traumatic procedure made her feel completely out of place in the society. When this feeling became overwhelming, she killed the main doer of genital mutilation M' Lissa resulting in her own imprisonment and death.

Sign and symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Tashi shows that trauma leads to ruin the well-being of the individuals suffering it. Similarly other female characters like Amy Maxwell, Ayisha have also been adversely affected by female genital mutilation. Alice walker has taken the real subject matter of female genital mutilation which prevails in different communities like African, Islamic, European and Asian communities and has shown it through fictional characters in the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. She is a social activist, reformer and this novel also aims to spread awareness against such ritualistic practice of genital mutilation embedded in different African, Asian and European cultures. Tashi becomes restless in her family and finally she becomes a murderer. Female genital mutilation has all such great effects on Tashi's well-being too.

Review of Literature

Since its publication, Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* has attracted comments from critics all over the world. Dhavaleswarapu Ratna Hasanthi, in his article "Gender Politics and Women in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" discusses the impact of female genital mutilation on gender politics. He further analyzed the text through feminist point of view where characters like Tashi, Amy Maxwell and Ayisha suffer as a result of patriarchal dominance. In the article, Female Genital Mutilation is shown to be practiced in women "despite the terrible shortcomings associated with the procedure, it is seen as an essential aspect of womanhood, and the pain associated with it is silenced and is kept aside as a taboo" (44) in different communities of the world. The article advocates and refutes the practice of Female Genital Mutilation and promotes gender politics which focuses on progress of the women hampered due to this cultural practice. Hasanthi forms the conclusion that women should be conscious on how they are being limited in the society "through racist, sexist and classist means" (48) so that they can come out from practices like female genital mutilation.

Similarly, Lakbakhsh, Pedram, et al in their article "Juxtaposition of Women, Culture and Nature in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" explore the suffering of women and nature in hands of Olinkan men and European colonizers. They have used Eco feminist concept to analyze the text. They argue that the myth of creation introduces the earth as a female body whose validity and values are established and determined if a male god approaches her. As stated in these lines, "Such long established assumption justifies the patriarchal supposition that both nature and the female are there to be at the service of males" (94). Male Olinkan wants female to go through mutilation to make themselves superior and Whites wants to show their dominance in African habitat as a colonizer by exploiting natural resources over there with their vested interest creating hegemony over Olinka. The article argues, that "men's brutality against women is that it is their secret weapon to paralyze women and ruin their self-confidence leaving them submissive and subdued" (97). This analysis draws conclusion that the male dominated society has negative impact on females as well as nature.

Similarly, in a thesis entitled "*Possessing the Secret of Joy* by Alice Walker and *Desert Flower* by Waris Dirie" Despoina Anastasiadau aims to analyze the novels *Possessing the Secret of Joy* and *Desert Flower*, dealing with female genital mutilation resulting in weaker health of females

as a major theme. Both novels discuss African tribes named Olinka and Somali in which male members impose cultural practice of genital mutilation to the female members of that community. She has also highlighted the history of female genital mutilation which was practiced at ancient Egypt and later on established as a tradition. This paper further argues that female genital mutilation has strengthened patriarchy and degraded women's health as they have to face difficulty in their married life, especially at the time of pregnancy and while giving child birth. The paper concludes with a note that female genital mutilation "is a cultural construct enforced by father figure who exploit ancient mythologies, misogynistic religious beliefs, and the entrenched customs of African tribes such as the Olinka and the Somali" (62).

Furthermore, Talebian Sedehi, Kamelia, and Rosli Talif in their article "Speaking Characters in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" discuss the circumcision and its negative impact on female. The conceptual framework of Julia Kristeva is used here. They assert in the patriarchal society like Africa also women can fight for their rights and can save future generation by rejecting circumcision which has made women backward in the society. The article mentions, "The more women accept suppression, the bolder men become to belittle them" (57). Therefore, the article concludes that women should question the tradition, which have negative impact on them like Tashi. Women should gather courage and be aware of their rights.

Similarly, Abirami, V. and M. Leelavath, in the article "The Secret Murder of Joy: An Eco feminist Study on Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*", have viewed the novel from ecofeminism and post-colonial perspectives. The article shows that new missionaries had come to the Olinka village for raising awareness about female genital mutilation. But the Olinkan people were not ready to change their cultural values. It is clearly mentioned in these lines, "In their eagerness to resist cultural imperialism, the villagers reinforce the traditional practices" (453). Therefore, Tashi also had her genital mutilation to show loyalty towards her villagers. The article further illustrates, women would be close to nature if they had genital mutilation. It is clearly stated in the lines, "The women who feel stronger affinity to nature, go a step further and mutilate their genitals" (454). Abirami and M. Leelavath, moreover, highlight the unhygienic practice of genital mutilation, where a single blade is used to circumcise two females. It increases the possibility of spreading contagious diseases, as stated in "It is believed that the AIDS epidemic in Africa can be partially linked to circumcision" (456). The article draws a conclusion that culture should always uplift the human race and there should not be any kind of violence against women in the name of culture.

Likewise, Ugwu, Chinonye Ekwueme, and Naomi Essien in their article "Western Impunity and African Complicity in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" have discussed 'ecological degradation' and 'African complicity' through postcolonial perspective. In the article, they mention the African community being harmed by the westerners. They exploit their natural resources and they study the African ecosystem through the characters and geographical location given there. Here eco-critical theory is applied by them. The article claims, Western people open "pharmaceutical companies" (30), and they compel the native people to destroy forest, kill monkeys. "The company in addition, subjects the animals to treatments, intolerable, even for animals" (30). Westerners have exploited the native African land, as the writers examine in their article:

Western science and technological advancements engenders resolutely establishment of the culture of invading the peripheral world, such as Africa, intent on exploiting her natural resources, but destroying, in the process, the pristine eco-balance of the place and endangering her biotic diversity and sustainability. (33)

The article concludes by exposing some of the ecological evils plaguing Africa with western scientific thought. It has brought the issues of fossil fuel exploitation and raised awareness towards the protection of African ecology and natural resources like forest, species prevailing in their ecosystem.

Likewise, Soundararajan, R and M. Natarajan in their article “A critical study on Female Genital Mutilation in Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy*” examine the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* using analytical framework of feminism. The article discusses the history related to female genital mutilation, as stated in “Female Genital Mutilation is a cultural tradition that has existed for as long as 6000 years, dating back of the time of the ancient Egyptians; it persists today in as many as twenty-eight African nations, as well as parts of Asia” (242). Article further clarifies that the women are being identified with genital mutilation. Soundararajan, R and M. Natarajan have quoted Robin Morgan and Gloria Steinem idea on genital mutilation, “Infibulations creates the ultimate chastity belt, one forged out of the woman’s own flesh” (243). The article shows Tashi’s life being affected by genital mutilation. As stated in these lines, “Tashi’s role as victim in an androcentric society reflect the mutilation of her female society as means of maintaining its position of power of women and how it leads to established their rights” (243). This analysis draws conclusion that the novel has successfully presented the idea of violence, women’s sexual identity and male dominance over women.

Analysis

Trauma triggers in an individual’s life when something unpleasant incident occurs in one’s life. The unpleasant incident may be caused due to war, cultural practices or by any individual. In this regard, Caruth Cathy states, “trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Experiences 11). Tashi who is also known as Evelyn belongs to traditional African Olinkan tribe. In their community every female must perform Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). FGM is a practice where female’s external genitalia is removed partially or completely. Tashi herself was victimized by this practice. Before her mutilation when she was living in Olinka, her sister Dura had to face death due to this practice of mutilation. At that time of Dura’s death, Tashi’s face was red and bulged. In the novel, Tashi’s friend and sister in-law Olivia states, “The whole of her little cropped head and reddened brown face bulged with the effort to control her emotions, and except for the tears, which were so plentiful they cascaded down her cheeks, she was successful” (7-8). Female Genital Mutilation of her sister made her terrorized at the very young age.

Tashi always feels regret on being unable to save Dura’s life. She herself presents her feelings in the novel, “How small I felt, especially since Dura was no longer around to measure myself against” (16). Tashi had frequent flashbacks of her sister and she feels numb. That memory deeply remained in her heart and mind which grew bigger as she grew and deeply affected her normal life after she herself was circumcised. Olivia who knew Tashi for a long time feels sad to see her deteriorating condition. After the mutilation, when Tashi returns home, she expresses her condition as, “It was heartbreaking to see, on their return, how passive Tashi had become. No longer cheerful or impish. Her movements, which had always been graceful, and quick with the liveliness of her personality, now become merely graceful” (65). Female genital mutilation is shown to be the reason which makes Tashi hopeless and mentally disturbed. If in Olinkan community also, there had not been the tradition of practicing female genital mutilation, Tashi would have lived a normal happy life. She would have focused in other areas of her life, rather than getting stuck in traumatic situation.

In the same way, Alexander, Jeffery C, et al points out Charcot, a French neurologist’s view on memories of trauma as “parasites of the mind” (43). Traumatic memories hunt Tashi and she is not able to get out of it. Slowly she develops Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder “included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to response to both human and natural catastrophe” (Caruth Explorations 3). Tashi becomes the victim of catastrophic

event of female genital mutilation which slows down her mental and physical well-being. During her painful time Tashi does not eat properly. She looks like a scarecrow lean and thin. She only wears black colored clothes. She has lost interest on bright colors. She is full of anger and agitation, so much so that once she slaps a man who visits her house without any cause. The man shows friendly behavior to her, but she acts in opposite manner. Tashi herself presents her feelings in the novel, “I felt the violence raising in me with every encounter with the world outside my house” (142). Generally, people regard their youth, as a time to explore new things and experience a state of bliss. They take the youth life as a period to completely indulge themselves into some fruitful activities to mend their present and future. In contrast, in Tashi’s life, she is always stuck in her past traumatic experience and has lost interest on everything. She always looks gloomy without any future plan. Tashi, from her childhood to adulthood, was not able to live her life to the fullest because of the trauma caused in her life due to female genital mutilation. She forgets to love herself and her existence. In the novel Olivia says to Adam, “But don’t you remember, Adam, Tashi was weeping when we met her! I am at a loss. For that is not the little girl I remember”. (13)

At the same time, Adam, Tashi’s husband from America is also remarkable. He loves her. He accepts her though she was from African tribe and her genital was circumcised. He often says, “My Wife is hurt, I say. Wounded Broken, Not mad” (163). Tashi’s traumatic behavior has affected their relation because she used to feel pain at the time of physical relation. She wakes up at middle of the night with terror. She cannot enjoy her marital life because she was feeble physically and mentally due to FGM. Normally people find pleasure having sex. Tashi was broken internally, she could not find enjoyment in her sex life. As she was genitally mutilated, she thought she would feel pain in her vagina if she had sex. Whenever Adam touch her in a romantic manner she would bleed. She would feel uncomfortable and hurt. Tashi further expresses, “After three months of trying, he had failed to penetrate me” (59). Due to Tashi’s mental condition Adam also remains in tension. So he indulges himself in an affair with Lisette and also has a son Perre from her.

In this context, Van Der Kolk, Bessel points out psychologist Porges idea regarding traumatized people, “achieving any sort of deep intimacy- a close embrace, sleeping with a mate, and sex- requires allowing oneself to experience immobilization without fear. It is especially challenging for traumatized people to discern when they are actually safe and to be able to activate their defenses when they are in danger” (63). Similarly, Tashi also wants to love her family, husband but cannot show her love and intimacy because traces of traumatic experience still remains in her mind. The trauma caused wired behavior in Tashi towards her husband like not giving him proper love and care which results in the extra marital affair of Adam. After knowing her husband’s extra marital affair with Lesette, she becomes more devastated. Then, she thinks of murdering Pierre, son of Adam and Lesette. If she was not genitally mutilated, she would also have shown love towards her husband. Criminal thought would not have come to her because from childhood she was so loving and caring to all her acquaintances.

Caruth Cathy highlights Sigmud Freud’s concept of “traumatic neurosis”. It means people in trauma are lost in past rather than in future all the time and have frequent flashbacks, nightmares and inner turmoil. Tashi never forgets about her sisters Dura’s death and her suffering. She has flashbacks of her sister. She cannot forget her sister Dura’s death due to female genital mutilation. She had a feeling of range and revenge in herself. Tashi herself had spoken after Dura’s death remembering her:

There was a scar at the corner of her mouth. Oh, very small and faint, like a shadow. Shaped like a miniature plantain, or like the moon when it is new. A sickle shape with the points toward her ear; when she smiled, the little shadow seemed to slide back into her cheek, above her teeth, which were very white. (10)

It is also important to notice how Tashi's traumatic experience impeded her assimilation in US. Culture. The novel portrays the early life of Tashi spending her childhood in Africa with Olinkans. As a member of Olinkan culture, they used to have scars on their face and female genital mutilation. So Tashi also had a scar on her face and had her genital mutilated. Tashi felt ashamed of her scars on the face when she came to America. Due to this traditional culture, she loses her confidence for whole of her life. M' Lissa, the midwife who used to mutilate the young girls over there, was considered as honorable person. Tashi dreams as somebody is trying to harm her, but she is unaware about the person who is seeking to injure her. Her psychiatrist Mezze asks about the person who tries to harm her in her dream; she cannot answer. In Tashi's dream, symbolically, the negative image of M' Lissa haunts her mind, as if somebody is trying to break her wings. Tashi tells Mezze about her dream in following words:

There is a tower, she says. I think it is a tower. It is tall, but I am inside. I don't really ever know what it looks like from outside. It is cool at first, and as you descend lower and lower to where I'm kept, it becomes dank and cold, as well. It's dark. There is an endless repetitive sound that is like the faint scratch of a baby's fingernails in paper. I cannot see them. And they've broken my wings! I see them lying crossed in a corner like discarded oars. (26)

This terrifying dream is the result of her traumatic experience of female genital mutilation. Soon after, Tashi is terrified by her nightmare, Adam describes his wife's situation in bed as a terrified woman, holding her pillow and she also shows terrified expressions such as widely open her eyes and trembling with fear. She dreams as if somebody is pulling her and she is unable to move. The anxiety dreams initially trigger Tashi's trauma and she is unable to forget her miserable past. She always revolves round the loop of the past. Furthermore, Caruth also puts emphasis on the idea of Freud that dreams have no direct connection to the inner wishes but in fact dreams are triggered due to the bad events which happen outside (Experiences 4). Tashi's dreams are also the results of the bad events of FGM because before FGM she never felt so. Tashi has become like a slave of her traumatic memories. Even in the dream she cannot avoid her traumatic past. Regarding this situation, Caruth Cathy highlights, "the trauma of the nightmare does not simply consist in the experience within the dream, but in the experience of waking from it" (Experiences 64). Tashi is also frightened even after she wakes up. Adam mentions, "She dreams they have imprisoned and broken her wings" (27). When he asked Tashi who had caused her harm in the dream, she is unable to answer and describe it to Adam. Female genital mutilation is a massive jolt in her normal life. As a result of it, revengeful behavior towards the villain of her life that is M' Lissa also arises whom she ultimately kills. In her dream symbolically, she is shown as a sufferer, and somebody is trying to harm her. Tashi's dream is obviously provoked by the event that happened to her during female genital mutilation as before this event she was always a cheerful girl friendly to everyone.

In the same way, Tashi's mother genital was also mutilated. An American missionary group visited Tashi's village, when they knew about the prevalence of female genital mutilation in the Olinkan community. They wanted to exclude Tashi from doing female genital mutilation, but she thought if she is mutilated then only she could feel at home in her society. Mutilation has got mythological significance in their community. So she goes through the procedure. The novel mentions that after the genital mutilation procedure Tashi was unable to pee properly, her menstruation lasted for ten days. Her first pregnancy when she was expecting to have daughter was a failure because she had a miscarriage, and second pregnancy was also complicated. Tashi feels harder to return to her normal life and to carry on day to day tasks. She gets indulged in her memories which is painful and unforgettable. In this respect, Van Der Kolk opines that, "If elements of trauma are replayed again and again, the accompanying stress hormones engrave those memories ever more deeply in the mind. Ordinary day-to-day events become less and less compelling. Not being able to deeply take in what is going on around them makes it impossible to feel fully alive" (47). Tashi also feels numb and depressed when she visits Bali with Adam. Even in pleasant

environment, she feels isolated and void. When Adam spent time with Tashi in Bali, he expresses, “But I am instantly back in our bed, sharing the night and its terrors with my wife”. (26)

Frequently, in the novel Tashi is shown to have flashbacks of her sister Dura. Dura was her favorite sister and had close emotional connection with her. She liked her presence around her. She dies when M’ Lissa, who was regarded as a midwife, performed her female genital mutilation. Because her operation was done unhygienically without using any sterile equipment and so Dura had to face death. Tashi cried a lot, but her tribe members suggested her not to cry and regard it as normal. In this context, Van Der Kolk argues, “Flashbacks and reliving are in some way worse than the trauma itself. A traumatic event has a beginning and an end- at some point it is over. But for people with PTSD a flashback can occur at any time whether they are awake or asleep” (47). Tashi and her sister Dura used to play together. After her death she is terrified because Dura died of heavy bleeding. In later days of her life she remembers her sister’s death frequently. She frequently sees Dura in her dream like Dura carrying jugs full of water and often says, “It was a nightmare. Suddenly it was not acceptable to speak of my sister. Or cry for her” (15). She cannot forgive the person who was responsible for her death, M’ Lissa. The Incident of Dura’s death which she regarded as a murder haunts her time and again. She memorizes Dura who picks up the burning twig and stuck it on her mouth, when she was a child. Other people used to regard this incident as funny, but she feels upset as it burned Dura’s skin. She misses Dura, and she thinks if the wrong doers are not punished, it will be injustice for her soul. She states, “I felt a painful stitch throughout my body that I knew stitched my tears to my soul” (81).

With the help of Adam and Olivia Tashi was taken to the psychiatrist Mezee, also known as the old man. Mezee was a friend of Olivia. Previously when she had visited the psychiatrist, she felt as if she was looked by the doctor with racial gaze. She dislikes to be called as African black woman, but with Mezee she feels comfortable. Mezee told Tashi to paint a picture. Tashi first of all painted a picture of leopard with two legs and her mother had painted it having four legs. Mezee asked her the reason but she did not know. Tashi’s painting thus reveals her inner trauma. Leopard with two leg represents M’ Lissa, who had done her genital mutilation. According to her, M’ Lissa is regarded as a terrible animal. There is a negative image of M’ Lissa in her mind. So she compared M’ Lissa with leopard in her painting. Symbolically, M’ Lissa is regarded as a dangerous woman, who ruins Olinkan female life. In this regard, Herman Judith states, “More commonly, traumatized people find themselves reenacting some aspect of the trauma scene in disguised form, without realizing what they are doing” (40). If a woman like M’ Lissa is thrown away from every community, then females would have rapid progress in their life. Women could liberate themselves. They could make their own choices for living happily. Here M’ Lissa herself is a woman but she is working to ruin other women’s life, and act as a hindrance to their progress. Even though she is a woman she is regarded as a dangerous creature, in the eyes of Tashi. So in most of her actions, hidden feeling of trauma and revenge is seen.

In addition to being a psychiatrist, Mezee had already known about Tashi’s case as he was a family friend of Olivia. So for the treatment and psychotherapy of Tashi he spends some time with them. He invites Adam and Tashi to his home in Bali. So that they could have a quality time there. He took them to picnic and he also shows them an old film. While watching it, Tashi becomes terrified with no reason. When film is still on, she states, “I felt such an overwhelming fear that I fainted” (71). Actually, she had seen a scene of cock fighting in the film which made her overwhelmed with fear. She had a terrified image of cock in her mind as experienced during her sister’s genital mutilation. Her psychological condition makes her caught in a web of fear. Mezee asks Tashi to make a painting so that she could access her emotional pain. She paints the fighting cock which looks very fearful with giant appearance and “the giant cock waited, crowing impatiently, extending its neck, ruffling its feathers, and strutting about” (71). In this event, she expresses her inner feelings through painting. Her traumatized self gets reflected in the painting

of cock fight. She imagines a big cock even on a sheet of paper. But it does not satisfy her. She starts painting on the wall. However, she feels sick after painting. Her traumatized memories get triggered through the painting. Traumatized person's memory is often triggered externally as Walker Pete mentions, "External triggers are people, places, things, events, facial expressions, styles of communication, etc. that remind us of our original trauma in a way that flashes us back into the painful feelings of those times" (86).

Tashi herself states, "For, as I painted, perspiring, shivering, and moaning faintly, I felt that every system in my body, every connecting circuit in my brain, was making an effort to shut down"(72). At this stage, Tashi's trauma is triggered by the simple incidence of watching film. Trauma due to female genital mutilation had made her so feeble, she could be easily distracted by the normal activities done for fun. This incidence shows devastating effect of trauma on individual life. Every events in her life which is regarded to be pleasant, also had piled up and mixed with her traumatic incidence. She is not able to distinguish between right and wrong. Her marriage, travel to Bali should be the events to upgrade her life. On the contrary, these positive events also had negative consequences in her life due to trauma created in her by Female genital mutilation.

In the same manner, as she paints, Tashi feels she was hiding in an isolated place where there was elephant grass and a hut as she asserts, "As I painted I remembered, as if a lid lifted off my brain, the day I had crept, hidden in the elephant grass, to the isolated hut from which came howls of pain and terror" (73). It shows she was in terror and fear. Again and again flashback of Dura comes in her mind. It is also because she was traumatized looking her genital mutilation act. She frequently feels that Dura was inside that hut, with other young girls because once inside the hut Dura was tortured and M' Lissa was also inside that hut. She carried dirty chicken, using her toes and gave it to those girls to eat. Tashi is unable to forget these memories of her sister's suffering and ultimate death and M' Lissa who circumcised many females. So as a traumatic memory it repeatedly came to her mind from time to time. Tashi herself mentions while painting, "There are no words to describe how sick I felt as I painted" (71-72). Tashi was circumcised by M' Lissa in the past, but due to the trauma, she frequently sees M' Lissa torturing her and her sister Dura. She is unable to forget that very incident. Day by day her fear grew larger and had a shattering impact upon her well-being.

Regarding this unforgettable memory, Heraman Judith asserts, "The Traumatic injury persists over even a longer period" (48). It is true for Tashi. Due to her genital mutilation Tashi had not only immediate problem but also has to face difficulties in her later life. She also becomes physically weak due to mutilation. She had miscarriage and difficulty in giving birth to her baby even when she bore a child named Benny. Tashi writes, "Benny, my radiant brown baby, the image of Adam, was retarded. Some small but vital part of his brain crushed by our ordeal" (60). She realizes her baby is mentally weak due to her trauma. She even wept after giving birth to her baby in the hospital. Here the traumatic incident which had occurred long time ago has severe impact on her life. Due to this traumatic state she gives birth to a baby which was also retarded. Her child Benny himself admits the effect, "Nothing that I was asked to do stayed in my mind. Nor could I even remember I'd been asked" (94). He had a poor memory throughout his life.

Also due to trauma, slowly Tashi develops a feeling of worthlessness. She becomes depressed and hears loud noise inside her mind, Tashi states: "I felt as if there was a loud noise of something shattering on the hard floor, there between me and Adam and our baby and the doctor. But there was only a ringing silence. Which seemed oddly, after a moment, like the screaming of monkeys" (58). This unreal but frequently heard noise is due to her traumatic experience. This very incidence of genital incision has emotionally impacted her and she had also become physically weak. In the same situation, she gives birth to an unhealthy baby. It shows if we are unhealthy mentally it will have impact on our physical health. Mostly, it is seen that only healthy

body can give birth to a healthy offspring. It is equally important that we must be physically and psychologically well to make our future generation healthy. Eventually, Tashi's genital mutilation had great impact on her upcoming generation. Despite this, if Tashi had not been mutilated and had been nurtured, loved by her Olinkan family and community, she would have produced healthy offspring. The well-being of a mother results in producing healthy offspring. Here unhealthy baby is the result of a traumatized mother.

Similarly, "Traumatized people relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions" (Herman 39). Tashi has the feeling of violence towards her family members and also to the outsiders. Perre, Lisette son was studying in the Cambridge University. He has come to meet Adam and his family to America. For instance, traumatized Tashi with no reason slapped Perrie when he arrives at their house in taxi. As described in the novel, when Perrie gets out of the taxi, smiling at Tashi, Tashi gets furious and started throwing stones towards Perrie and the driver. She herself speaks:

I began to laugh, as the taxi disappeared down the street. In their cowardly haste they'd forgotten Pierre's luggage. The brown suitcases sat, importunate and irrevocable, where he'd dropped them; more heavy baggage for me to lift and somehow carry. I would not. I dove forward, flapping my arms and shrieking hoarsely like a crow, to kick them into the street. (143)

After that, seeing Tashi's behavior taxi driver also ran away. Tashi's traumatized life also makes her relationship with other family members bitter. Although Pierre was Tashi's step son, he had heard about Tashi's traumatic condition. So he wants to establish good relation with her. Conversely, Tashi flew into anger after seeing him. She takes Pierre as her enemy because of the trauma that dwells inside her. She cannot find herself at peace.

As a result of trauma, Tashi also has suicidal thoughts whenever she hears Lisette, Adam's mistress who was pregnant and was about to have Pierre. Lisette herself mentions, "She flew into a rage that subsided into a year's long deterioration and rancorous depression. She tried to kill herself" (125). This is a sign of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder where Tashi is being disturbed internally. A normal person behaves in a hospitable manner when somebody wants to meet them, but Tashi is agitated. She weeps most of the time, feels herself in dark and she is unable to tell Adam about the dream that she had which terrifies her every night. She is not able to find relief after visiting psychiatrist for many times and damages her family life. According to Herman Judith traumatized people "breach the attachment of family, friendship, love and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others" (51). If there was no effect of Trauma she would have become successful like Olivia. Olivia, Tashi's friend and sister in law who is engaged in educating people against female genital mutilation, as a member of missionary group.

Another instance of her traumatic condition is that Tashi does not care her body. The traumatic past causes so much pain to her that she forgets everything happening around her. In this context, Van Der Kolk, Bessel states people "despise themselves for how terrified, dependent, excited, or enraged they felt" (5-6). Tashi does not love her existence. She has a feeling that she should take revenge for what had been done to her and her sister unless it is done, she despises her existence. Benny tries to take care of his mother by giving her food but her son states, "traditional porridge and fruit breakfast that hasn't changed since I left" (55). It shows she is not feeling at home in her present state. She wants some positive change. She always feels something lacking. She does not care herself. She has lost interest in food and does not show normal behaviour. Generally people in normal health are conscious about their health. But in contrast, Tashi has lost the habit of self-care.

Similarly, referring such long lasting effect of trauma Alexander, Jeffery C, et al. quotes Freud's saying "traumatic memory is a foreign body which long after its entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work" (33). As mentioned earlier, Tashi was mutilated by the mother figure of the Olinkan community M' Lissa, who is highly respected in her community. Tashi recalls her past and feels sad that the highly so called respected person in the community is the cause of suffering for a large number of people. Tashi remembers how M' Lissa used to encourage Olinkan young female to get genitalia circumcised. She often said women must perform female genital mutilation so that men could have pleasure having sex. The larger the opening the men will have more pleasure, "pleasure depends on an opening it might take months, even years to enlarge" (217). M' Lissa often tells Tashi to get her genital mutilated, as Tashi was saved from female genital mutilation by the Christian missionaries at her young age. While other females of her community were undergoing through circumcision, M' Lissa used to spread the false belief among females that women's private part vulva is dirty and should be removed. She implanted the thought in the Olinkan people that every Olinkan females should be "Bathed", "cleaned off" (240). In Olinkan community no one dares talk about trauma associated with female genital mutilation. They think it as a ritualistic practice, which liberates women. Instead, Tashi feels more traumatized thinking that, the highly prestigious procedure had ruined her life. That's why Tashi often thinks, as she says to Olivia soberly, "may be death is easier than life, as pregnancy is easier than birth" (249). This feeling that life is not worth living and suicidal tendency is result of her traumatic experience. She has begun to hate herself feeling that she can't do anything against the perpetrator.

When initially at childhood Adam met Tashi, she was so cheerful and happy. She used to laugh, but after the incidence of her genital mutilation and her happiness slowly started to fade away. Childhood is a period when most of the people are free of negative thoughts. But Tashi was cascaded with traumatic memories of her sister's circumcision and her death. She was unable to avoid it and enjoy her innocent childhood. Seed of revenge towards M' Lissa was sown in her heart and mind from which she could not be free off in her adulthood also. Traumatic incidence of female genital mutilation acted as a slow poison for Tashi and expanded inside her as she grew up.

Similarly, Female genital mutilation is considered as a pure form of ritual practice in Olinkan African community. Walker Alice mentions that the culture of female genital mutilation has been started from older civilizations like Mediterranean and ancient Egypt. Tashi-Evelyn in *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, has talked about the mythological significance of the female genital mutilation. According to the myth, God named Amma, has spread clay on the earth. Initially the earth was flat, but later on there was "termite hill" (169). Earth was not flat which hindered Amma to have sexual contact with earth. Tashi has said in the novel, earths "sexual organ is an anthill, and it's clitoris a termite hill" (169). As in the earth there was "termite hill" (169), and Amma cut off the hill and fulfilled his desire without any obstacle. Olinkan people also follow mythical significance of having genital mutilation and suppose female without genital circumcision are like earth with termite hill. Tashi's mother was also mutilated and so did she and her sister. This was like a tradition which passed from generation to generation. It was felt that almost all females of her community should get mutilation.

Similarly, Tashi thinks she would be detached from her community members if she doesn't go through ritual of female genital mutilation. Even though after having genital mutilation she feels uncomfortable. She wants to be connected with her community. Tashi had not had her circumcision done at her early age, so her friends who had already have female genital mutilation done, thought her vagina to be monstrous. Tashi mentions, "They laughed at me for having a tail. I think they meant my Labia majora" (120). The circumcised girl would make fun of Tashi who didn't go through female genital mutilation initially and run away from her, considering her as a demon. It gives a lot of mental suffering to Tashi. In this regard, Caruth Cathy highlights Freud's idea about trauma as "wound of the mind- the breach in the minds experience of time, self, and the world- is

not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable” (Experiences 4). These kinds of incident increased her mental instability. Due to these memories also, the inner trauma got chance to foster and become rigid slowly. Tashi revolts against this culture by murdering the perpetrator which put this cultural practice at a threat. Tashi was the representative figure of trauma faced by whole Olinkan females due to female genital mutilation.

Moreover, in Tashi’s Olinkan community, the people who were considered to be the leader of the society started the tradition of circumcision and as an indispensable part of their culture for example M’ Lissa. The novel shows how false belief is constructed about mutilation and spread throughout the people of that community as a result innocent females are traumatized or have to face death like Dura. Dura also thought if she remains uncircumcised she will be punished. In this way, false consciousness on the people of that community leads to trauma in the members of that particular group.

Additionally not only the female members of that community were traumatized but male also were the sufferers. For instance Adam has told Olivia, about a young woman named Hapi, during their visit to the prison where Tashi was imprisoned. She was genitally mutilated. The woman’s husband wanted to have physical relation with his wife, but he was unable because she would feel pain and starts weeping. Then he used to perform anal sex. Later on she died. Further, Adam mentions, “He had no understanding that the way in which he had made love to her had cost her, and him, her life” (248). Adam was also not having a healthy sexual life with Tashi. The practice of female genital Mutilation was started, so that it could enhance the sex life of men, but just opposite of it, men were also victimized by this practice. The novel shows female genital mutilation had effect on both manhood and womanhood and had crippled the society. If the member of that community are psychologically stressed then they can never make their future generation better. The girls were mutilated without using sterile instruments with rusty razors, and knives. Many females were infected due to the use of uncleaned instrument. Same knives, razors were used to circumcise twenty children at once and as a result there was a great risk of spreading different health hazards. Therefore, female had to struggle with their health condition throughout their life time. Tashi does not want what had happened to her and her sister, along with other members of the society to be repeated. So traumatized Tashi decided to murder M’ Lissa.

Similarly, while Lisette and her son Pierre are having conversation on one rainy day, sitting near fire, Lisette talks about a girl named Ayisha who belonged to Islamic family from the Middle East. She also had to face torture and trauma due to female genital mutilation. The novel shows as an Islamic girl genital mutilation was the foremost requirement for marriage. She was married to Torabe, who was much older than her and he had also several other wives. She was severely tortured in her wedding night. Further Lisette mentions, “he had cut her open with a hunting knife on their wedding night and gave her no opportunity to heal” (136). She screamed and was terrorized. She ran away from her husband’s house. As a consequence of this traumatic event she had to die at a young age. Female genital mutilation was essential part of their culture which is unavoidable by any females and this cultural practice demands change. If the tradition of female genital mutilation did not prevail in Ayisha’s community, she would not have to face death. After circumcision Ayisha had heavy bleeding, she contacted her mother. Her family members thought FGM was a necessary practice and Ayisha would stop bleeding soon. It is her duty being a woman. The tradition of female genital mutilation has created a false consciousness in people which has brought terrific outcome. It is deeply rooted in the form of tradition and so people are accepting it as a gift of God. The novel shows awareness is needed among females to revolt against FGM. So that the trauma is experienced by females like Ayisha can be abolished.

In the same way, Walker Alice talks about another character, Amy Maxwell. Amy Maxwell is a patient of doctor Raye. Tashi also consults the same psychiatrist. Raye introduces Tashi to Amy

Maxwell. She is from a rich European family. In her community also, female genital mutilation was practiced. Woman touching her body sexually was considered a taboo. Amy Maxwell belongs to different background than African people. Her family was educated. But when she was four she used to touch her genital. Her parents also used to pour hot pepper sauce in her hand so that she could not touch herself sexually. They decided to remove her clitoris at the age of six. She was mutilated by saying that she would have her tonsils removed by her parents. She then expresses her voidness, "I never touched myself- in that way-again. And of course when I accidentally touched myself there, I discovered there was nothing left to touch" (187-188). Amy was so sad and traumatized due to circumcision. Even when she grew up, she felt pain inside her soul for what she and other African had to suffer. While narrating her story to Raye, Tashi says, "She cried, striking the arm of her chair with a clenched fist" (187).

These events show, female genital mutilation is a practice, as a ritual in different communities of the world which leads to trauma in people. In *Possessing the Secret of Joy* different figures from different communities are shown as traumatized due to female genital mutilation. Tashi and Dura are from the Olinkan African community, Ayisha is a girl from Islamic community and Amy Maxwell, an American woman who has to deal with the inhuman practice of female genital mutilation in the name of tradition. Among different races of people, living in different part of the world Female Genital Mutilation was essential. It was believed to have passed down from generation to generation. Tashi's mother was mutilated so were her daughters. Tashi's mother, even after Dura's death, thinks mutilation was necessary for Olinkan women and wants Tashi to have mutilation. Ayisha's parents also encourage her to have mutilation in the name of culture. They thought they would be socially boycotted by their community if they denied to perform circumcision. Amy Maxwell's parents also thought female genital mutilation as essential practice. Female genital mutilation has created a trauma in people of different communities. They find themselves as separated and felt insecure in their family and society. They long for love and recognition. So trauma is shown to be a universal experience if genital mutilation is done irrespective of their nationality, caste, or creed.

In this respect, in the clash between those who support the tradition and those who want to point out its harmful effects for example, M' Lissa uses every occasion for promoting female genital mutilation. But American missionaries go to the Olinkan community to defame this practice. Tashi was initially saved by the missionaries when Olinkan community try to mutilate her genital when she was young. Adam and Olivia were also the member of the missionaries. Adam fell in love with Tashi during his visit to Olinka along with other missionaries. Tashi married Adam, even though her tribe members didn't want her to get married with him. The American missionaries create awareness in the Olinkan people about the harmful consequences of female genital mutilation. M' Lissa who is regarded as the antagonistic figure in the novel, often encourages people of Olinkan community to have mutilation. She provokes Tashi's mother, Catherine to get Tashi mutilated at early age. When Tashi visits M' Lissa after being adult to have mutilation the narrators mentions, "She recognized it as the only remaining definitive stamp of Olinkan tradition" (63). It shows by suffering a kind of excommunication, she agreed to have genital mutilation. In her community, female Genital mutilation was regarded as an indispensable part which caused trauma to several Olinkan women. If these kinds of traditions passes from generation to generation, then large number of women will be traumatized. The novel shows if female genital mutilation is not done then they will have a guilt in their mind and feel insecure in their community.

In the novel, Tashi recalls her traumatic incidence and the perpetrator of her trauma every day. Tashi is overwhelmed with a rage and when she goes to sleep she talks to herself by imagining M' Lissa's death, "I swore I would mutilate her wrinkled body so much, her own God wouldn't recognize her" (204). This feeling of revenge to get out of trauma called 'acting out' is shown here in her mind looking her sister's mutilation. It did not end until she lived as Alexander, Jeffery C

highlights Caruth's idea of "trauma as a wound that is not healable" (43). Tashi couldn't remove the occurrence of that incidence from her mind. Alexander, also considers, the incidence of trauma, as "an indelible imprint" (43) and the nervous system of our body "has been unable to dispose of" (43) traumatic memories. The memory of trauma is like a slow poison which damages our brain, as Tashi's mental health state is degraded due to trauma. She was unable to focus on her life, she always had the feeling of revenge, like in William Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet, Protagonist Hamlet always wonders on how to take revenge of his father's murderer. Tashi had revengeful attitude towards the cause of her sister's death M' Lissa. She thought on how to approach M' Lissa and give her the punishment for her wrong deeds. In one way or the other M' Lissa herself states, "The very first day she came I could see my death in Tashi's eyes, as clearly as if I were looking into a mirror. Those eyes that are the eyes of a madwoman" (205). It illustrates that the desire to get rid of the source of trauma constantly haunted her mind.

Conclusion

Subsequently, as a punishment for her desire to soothe her trauma by eliminating the perpetrator of trauma, M' Lissa, Tashi was sentenced to death. In this regard, Ray Larry has pointed out, "Freud's distinction between mourning-memory work that enables reconciliation with loss- and melancholia where the loss is continually revisited, is vital, intrusive and persistent" (145). Tashi has shown melancholia. She is unable to manage her trauma by accepting it or out letting it like expressing or crying. Thus, she acts out and takes revenge by murdering M' Lissa. About acting out, Lacaripa Dominick writes, "As in acting out in general, one possessed, however vicariously, by the past and reliving its traumatic scenes may be tragically incapable of acting responsibly or behaving in an ethical manner involving consideration for others as others" (28). Tashi has no regret of murdering M' Lissa even though it has great consequence in her life. She chooses to die rather than living a traumatized life. It means that trauma is very deeply settled in her mind. She was not happy in her community where she had lived her whole life and also in very pleasant environment of America or Bali. It shows Trauma had created distrust and hatred towards Olinkan community. So, Tashi wants to get rid of all the bad memories associated with Olinka's bad culture. She wants to be fully liberated. Therefore, she had unfortunate decision of killing M' Lissa. Traumatic memories remain to some extent in her mind even when she is about to die. Tashi expresses her feeling in a letter, which she writes to Lisette just one day before her execution while she is in prison, "But if heaven is like Olinka, or even like America, there is much to be anxious about" (272).

Referring such long lasting effect of trauma, further Tashi has claimed, she is unable to have confidence over her life time she herself spoke, "I am like a chicken bound for market" (45). It was due to trauma caused by female genital mutilation. Referring to readiness for any kind of sacrifice to get rid of the source of trauma Walker Pete opines that the traumatic people go in a flight/ fight response, the fear of trauma remains in their mind even if the event triggering trauma had already passed away (7). In this novel also, as a consequence of trauma, Tashi murders M' Lissa. While there is hearing of her case, many people of her community also appreciate her. People do not think her as an evil criminal, but a person who has done murder to release burden from her life and to raise awareness among her people. Tashi is trying to give justice to her dead sister Dura. She chooses to die instead of surviving in intense traumatic situation. Tashi writes in her letter to Lisette, "Dying now does not frighten me" (227). She doesn't feel guilty of her deeds, as the trauma of female genital mutilation was the cause of her madness. Normally people feel regret after committing such crime. But here Tashi has a feeling of contentment inside her, because according to her she did justice to her sister Dura, herself and whole Olinkan women and now she has no fear of the perpetration again, because the source of perpetration is eliminated.

On the whole, this dissertation shows the life of African woman Tashi who suffers from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder which resulted due to the practice of female genital mutilation. She

had frequent flashbacks, nightmares and fear as a result of the trauma, triggered by female genital mutilation. She went through depression and sought help from psychiatrist like Mezee, but it didn't help her to get relief from her trauma. Tashi's ultimate demise depicts the horrific side of a harmful custom like female genital mutilation not only Tashi but also the life of Ayisha, Amy Maxwell and Dura were ruined by the custom of female genital mutilation. Tashi's whole life revolves around her bitter traumatic past. This research has tried to create awareness about the harmful effects of genital mutilation embedded in the novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. Thus, people's attention may be sought on the abolition of female genital mutilation. Consequently, female can live life on their choice rather than in bondage of such tradition. In this way, this paper deepens awareness about the dark aspect of female genital mutilation on women's psychological health.

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