

Implications of 9/11 Attacks in Waldman's *The Submission*

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Abstract

This paper scrutinizes the impacts of 9/11 attacks as portrayed in Amy Waldman's The Submission that is written in 2011 after a decade of the incident. The research shows that the incident of 9/11 opens up both new challenges and opportunities for the people of the world in general and the Americans in particular. The article explains the reasons for the adversities that minorities and women experience in the aftermath of the attacks as depicted in the novel. As the terrorists are men, the incident of 9/11 is generally seen as a masculine event that overshadows the sufferings experienced by the women characters. The objective of the paper is to explore the repercussions of the attacks in the lives of the women as portrayed in the text. The article pictures the trials and tribulations of women from ethnic minorities of the non-western countries. The paper employs the feminist perspective to analyze the traumatic sufferings of the Asian women. I use the concept of E. Kaplan to analyze the fictional data to investigate into the status of ethnic minorities especially women in the post-9/11 situation in the United States of America. The finding of the research implies that women face more identity crisis than their counterparts in the aftermath of the incident regarding life, liberty and pursuit of happiness which are needed to lead lives with dignity.

Keywords: Implication, Trauma, Suffering, Identity Crisis, Minorities

Introduction

This article investigates into the catastrophic event of 9/11 and its impacts as portrayed in *The Submission* by a journalist Amy Waldman who witnesses the incident and its aftermath. The incident opens up new challenges for both the people of the United States of America and the immigrants of the non-western countries. It is difficult for Americans to decide who are innocent and who the perpetrators of this tragedy have been. Concurrently the Americans are unable to see the suffering of those whose ethnicities are different from those of the White Americans. The incident fuels the literary writers to create both fiction and non-fiction in the aftermath. Waldman pictures the incident and its implications on the minorities from the Third World countries as they undergo identity crisis because of the

psychological trauma on the part of the families of the 9/11 victims and the immigrants whose ethnicity is compatible to those of the perpetrators of the attacks.

This paper primarily underscores trauma as the central theme of the novel in its analysis to reveal the repercussions of the 9/11. Borges establishes that in post 9/11 fiction the central theme is trauma rather than the war against terror. Post 9/11 fiction majorly deals with the traumatic suffering of the Americans psychologically and culturally. *The Submission* pictures the burdens of national and political ideology internalized by the characters so far. The perpetrators of the tragedy are the men as revealed in reports of the United States of America and their ethnicity is Muslim. These two identities leave indelible impressions upon the minds of the people from all communities in the American society.

Discussion

The paper describes the attacks and how they are perpetrated. The planes hit the world trade center and the majority of the victims are men. The incident of 9/11 can be taken as a masculine phenomenon. The American media project it as a tragedy which causes sufferings for the American men by the perpetrators who are men as well. The American media portray the victims of the tragedy as the innocent people. J. M. Conte elucidates that the image of the falling man symbolizes the fall of American political history. The victims of the tragedy includes both men and women the Americans and the non-Americans including Muslims (557). Women of the third world are the victims of the 9/11 attacks as well. However, the Western media do not project the immigrants as the victims. Indeed, they are equally victimized. There is the partiality in representation of the victims. Only the white Americans are cast as the prey of the perpetrated attacks of 9/11.

The trials and tribulations of the female immigrants are not focused in equivalent to the sufferings of the Americans. The sufferings of non western women remain muted and unexplored. This paper traces trials and tribulations of Muslim women as depicted in the novel. The representative victim of the Muslim community is Asma Anwar who is from Bangladesh and has been living in the United States of America for many years. She is the eye witness of the 9/11 attacks. She has lost her husband. She is traumatized. Nevertheless, the western media do not project victims like Asma in their reporting as shown in the novel. According to J. Greenberg, the upsetting trauma of 9/11 shatters the Americans' sense of psychological unity and tears the individuals into fragments. The Americans are not only the victims of the horrible event even a great number of Asians and Asian Americans with other cultural backgrounds rather than those of White American Christians suffer the incident and its impact (34). However, the fact is that the Americans are not the victims of ethnic discrimination is not emphasized in both fiction and reports of the national and international

media and authors. The novel mentions Asma Anwar who has horrible attacks. Women like Asma have many challenges including scarcity of job opportunities, cultural acceptance, recognition, and extension of the visa in the post-9/11 situation.

The mainstream society of the United States of American neither accepts the Muslim minorities of the Asian countries nor prefers to collaborate with them in the workplace. This reluctance leads immigrants like Asma to exclusion and isolation. On this ground, she experiences both the scars of the incident and the repercussions of the tragedy in the aftermath. The incident of 9/11 takes its roots as a psychological trauma but later on it establishes as culturally traumatic as the Americans take it as a threat to their nationalism. The American media project the victims as martyrs. Nevertheless, among these victims of 9/11 the Muslim immigrants in the USA are excluded from this list, which shows American prejudice against Muslims in general and Muslim women in particular. The sufferings and grievances of the latter are not deleted from the pages of the history as mentioned in the novel. Waldman is critical of this exclusion and precisely depicts the case of Asma Anwar to bring the issue of such discrimination in the fictional world.

Q. Khushi and A. Rashid opine that the incident of 9/11 adjoins the dichotomy of the “West vs. Terrorist” in the binary of the “West vs. Rest”. In the Post 9/11 era, mainly the Muslim identity is stigmatized and the Muslims are discriminated around the world. The world is stunned into silence challenging the notion of American exceptionalism (13). On the surface, the attacks of 9/11 destroy buildings and take the life of thousands of innocent people and on the deeper level, the perpetrators of attacks “shattered a sense of security and perceptions of invulnerability among residents of the United States” (Silver 427). In other words, the perpetrators do not only collapse the highest buildings of the United States of America, but they destroy an icon in the household imagery of the American nation as well (Borradori 28). This disorganized situation opens the door to discussions of the issues of the immigrants as well who equally suffer the scars of the horrible incident. Thus, the incident turns into the form of the cultural trauma. Ethnic differences become the demarcation between the Americans and non-Americans in the aftermath as portrayed in the novel.

The incident of 9/11 fundamentally affects the sense of the world as a shattered place with incompatible identities. It projects the contrasting standard the Americans as the most innocent ones and Muslims as the perpetrators and potential enemy of the Americans. This inconsistent social situation sets the world as a small place with national enmities. In the aftermath of the tragedy, the American society feels vulnerable and therefore executes the policy of exclusion and discriminations at the cost of democratic values and principles as accorded in the constitution of the United States of America. The media accelerate this initiative which is regressive and devastative to the human values. Besides, American

media primarily underscore the perpetrators of the attacks because of their cultural backgrounds i.e. the Muslims. The representation of the Muslims in the post-9/11 situation challenges the principle of diversity that accommodates and collaborates with differences. The provocation of the Muslim background of the perpetrators of the tragedy intensifies the conflict between both of the cultural groups: the Americans and the Muslims.

Although both perpetrators and the Americans who are the concerned parties of the tragedy have been male, the women like Asma Anwar become the victims because of their rigid mindsets and parochial definition of democratic values that are exclusive in the American context. The feminist critical discourse analysts challenge the patriarchal constructs and structures of oppression against women. Women seek their right to vote to the freedom of the female category in the form of womanhood. Nevertheless, consistently there is the issue of authenticity of experiencing. Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak argues that Euro-American white women cannot represent the experiences and sufferings of the third world women. The woman of the third world countries is always marked with the sanctioned identity of ignorance by the western female elites (21). The reading of Spivak about the women from the third world shows that they are doubly marginalized and the Western Discourse propelled by media and fiction ignore their voice. The 9/11 helps the Westerners to develop a discourse about American Nationalism that does not include the voices of women including the voice of Asma as depicted in the novel.

The novelist precisely constructs this female character that represents the subaltern women of the third world countries who are adversely affected by the tragedy of the 9/11. Pertaining the 9/11 and war against terror, Kaplan pronounces that their response to the tragedy of 9/11 the sufferings of euro-centric women even went unresolved. This indicates to us that what attention would have been paid to the suffering of the third world women at a disadvantageous position in American society. Indeed, the situation of the third world women is more adverse i.e. culture in which women are living, are acting as a site of exploitation meant for them and repress their bodies and demolish their identity. It is the calamitous need of the time that we should re-organize our priorities to help women win the battle of terrorism (Kaplan 46). Only the men as the sole victims of 9/11 are presented in fiction and media as fueled by the United States of America. Kaplan further states that the incident of 9/11 changes greatly what has been constructed by the first and second of the Western feminism.

The novel deals with the issue of the memorial competition organized to select the best architect to design the monument for the victims of the 9/11 after a decade of the incident. The submission made by the unknown architect, Mo Khan reignites the conflict between the Americans and the ethnic minorities especially Muslims. Although he is

selected for his design, the jury members are not willing to accept him because of his cultural background. Indeed, he has already moved ahead to accept the mainstream culture, the jurors do not take him a normal American. His submission of the design demonstrates the prejudices and discriminations deep-rooted in the social fabric of the United States of America.

The memorial is intended to respect the victims and remind the traumatic event that remains as indelible impressions on the minds of the Americans and those who lose their family members even beyond the United States of America. The Garden aims to represent the American nationalism. There are different members in the memorial design selection jury. Although Mo Khan is selected, the jurors hesitate to declare the name because of his cultural background. His title, Khan discourages the members to delay their verdict. Only one of the jurors named Clare advocates for justice and fairness. She is pressurized to review her decision. Asma's husband is from the victims of 9/11. She speaks for the rights of her husband in a public gathering. After the death of Asma by unnamed murderers, the jury members suggest to withdraw from the competition as a correcting strategy of the sufferings of 9/11. The novel narrates the trauma of this catastrophic event, seeks to facilitate healing from a post-traumatic stress disorder and 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 63). After 9/11, Americans find themselves and their homeland flimsy and defenseless in many ways. Waldman's *The Submission* responds to the incident and shows how cultural conflict is intensified in the aftermath. Waldman raises the issue of identity crisis of ethnic minorities primarily of Muslims in the post-9/11 situation. Immigrant Muslim women get marginalized three times: first they are women, second they are immigrants and third they are Muslims as exemplified in the case of Asma who is a Bangladeshi immigrant—a widow who loses her husband in the 9/11 attacks. Her fragile situation and lack of justice on her part challenges the democratic values of the United States that prides in ensuring the life, liberty and pursuit of happiness to everyone regardless, social status, ethnicity, religion, culture, race, sex, and physical condition. "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 170). The extract shows the reaction of the Americans who are coping with grief and loss. Jurors are the Americans who are unable to feel the suffering of those who are not the Americans but the victims of the 9/11 incident like Asma who suffers the repercussions of the attacks. Asma asserts:

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?" (70)

Asma is introduced as an impoverished and lowly married to Inam, a much older man from a poorer family working as a sanitary worker in the United States. She is cast terribly worse than Clare a white American woman. Asma before her death is reluctant to leave America. She starts 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 251). Asma is a Muslim by her religious identification; she is marginalized in the States. The Americans consider Christianity superior to Islam and associates it to the non-western countries. Asma counters the dominance of the American nationalism that is rigid and fundamentalist.

The situation of Asma consistently haunts her in many ways. First she is an immigrant from Bangladesh. She stays there illegally. Meanwhile she has lost her husband in the attacks. She suffers the traumatic suffering of the tragedy. Asma supports Khan's memorial because in her temporal moments of solace. "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 92). Her support to the designer of the memorial refers to the solidarity needed for the ethnic minorities in the aftermath of the 9/11 incident. She is a victim of the American generalization and discriminatory policy towards the Muslims in the post 9/11 situation.

Asma redefines the Muslim identity with which she and her husband are being recognized in the United States of America. She challenges the Eurocentric mindset of the Americans who take a discriminatory stance on the people residing there. Although she is unfortunate that she is stabbed to death, she proves her revolutionary spirit reflected in her associations and actions taken in the aftermath of the 9/11.

Conclusion

This article has investigated into the problems created in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks as represented in Amy Waldman's *The Submission*. The research shows the repercussions of the tragedy are more seen in the lives of the women who are marginalized three times in the United States as depicted through the character, Asma Anwer, who has been there as an immigrant. Because of her cultural identity, she is a Muslim from an improvised country, Bangladesh. She becomes a widow after the death of her husband Inam in the attacks. The portrayal of Asma questions American democracy that promises to ensure life, liberty and happiness of women but fails to protect women like Asma in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The analysis reveals that the women characters are equally the victims of the tragedy of 9/11. The novel is the story of the loss of those who have lost their lives in the attacks of twin towers and those who have been affected by social chaos and discrimination of 9/11. Waldman does not simply portray the trauma of the American characters but also the sufferings of the characters from the non-western countries as exemplified in the case of Asma. Despite great loss, she does not lose hope and keeps struggling for identity.

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