

Shaping Character Through Traumatic Instances: A Study of Roxane Gay's *An Untamed State*

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Abstract

Rape being a dreadfully increasing criminal activity, the number of people experiencing trauma has increased. Researches say that women, especially the victims of sexual abuse are more likely to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Its impacts may get manifested in their behaviour, later. In this context, this project analyses a topic of high contemporary relevance; the traumatic breakdown in the novel, *An Untamed State* by Roxane Gay, focusing on the protagonist, Mireille Duval Jameson, who was kidnapped and gang raped.

By analysing this novel against the backdrop of trauma theory, this project investigates how a traumatic incident is capable of changing one's personality and his or her perception of life. This study also analyses the relationship between women and trauma and the factors which lead to their increased vulnerability.

According to American Psychological Association, women are more vulnerable to PTSD. Psychological trauma can leave the victims with haunting memories, anxiety and depression. It can also leave people feeling numb, disconnected, and unable to trust other people. Analysing the novel against the backdrop of trauma theory, this project unveils the damages; both physical and mental, endured by the protagonist. Though violence against women is increasing day by day, no one neither speaks nor thinks about their mental state. In this context, this study which delves deep into the mental state of a rape victim becomes more relevant.

Keywords: *An Untamed State*, trauma, rape, depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, scopophilia, relationships, healing

Introduction

1990's witnessed the rise of trauma as a literary theory and many scholars began to approach literature using the framework of trauma studies. It illuminates the effects of extreme violence in literature and allows critics to explore the ways in which these effects unfold for victims in the years after traumatic events themselves. This article will be analysing the novel, *An Untamed State* written by Roxane Gay against the backdrop of the theories of trauma.

Trauma theory is an interdisciplinary theoretical body that draws from psychoanalytic, feminist, and poststructuralist discourses. It focuses on the study of both personal trauma (eg: abuse, mental illness) and collective experiences of trauma (eg; holocaust, slavery, genocide). The theory offers a framework for understanding experiences that by definition overwhelm the coping mechanisms of individuals, and

involves inquiry into the relationship between memory and truth and the ways that testimony can aid the recovery process. Different kinds of trauma have affected and started affecting people across the world. Apart from war zones, there are innumerable religious, racial and ethnic violence. FGM or female genital mutilation and rape can lead to trauma.

The main objective of this study is to unravel the recent trends in trauma theory and its representation in literature. By analysing Roxane Gay's novel *An Untamed State* against the backdrop of trauma theory, this project tries to study how a traumatic incident is capable of changing one's personality and his or her perception of life. In this novel, the protagonist Mireille, is being immensely influenced by the gang rape. It shatters her body and mind, changes her attitude to life and relationship with others. Many things that were really important before, turned out to be nothing. Her father, whom she considered as her pride before, turned out to be a stranger. At the same time, her mother in law, Lorraine becomes her saviour, who helps her to get back to normal life. Her feelings for Haiti is being completely reversed.

Women, especially the victims of sexual abuse are more likely to develop PTSD. Rape being common nowadays, the number of people experiencing trauma has increased. Researches says that small girls are more vulnerable to sexual violence. Its impacts may get manifested in their behaviour, later. In this context, this project analyses a topic of high contemporary relevance; the traumatic breakdown in the novel, *An Untamed State* focusing on the protagonist, Mireille Duval Jameson, who was kidnapped and gang raped. Through the character Mireille, Gay succeeds in demonstrating the mental struggles of a rape victim and the difficulty with which she gets back to normal life.

Shaping Character through Traumatic Instances

According to RAINN¹, every 92 seconds someone is sexually assaulted in the United States. Of those victims of sexual assault, most will experience some kind of negative effect on their mental health. Unfortunately, most of them will experience these effects in some capacity. While many common psychological effects of sexual assault include feelings of shame, guilt, or fear, these emotions may be more fleeting and get better as time goes on. In many other cases, the effects are more severe. One study found that, victims of sexual assault were significantly more likely to experience anxiety disorders, eating disorders, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), sleep disorders, depression, suicidal attempts etc. Without professional mental health treatment, it could lead to devastating results. Some people may even develop a substance abuse disorder as a way to escape their overwhelming feeling or as a way to try to cope with them.

Roxane Gay² is an American writer, professor, editor, and social commentator. Much of Gay's written work deals with the analysis and deconstruction of feminist and racial issues through the lens of her personal experiences with race, gender identity, and sexuality. Lena Dunham addressed Gay as the "powerhouse of a writer."

'An Untamed State' is the debut novel by Roxane Gay that is centred on a woman's struggle to survive a brutal kidnap. It was published in the year 2014 and received wide recognition for its unflinching portrayal of sexual and spiritual violence. "An Untamed State establishes Roxane Gay as a writer of prodigious and arresting talent" (Guardian). The novel is set in modern day Haiti, where kidnappings are

¹ Rape Abuse and Incest National Network

² Roxane Gay is an American writer, professor, editor, and social commentator. Gay is the author of The New York Times best-selling essay collection *Bad Feminist*, as well as the short story collection *Ayiti*, the novel *An Untamed State*, the short story collection *Difficult Women*, and the memoir *Hunger*

quite common and take place like business transactions. Mireille Duval Jameson is the protagonist of the novel. She is a lawyer by profession, wife of Michael Jameson and mother of Christophe. She was kidnapped outside the gates of her parents' estate while she, her husband and son were visiting Haiti. Mireille was held captive for thirteen days since her father Sebastian Duval refused to pay the ransom. During that time, she is starved, raped and beaten. The novel details Mireille's struggles to stay in charge of herself while in captivity and her fight to get back to herself and her family, after she was released. The novel is written in forty three chapters divided into two sections titled 'Happily ever after' and 'Once upon a time,' dealing with her life during captivity and the life after release respectively.

Unveiling the Trauma

Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless in a dangerous world. Psychological trauma can leave you struggling with upsetting emotions, memories, and anxiety that won't go away. It can also leave you feeling numb, disconnected, and unable to trust other people. During her stay in the 'cage' she remembers her good old days. Through this novel, the author gives a horrific account of the physical and psychological tortures that the protagonist underwent during her captivity. Gay dedicates the novel for the women, all over the world.

Most part of the novel is told from Mireille's perspective. From the very beginning itself, the author makes it clear what the novel is about. "Once upon a time, I was kidnapped by a gang of fearless, yet terrified young men" (Mireille 4). In the first chapter, she talks about how she is being taken away mercilessly in front of her husband and son. They are in Port-au-Prince, in Haiti, where Mireille's parents live. Mireille and her husband were taking their one year old son, Christophe to the ocean for the first time. When the gates to her parents' estate opened and they drove onto the street, they were surrounded by three black Land cruisers. One of the men grabbed Mireille by the hair, slapped on her face, threw her in to the ground, and kicked her in her stomach. Michael is also being beaten terribly and is unconscious. "Go easy or we kill your family. We kill everything you've ever loved" (Land Cruiser 7). The captors threaten Mireille and shoved her into the waiting vehicle. Throughout the first part, the author details the tortures she underwent during her captivity. The novel's narrative voice is saturated with trauma, yet unnervingly steady throughout.

The author provides a detailed description of the 'cage' in which Mireille is locked. The car stops on a noisy street. The captors led her through a dark room where she sees a woman watching television, four men playing cards, and a child's bedroom. Finally they reached a room with a small bed on one side, a bucket on the other and a window with bars looking out to an alley. They lock her up in that room. She says, "they left me in a new cage." (14) She also says that there were only the walls threatening to close in on her and the heavy stillness of air. She was starved and brutally raped by the captors.

In chapter five, Gay describes a man who introduces himself as the 'commander.' Wearing tight jeans and T shirt, a pistol tucked into the waistband, he appears to be the head of the kidnapping group. He shows his authority through his physical strength. He makes Mireille call her father, demands One Million dollars as ransom, to be paid immediately. During the thirteen days of captivity, she longs for her family, especially her son Christophe, who is not yet a year old. She goes back to the memories of her childhood, summer holidays she had spent in Haiti, her father, her first meeting with Michael, their marriage, her delivery and so on.

She was brutally raped by the men. The commander and another young man named Tiperre hurts her severely, many times. Privacy was not at all valued and she was made to bathe and piss while they watched her. When she is forced to have sex with a man, other people watched it with voyeuristic eyes, thus transforming her into an object of ‘scopophilia’.

In chapter eleven, Mireille is being gang raped by several men who conquered her body one after the other. She says “all I could think about was my body, how the first time in my life I understood the very weakness, the utter fragility of human flesh” (80). She feels her body has torn apart. They never paid any attention to her cries and screams. She felt that “my body was not my body; it was less than nothing” (82). When she is finally taken to the commander, he burns her skin with a lit cigarette. “He removed my clothes, almost politely, and knelt between my bare thighs, lit a cigarette” (Mireille 84). She begs to the commander to leave her, to leave something of her body for her loved ones. But he blames her father who is not ready to pay the ransom and reminds her about the consequences that might happen to her. Through this novel, Gay condenses female abjection as the casualness of male violence, repeats itself time and again throughout the captivity.

Transformation to the Fragmented Self

As days passed, she begins to lose hope. “I became two women ; the one who remembered everything and the one who remembered nothing” (Mireille 171). She begins to get distanced from herself. She feels alienated from everything that she possessed. In the last phase of captivity, Mireille surrenders herself without much fighting. She feels that she is no one. “I tried to remember the name of the woman I had been. I could see the shape of that name, but nothing more” (Mireille 193). She feels distanced from her family and is trying to recall the name of her husband and his smell. She further says that the commander’s smell was becoming familiar. When her father finally paid the money, she was released and here, the first part ends. But before setting her free, commander enjoyed her for the last time. In the end of the first part, Mireille says that “Once upon a time, my life was a fairy tale and then I was stolen from everything I’ve ever loved. There was no happily ever after. After days of dying, I was dead” (207).

Even after her release she takes a lot of time to get back to her real self. Thirteen days of captivity shatters her body as well as her mind. The memories of captivity and the tortures of the captors haunts her for years. Those days had damaged her so much that it changed her attitude towards life, relationship with her family members and feelings for Haiti. After the release, the world looks and feels different for her. Mireille can never be as she was; she would always calculate the worst possibilities of being alone with any man. Language also becomes subject to calculation: the reader cannot help but see how seemingly innocuous words like “milking machines” and “wife beater” inscribe violence against women.

When she was set free, she manages to enter a chapel and she was able to reunite with her family with the help of a preacher in that church. She was so broken that she was unable to recognize her husband. Mireille is not letting her husband to touch her. She is afraid that any person could harm her. She is not even letting the doctor examine her. When she is taken to the hospital, she says, “I couldn’t bear the thought of taking off my clothes for yet another man my body did not care to know” (222). Mireille loses her own control and behaves in abnormal ways. The doctor reveals that she displays symptoms of (PTSD). Fear, always being guard for danger, trouble sleeping, angry outbursts, aggressive behaviour,

shame etc are some of the symptoms exhibited by people who suffer from PTSD. Mireille is not an exception.

She reaches home, sees her mother and her baby, whom she longed to see all these days. But she mentions about them as if they are strangers; ‘an older woman and a sleeping child’. Thinking of herself as dirty and spoiled, she is not willing to hold the baby. She believes that it will make him polluted. In many ways, rape makes body the enemy, something that’s been violated and contaminated – something the victim may hate or want to ignore. All she needed was to be alone. She considers herself as unclean and stays under lukewarm water for a long time. She washes herself until there was no soap left.

Whenever Michel touches her she feels a kind of uneasiness. She says that she could still feel the weight of Tipierre’s arm. She feels afraid whenever Michel touches her. She says “I wanted to hide. I wanted to sleep alone so I could be safe” (231). She begins to look at her family as if it is another cage. Though she tries to forget everything, it takes a lot of time to recover. She burns her clothes that she had worn for thirteen days hoping that it might help her to forget the memories of cage. She says,

I took my soiled clothes, the ones I wore for thirteen days, the ones covered in piss and tears and semen and blood I could not wash out even though I tried...I threw those filthy clothes holding those memories of my body I to the fire pit behind my parent’s house and watched the clothes smolder.(235)

The novel talks about how these kind of incidents shape ones’ life and the difficulty with which the victims get back to their normal lives. The very next day, Mireille goes back to Miami, along with her husband and child hoping that she will be safe there. But it does not make much difference. While they were in Haiti airport, she worries that one of her kidnappers would be waiting for her. As she watches one of the security agents giving a passenger a vigorous pat down, she moves back saying that she can’t do that. When security checks her, she says “I tried to find the words to explain to him that I could not be touched, that if he touched me I would shatter and I would die more and I would never find my way home” (250). All these instances shows that she is mentally ill and that even simple things could hurt her. She is shouting at Michael inside the plane, for simple reasons, and behaves in an odd manner thus drawing the attention of other passengers.

Mireille’s sister Mona was waiting for them in Miami Airport. There is a strong bond between the sisters and Mireille hopes that Mona’s presence would provide her some sort of relief. She says, “If I can get to my sister, I will feel better and I will feel alive”(257). Mireille reveals to Mona that their family took thirteen days to pay the ransom is the fact that hurts her the most.

Next morning, she is getting ready to go to work. Michael tries to stop her saying that she is not well and should better see a doctor. She drove out of her home, but is afraid to get out of the car. She calculated about everything that might happen to her in the short distance between her car and the elevator entrance. Every sound frightens her and is again getting inside the car. She feels safe only after locking herself inside. She is unable to do anything. Neither she could go to work, not stay at home. All these shows the intensity with which the incident had paralyzed her, mentally. She keeps on driving and goes out of Miami.

She decides to spend a night in a hotel room in Chattanooga. She is so afraid and is taking precautions to avoid any further danger. She puts the ‘do not disturb’ sign on the doorknob and pushes a chair in front of the door and sets one of the water glasses on the narrow arm so that she would get to know when someone tried to enter the room. When Michel tells her that he is on his way to get her, she is going further and further away. She begins to consider her family as a burden that suffocates her. She always wanted to be alone. She is afraid of the officer, who asks her to get out of the car. He tells her that

overnight driving is not allowed and suggests that she should shelter somewhere. Though he had kind looks, she imagines the worst possibilities he is capable of doing. She says, I was still afraid of what he might do to me. He could throw me over the hood of the car and tear my clothes off. He could drag me behind the rest of the area or into one of the bathrooms. He could force me to my knees. He could make me put my mouth on him. He could take me in the backseat of his car. He could rise his gun or nightstick and try to reshape my body in new and crueler ways. He could gut me or shove me in the trunk of his patrol car and take me into the deep Kentucky woods.(271)

Pathway to Healing

Mireille finally ends up in her in laws house. Lorraine, her mother in law takes care of her as if she is her own daughter. It is only then, she felt safe. Even then, Mireille takes time to recover completely. She says that the mere mention of Michel's name made her heart contract. She was still unable to sleep. Even if she was able to, she woke up screaming many nights. Lorraine tries hard to get her back to normal life by making her help in the kitchen and farm. Though Lorraine wanted her to take her in to the hospital, she never agrees. Mireille says that every sound seems strange and frightens her. Even the blood reminds her about the cage and the commander. One day her palm gets cut by the broken glass. She says, "my body was once again forced open by something sharp" (282). The oozing blood reminds her about commander who was very fond of the sharp knife and how he drew his knife in neat rows all over her body. It is said that she had bruises all over the body.

She stays with Lorraine and Glen (Michel's father) for almost six months. But she says, it felt for her like eternity. She begins to call Michael, several times a day and his sound seems to loosen the pain. Slowly, she began to miss Michael and Christophe, showing signs of getting back to her real self. But the incident in the bar, where a man named Shannon tried to rape her, she is again thrown back to the memories of captivity. When Michael comes to Nebraska, Mireille argues with him to set her free. Angrily, she goes out of the house, but feels that the commander is following her. She hides in a shed holding a wire cutter to protect herself, in case something happens. She was found after an entire night of searching. This incident shows the intensity of the suffering she had undergone. She feels that she was kept inside a cage inside another one. She recalls her sufferings in the cage and says, "they were not yet old enough to be memories" (335).

Lorraine manages to take Mireille into the hospital. The intensity of damages happened to her body is only revealed then. Her vaginal canal was extensively damaged so that she needed a reconstructive surgery. But the thought of being paralyzed and being cut open frightened her. "All I could think was everything that could happen to my body in a hospital" (Mireille 321). Moreover, she was taken to several therapists and psychiatrists who gave her a lot of medicines. Some of them told her to talk about her grief as if they will be disappeared with recitation. She says that only one therapist told her the truth. She said, "I am going to come clean with you, Mireille" (Therapist 343). The damages happened to her body were so intense that she was unable to conceive. "No amount of reconstructive surgery or time or money or hope would fix what was damaged. The sorrows piled themselves silently around us, nearly choking us, choking me" (Mireille 344). They had to find a surrogate for their next baby and they named their daughter, Emma Lorraine.

Overcoming Relationship Struggles

After five years Mireille and Michael goes to Port-au-Prince, though they had planned that they would

never visit the place again. As they landed there, Mireille tells Michael, “I really do not want to be here. Please don’t let anything happen to me” (346). It shows her fear that the same can happen again. As they drove up to her parents’ house, she sweated heavily and felt dizzy. There is a lengthy conversation between Mireille and her father. Though she blames him for everything happened to her, later she tells that she is ready to forgive him. It is only then she identifies herself that she is Mireille Duval Jameson, she is married and that they have two children. But later, she tells Michael that she wouldn’t forgive her father. She lied because it costs her less than the truth would have cost her father.

A few weeks later, in Miami, the memories of captivity returned to Mireille again. While she was having lunch in a restaurant along with Michael, Mona and her husband Carlito, she noticed a busboy who filled water their glasses. He had a scar beneath the left eye and Mireille recognized him by his smell that it is the commander. His hands shook as he noticed Mireille. She followed him to the kitchen and began pounding at his chest with her closed fists. She dug her fingernails into his face and pulled the scar until he started bleeding. She shouted at him that he should have better killed her. As Michael approaches him, the commander starts running like a coward. It is only then she realizes that the commander is in fact, very weak. Right now, neither he has the kingdom, nor the men who served him. Mireille recalls the last time when she was forced to have sex after the ransom was paid. She says that it was the real sacrifice, ‘her life, for her life’. When Michael started running after the commander, she is holding Michael with both her hands telling him not to leave her, which suggests that she has already planned to start a new life.

The mind works as the second prison in this novel. The story of kidnapping essentially never ends, but continues to loom large in the victim’s mind. Told almost completely from Mireille’s perspective, *An Untamed State* wastes no time delving into this ordeal, and Gay keeps the close-up on her throughout the novel, intensifying the narrative connection with her even as Mireille dissociates from the woman she was. Other sections from the perspectives of her father and her husband, Michael, offer context but no relief from the family’s nightmare; still, it is to Mireille’s view that Gay insistently returns, delving deeper into the way her abduction and treatment in captivity has irrevocably marked her. Repeating that she is “no one.”

The incident changes Mireille’s attitude towards Haiti. She says that she was always a curiosity for her American friends. “A Haitian is not from slums or the countryside, a Haitian who has enjoyed the life of a privilege”(Mireille 11). She says, there are three Haitis- the country Americans know, the one Haitians know and the one she thought she knew. It was believed that there are certain etiquettes for Haitian children. Mireille’s parents always insisted their children to be modest. During her captivity, Mireille recalls the summer afternoons she had spent in Haiti.

However, everything seems to change after the incident. After the release, when she comes back to Port-au-Prince, she says, “the way I had enjoyed such decadence disgusted me”(225). She leaves Haiti deciding she will never come back again. When she visits Haiti after five years, she feels completely detached and says “I saw no part of myself in the country I once called home”(346). Susana Onega and Jean-Michel Ganteau says that “*An Untamed State*, provides a good illustration of the current fluid, interconnected, unstable reality of selves and worlds” (15).

Kidnappings are quite common in Haiti and therefore it evolved as the ‘kidnapping capital of the world.’ Mireille talks about some kidnapping stories she knows. Her cousin was kidnapped, was held captive for two days and was released after paying the ransom. Sebastian Duval tells the story of his best friend Antonio Deus who lost his entire family to kidnappers. The police and law are unable to do anything in

order to prevent this from happening. No one dares to open their mouth in fear of their lives and simply watches as people are being taken away in front of their eyes. When Mireille was being kidnapped, no one dares to move a step forward, but simply watches the scene. Haitians are accustomed to the news of kidnappings so that the news about Mireille's kidnap creates no impact on her father and the negotiator. Her father behaves as if nothing had happened and is not willing to pay the ransom since he believes that if he paid the ransom so soon, the kidnappers will come for another one, thus causing danger to the entire family.

Sebastian Duval is a wealthy man of great pride who owns his own construction company. He is a man who will never pay a ransom, not for himself, not for any member of his family. His attitude becomes another reason for Mireille's suffering. A father is supposed to be the protector of family. But the fact that Mireille's father took thirteen days to pay the ransom, challenges this notion and makes her feel detached from him. Mireille talks about her father and the relationship between the two in great detail. Sebastian Duval always wanted his children to excel others. Whenever the commander makes Mireille call her father, he simply tells her to stay strong. He never thinks about her situation in the cage. Even though she begs her father to pay for her, it does not make any impact on him. It is only after his wife Fabienne insisted consistently, he was ready to pay the ransom. As a result of all these, Mireille begins to feel that she is not safe with her parents and leaves the place deciding that she would never come back again. She seeks solace in Michel's house, where she recovers. Five years later, she comes back to Port-au-Prince hoping that she could tell everything that happened to her within the cage. Mireille bursts her anger at the father who was trying to justify his part. At the same time he feels guilty and falls out of words. Mireille was able to identify herself only after she said to her father that she is ready to forgive.

Michael is the one who loves Mireille the most and he tries hard to bring his wife back to normal life. Mireille compares their relationship to a lock and key. He is also traumatic after the incident and is caught up in a helpless situation. Being an American, he is not used to these kinds of incidents. When they visit Haiti after five years, he carefully watches over Mireille, since he is afraid that the same thing may happen again. To an extent, he understands Mireille's situation and stays himself away from her, realizing that she wishes to stay alone. He takes care of their child in her absence and tries hard to take Mireille back to the normal life after release. In spite of all these, Mireille considers him as another cage and tries to go away from him. His presence reminds her about the cage. She takes time to restart their life.

Mireille recovers from her trauma during her stay in Michael's home. Lorraine, her mother-in-law, takes the best care of her and provides her love and affection, that her own mother fails to provide. Lorraine tries to indulge Mireille in household chores thus helping her to forget the memories of the cage, to an extent. She succeeds in taking Mireille to the doctor, thus leading to her complete recovery. Towards the end, the readers could see Mireille as a strong woman who does not try to run away from the commander. She says, "I did not need to hide from him. He was the architect of my fear. I wanted him to see the woman he made, the steel of my body he helped forge" (358). The novel talks about how an incident is capable of shaping a person. Gay has created a straightforward style and defiant voice that drive Mireille's recollections. Her captivity experience is suspenseful, immediate and at times mercilessly realistic. Mireille's memories of her time before the kidnapping provide a respite for her and the reader. Because Mireille is portrayed as a flawed, three-dimensional person, not just a symbol of suffering, Gay's novel puts a face, a name and especially a voice to the rampant global violence against women. Mireille says, "girl children are not safe in a world where there are men" (344). Laura Roldan Sevillano in her article

“Roxane Gay’s *An Untamed State*: A Caribbean Rhizomatic Novel Reflecting the New Transmodern Paradigm” says that “in *An Untamed State* linearity is broken through several summarised classic fairy tales, folk stories and myths embedded within the main plot that provide reflective commentaries about Mireille’s captivity experience, her trauma and her family’s reactions”(73).

Sexual violence is shockingly common in our society. According to CDC³, nearly 1 in 5 women in the U.S. are raped or sexually assaulted at some point in their lives, often by someone they know and trust. In some Asian, African, and Middle Eastern countries, that figure is even higher. And sexual assault isn’t limited to women; many men and boys suffer rape and sexual trauma each year. In this context, it is relevant to look at the mental struggles of the victims. Sexual attacks, especially against women are quite common, but it has got no relevance beyond the news that appear in newspapers. People are not at all bothered about the trauma faced by the victims. *An Untamed State* tackles the issue of sexual violence and gang rape in Haiti so as to open the eyes of Western and non-Western readers to such an urgent problem in the country. Thus the story of Mireille Duval Jameson becomes the story of every woman who undergoes similar kind of experience. According to Laura Roldan Sevillano, “the novel *An Untamed State* demonstrates the globality of sexism and sexual abuse” (77).

Conclusion

Though trauma has its beginning since the origin of human civilization, it evolved as a discipline only during mid 90’s under the heading ‘trauma studies’ and ‘trauma theory’. Trauma literature deals with the agonies or sorrows of the author or about the subjects or characters written. War, holocaust, rape, child abuse, racism, slavery, terrorism are some of the common factors that leads to trauma.

Analysing the novel against the backdrop of trauma theory, this project unveils the damages; both physical and mental, endured by the protagonist. Following the incident, Mireille passes through a prolonged period of psychological trauma, lost to herself. Focused on the life of Mireille, this project throws light upon the ways in which these kind of incidents are capable of shattering one’s mind and personality.

During the captivity, Mireille is being gang raped by several men. She is reduced to an object of scopophilia, that makes her associate herself to an animal. She begins to feel disconnected from herself and her family. Even after the release, she is unable to get back to her real self. She always anticipates dangers and neither lets the doctor examine her, nor lets her family members approach her. She begins to consider her family as a new ‘cage’ and seeks ways to get out of it. All these suggests that Mireille is traumatic, following the incident. She was immensely influenced by the incident so that it changed her attitude to life, family and her relationship with people. She loses faith in her father and seeks solace at her in laws house.

Rate of sexual abuse is increasing day by day. News related to these are being limited into small newspaper columns. No one bothers to think about the state of victims after these kind of incidents. However, it deserves a greater attention. Especially in the context of Covid-19 pandemic, trauma studies is given vital importance. The victims might go through a tough phase or might end their life forever. The victims of sexual abuse are more likely to suffer from PTSD. If not properly treated, there are chances that they might go out of control. In this context, trauma studies deserves much more recognition. This study, deals with the trauma of a rape victim in the novel *An Untamed State*, and focuses on her mental struggles as well as her difficulty in getting back to normalcy.

³ Centre for Disease Control and Prevention

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