TRAUMATIC SUBJECTIVITY AND ETHICAL RESOLVE: A STUDY OF SELECT NUCLEAR DISASTER NARRATIVES

Thesis submitted to the
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by

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DECLARATION

I, **Jinan T.K.**, hereby declare that the thesis entitled **Traumatic Subjectivity and Ethical Resolve: A Study of Select Nuclear Disaster Narratives** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by me under the guidance of **Dr. Zeenath Mohamed Kunhi**, Assistant Professor of English, Farook College and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled **Traumatic Subjectivity and Ethical Resolve: A Study of Select Nuclear Disaster Narratives** submitted by **Jinan T.K.** to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by her under my supervision and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Studies on human psyche and its workings as represented in literature are areas of critical interest in contemporary academics. It is generally understood that literature prepares a space to navigate into that inner core of human life and explore its ramifications on life and the world outside. The discursive act of writing and reading of trauma literature occupies a significant position in such a space. The present study attempts to understand the concept of trauma as an academic point of critical deliberations, its evolution from a theoretical perspective and its intricate relationship with human subjectivity, and its representation in the select nuclear disaster narratives - *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank, *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute, *A Gift Upon the Shore* by M.K. Wren , *Children of the Dust* by Louise Lawrence, and the non-fiction *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich. The relationship between traumatic subjectivity and the ineluctable need for an ethical recourse in the backdrop of trauma is also examined in the narratives taken up for study.

Theoretical debates on contemporary literature based on trauma related studies engender questions regarding the possibility of a narrative in the present, representing the traumatic events in the past or even placed in the future, and the validity of such narratives in recounting or retelling the subjectivities of the victims in the fictional or nonfictional texts/contexts. The present study also examines the role of literature in negotiating the space between narration and representation in reading the work. Contemporary writings, especially literature in the last decades of

the twentieth century and the first decade of the present century have been distinct with the ambience of horror and horrendous wounds. Even though the problem of representation in language is generally contested, it is also to be acknowledged that only the language of literature has the potential to traverse the mindscape of humans marked with memories, retrospection, introspection and reminiscences, which are again poignantly colored by sufferings, pains, wounds and trauma. Vulnerability and risk in relation to trauma, ethics, politics and poetics constitute the central concerns in contemporary culture, and academic conversations address these issues in the present parlance of literary researches. The precarious position of the traumatic subjectivity of the contemporary human life in this backdrop becomes a point of grave academic concern in the present scenario.

Postmodernist nihilism and the undecidability of the thematic and narrative fabric in contemporary representations of trauma intensify the need for an ethical centre. This ethical aspect of both writing and reading dominate the narrative conscience of the works analysed here. The ethical domain of reading is especially problematized as a pivotal concern. Both the writer's and the reader's ethical leanings of critical engagement is deemed as a surrogate of solace in contemporary trauma writings. Empathetic readers attuned to the ethical domain of reading come to the very practice of reading from an ethical space that addresses both the site of the author and the text. This process of reading gives an aesthetic interpretation through intellectual identification and ethical value judgments that enlighten the reader's responses to the texts.

In the recent years of literary production, an array of fictional works on traumatic experience and its representation in narrative form is seen to be influenced

by the theorization and testimony of the Holocaust, two World Wars, Nuclear meltdown, the psychic costs of colonization and racism and international security issues post 9/11 and so on. Informed by the theoretical frameworks of trauma studies and the ethical inclinations of literature, the present study problematizes the contemporary writings selected from the trajectory of nuclear disaster narratives with special attention to traumatic subjectivity of the fictional characters and the real life victims of the disasters. In the post World Wars scenario where atomic weapons proliferated, people have lost faith in viewing the world as a coherent order and as a result, a traumatic unconscious reigned the fictional, political and cultural landscape of the hour. Disaster narratives from the fictional world of the above mentioned authors are thus analyzed in the backdrop of trauma, subjectivity and ethics and the nonfiction is taken up for critical analysis for its attempt to synchronize the actuality and representation of traumatic subjectivity in a realistic narrative conscience.

How these contemporary writers present their works as sites of narrative expression and performance of traumatic subjectivity, their poetics of representation of testimonies, memories and loss, and disoriented selves make an interesting study especially in the light of their ethical resolve. The advent of technology like the predominance of television culture, as one reads in Ray Bradbury's novel just to cite one example, in a rapidly industrialized world is generally considered to be a major factor in augmenting the sense of a collective anxiety and traumatic gloom in the contemporary world order. The collective disasters of the recent past, including those of the nuclear catastrophes have inspired writers to address the issue of representing the traumatic subjectivity of the people involved in disasters. The cultural, aesthetic and ethical value of these literary and narrative representations of trauma exhibit

multifaceted character templates for presenting and exploring the writings that came in the contemporary world of reading. The novels that are studied in the present thesis take their ideological launch from this background.

The academic field of trauma studies draws its theoretical insights from psychoanalysis and poststructuralism. The idea of trauma's unrepresentability constitutes a point of cardinal interest in the literary researches in contemporary academics. While descriptions of the horrors of holocaust and the fears of nuclear disasters mark the conscience of the contemporary era, only a little attention was given to the problematics of depicting and representing trauma in literary studies.

The way contemporary literary culture engages itself in the present, and its projection of the future, may shed light upon the way it recounts the images of its past. Recalling, introspecting and inscribing the past consciousness in the present paradigm of narrative expression becomes a focal point of critical deliberations in the areas of academic research in the fictional as well as nonfictional trajectories of, especially trauma related writings. Contemporary literature including fictional and nonfictional narratives is coloured by a return to modernist angst and postmodernist nihilism. The writers who wrote at the closing decades of the twentieth century are intricately linked to the influence of World Wars and nuclear disasters and holocaust horrors. The fictional trajectory of this period responds to a world order that is presumably subject to the brutal increase of capitalism, rampant progress of individualism and the consequent loss of community. The traumatic experiences of the victims of the world wars and nuclear holocaust have formed the focal points of many of the works that figure in contemporary literature.

Trauma writings are in one sense, life narratives blurring the boundaries between fiction and history which is more so in the case of Nuclear fiction. Trauma studies also deal with the role of memory and testimony in forming the individual and cultural agencies.

The methodology of the present study mainly draws on the theoretical formulations of the twentieth century, i.e. schools of Psychoanalysis, Poststructuralism, and New historicism. As studies in trauma and subjectivity are discourses centered on the mind, psychoanalysis has been used as a methodological tool drawing on the theories of Freud, Lacan and Cathy Caruth. Traumatic subjectivity engenders the problematics of representation and this has been discussed in the background of postructural theoretical paradigms. As the justification between the actuality of the past and the representation of these traumatic events in the present narratives require critical deliberations in discourses of history, new historicism too constitutes the theoretical method of the study.

As the study largely revolves around the problematics of retelling trauma, the poststructuaralist formulation of representation provides ample space to the methodological field of the study. The poststructuralist school of Deconstruction presents the assumption that the traditional modes of conceptualizing the world are no longer credible and this mode delegitimizes metanarratives like the dominant history. This undecidability leaves space for the Romantic impulse to speculate upon a brighter future which results in the ethical dimension of writing and reading.

The readers too, take part in the poetics of representation in the act of reading and a third order signification takes place. Hillis Miller's concept of 'ethics of reading' too adds to the theoretical base of the study. The author, text, and reader are

each located in specific times and places, but a trialectics of reading takes place in each individualized act of reading and thereby simultaneously intermingle in the process of meaning production and interpretation.

In this trialectics of reading, an implied reader who is an empathetic reader in the present context comes to the very act of reading from an ethical point, addressing both the site of the author and the text. This ethical mode of reading neatly fuses reason and emotion in an attempt to formulate an aesthetic interpretation through which the cognitive identification and ethical value judgments come as the final resolve of reading. Reading trauma literature demands this trialectics of reading where the reader is to be self-conscious, aware of the connection towards the text and its writer. Narratives woven from real life experience, or fictionalized from real and actual historical traumas gain the capacity to affect others in this triad of reading. The proper representation of the trauma becomes the ethical responsibility of this trialectics of reading. Ethical reading accounts for the emotional and intellectual responses from an empathetic reader whose identification with the text is experienced through relating to characters and situations that kindle personal memories and reflections.

The notion of trauma, which in itself is a kind of a source of critique, is considered to be a destructive experience that deeply affects upon the subject's emotional balance and the perception of the world outside. Trauma studies address the influence of trauma in literature and culture by examining its psychological, representational and cultural significance. Academic studies in the field analyze the intricately complex psychological and cultural factors that influence the self's

perception of a traumatic event and how such an event designs and is designed by language.

Cathy Caruth in her *The Unclaimed Experience* writes: "In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flash- backs, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (85). Studies in Trauma theory emerged in the early 1990s drawing insights from Freudian formulations of psychoanalytic theory to develop a discussion platform for trauma as an extreme experience that defeats the reaches of language and meaning. This platform addressed the issue of unrepresentablity of trauma. Following this model a couple of pluralistic models of trauma theory came into existence suggesting that the assumed unrepresentablity of trauma is only one among the many responses to an extreme event and not its sole defining feature. The notion that an intense experience challenges the limits of language and representation, fragments the psychic fabric, and even ruptures the coherence of meaning, set the initial yardsticks of the field and continues to influence the critical deliberations even when the alternative approaches discredit this notion.

As mentioned earlier Freud's theoretical formulations on traumatic experience are instrumental in defining the psychological notions that influence the field. Psychoanalytic theories addressing the effects of trauma came out in the latter half of the nineteenth century. At this time, this study arose as a theoretical platform for studies regarding shock and hysteria. Apart from Freud, this field of study included critics like Hermann Oppenheim, Joseph Breuer, Jean Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Abram Kardiner, and Morton Prince. Freud's early theoretical

formulations in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) dominate the pioneering efforts in trauma's conceptualization as an object of study.

Trauma has been imagined as both an outer agent that takes the subject unawares and an inner action of defense against some overstimulation. Freud argues in *Studies in Hysteria* that the actual event is not traumatic in itself but the memory of the same brings in the actual trauma. This argument seems to be fundamental in the theoretical formulations regarding trauma studies in academics. Narrativization being a process of memorization in this regard, the role of narration and representation is crucial in any study around the notion of trauma. The very process of recalling the events brings about pain and it gives shape to a formerly repressed expression of an experience in the unconscious.

The depiction of trauma as seen in contemporary narratives is in a way where we find the individual trauma at the centre of the fictional world as linked to a general angst of the hour. Theories of trauma's effects on the individual subject are often used to examine the personal and individual experience of a collective traumatic event in a narrative, and this model has been employed in analyzing the novels taken in the present study. Such a study is used to explore the link between the traumatic experience of individuals and cultural groups or between the individual and the political climate. The social aspect of trauma is also a point of critical concern in the present study.

Following Freud, prominent critics like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Geoffrey Hartman who together form the first wave of this field of criticism, popularized the notion of trauma as an unrepresentable concept and event that exposed the inherent contradictions and lacunae within language and experience. In

the conventional conceptualization of trauma pioneered by these, trauma is considered to be an event that ruptures the consciousness and baulks directly linguistic representation. This view brings our attention to the intensity of affliction by suggesting that the traumatic experience has the potential to damage the psyche irrevocably. Hence trauma here is viewed to be an unassimilated event that shocks the identity and remains outside the normal frames of memory and narrative representation.

This argument emphasizes that the pains caused by an external source which makes internal changes to the operation of the mind irrevocably alters one's identity. This is a relatively new and significant area in contemporary critical studies and therefore a detail discussion is devoted to the problematization of traumatic subjectivity in the present study. The theoretical emphasis on trauma's unrepresentability rests on the view that an extreme experience fractures both consciousness and the medium of expressions. Therefore it causes lasting detrimental impact and thereby demands unique mode of narrative expressions. The event is usually outside the normal consciousness but remains just beyond the limits of comprehension in a timeless, spaceless state. But there it perpetually works in inflicting wounds on the psyche. Trauma's imperceptible absence and its simultaneously haunting presence in the consciousness, its disappearance from memory and an integrated narrative expression opens areas for critical analysis and interpretations in the academic parlance of reading. Theoretical formulation on trauma is inseparable from memory and disaster. Blanchot's words reiterates the argument:

The disaster is not somber, it would liberate us from everything if

it could just have a relation with someone; we would know it in light of

language and at the twilight of a language with a *gai savoir*. But the

disaster is unknown; it is the unknown name for that in thought itself

which dissuades us from thinking of it, leaving us, but its proximity,

alone. Alone, and thus exposed to the thought of the disaster which

disrupts solitude and overflows every variety of thought, as the intense,

silent and disastrous affirmation of the outside. (Blanchot 5)

Critics debate on how the experience of violence and trauma, and the

structure and framework for comprehending the same are inseparably interlaced. In

other words, we have no escape from the various pockets of ideology to look at the

actuality of reality. Žižek in his *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, elaborates on this

point:

…it is not just a question of seeing things (that is, social reality)

as they 'really are,' of throwing away the distorted spectacles of

ideology; the main point is to see how the reality itself cannot reproduce

itself without this so-called ideological mystification. The mask is not

simply hiding the real state of things; the ideological distortion is written

into its very essence. (*Sublime Object* 25)

A general feeling of anxiety instigated by the potential breakdown in socio-

cultural relations and aesthetic representation as theorized by postmodernism gave

rise to the fictional modes of apocalypse and dystopias. Frank Kermode's apt

comment on this anxiety in his *The Sense of an Ending* is highly relevant here. He

says: "Apocalypse is a part of the modern absurd" (Kermode 124). A world order

marked with panic and devastation as in the case of nuclear disasters and the aftermaths brought about an absolute distrust of any optimistic and secular or teleological understandings of reality and history. These disasters were read as the failures of the rationalist ideologies of the previous centuries. A traumatic reality defines the contemporary world order. Contemporary intellectual situation synchronizes with the apocalyptic movements in the century. Michael Barkum's views in this context demand critical attention. In his formulations of millenarian movements he writes:

> (They) are social movements which expect immediate, collective, total, this worldly salvation. They anticipate the complete destruction of the existing social order, political and economic order, which is to be superseded by a new and perfect society. They frequently couple this anticipation with an active desire to spread the inevitable result, often through violent, revolutionary means. (44)

Apocalyptic fiction finds its expression powerfully in dystopias where the writer envisions an absolutely nihilistic and pessimistic view life and world with no hope for renewal. In trauma related narratives, this nihilism and lack of teleological centre bring about the need of an alternative aesthetics which is hypothetically argued in the present thesis as ethical turn. Since the notion of trauma and subjectivity are key concepts that engage the critical analyses of the materials selected for study, a detailed account of "Trauma Studies" and "Subjectivity" are given in the second chapter, as an extension of the methodological framework.

The existing paradigm of studies in trauma, relating to ethics,   is made from different perspectives like literature, sociology, theatre, diaspora studies, migration

studies, international relations, law and political science as completely opposed to a concept with studies of the mind. A review of these studies convince us of the fact that there is a radical shift from psychological to the sociological and political dimension of trauma studies and it is here that the role of ethics comes as a crucial point.

Many works have been penned discussing the dangers of a nuclear war. Paul Brians's *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction, 1895-1984* is a detailed research on atomic war in fiction from 1895 to 1984 and is a key instance. The search for surrogates becomes the point of argument and the question of ethics comes as a separate point of discussion in this work. A similar study has been made by Susan Onega in 2007 in her *The Ethical Component in Experimental British Fiction since 1960s.* This works too fails to link between narrative politics and ethical resolve in trauma literature. Susan and Rubin Suleiman's article titled "Problems of Memory and Factuality in Recent Holocaust Memoirs" published in *Poetics Today* is a study that problematizes the conflict between the actuality of a testimony and its representation in narration. Each of these studies set off the need of an ethical resolve in narration and reading.

Some of the major studies in the field of Nuclear disaster narratives include Andrew Feenbeerg's *The Politics of Survival: Science Fiction in the Nuclear Age* which strikingly manages to overlook most of the significant works of Science Fiction and its space in literary culture with psychoanalysis as a key tool of analysis. Paul Brian's work, *Nuclear Holocausts: Atomic War in Fiction* surveys the history of the field and it discusses the political scenarios of nuclear war and descriptions of the immediate impact and aftermath of atomic attacks.

Apocalyptic Discourses in Contemporary Culture: Post Millennial Perspectives on the End of the World, edited by Monica Germania and Aris Mousoutzanis is a key work in the area and it brings us into some of the theoretical aspects of Trauma in the context of Apocalyptic fiction. Theoretical formulations are seen in many of the studies of the time and Philip Duhan Segal's dissertation in 1973 "Imaginative Literature and the Atomic Bomb: An Analysis of Representative Novels, Plays, and Films from 1945 to 1972" is a pioneering study that talks about the problematics of narrating and representing traumatic experiences. Robert T. Lifton's *Death in Life: The Survivors of Hiroshima* deals with the fictional nuclear wars and the representation of the same in fictional accounts detailing the horrors of the atomic bomb as used in Japan. Michelle Balaev's academic journal article named "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," is an informative piece of work on Trauma studies in literature.

David Dowling's "Fictions of Nuclear Disaster" is a 1986 treatise that promises to be a full length study on the issue of representation of the victimhood in nuclear disasters. "The End of the World" is a brilliant   collection of essays on apocalyptic fiction edited by Eric Rabkin, Martin. H. Greenberg and Joseph. D-Olander. This work is unique in its teleological concerns and it is here that the launching pad of the present study is set. The theoretical decidability in the representative realm of trauma is taken as one of the key concerns in the study.

Ann Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* is a comprehensive study on the role of memory and the unrepresentability of an extreme experience. Lawrence Langer's *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* and Michael Rothberg's *Traumatic Realism* (2000) are studies in the similar line of thinking. In *Between Witness and*

Testimony (2001), Michael Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer point out that fictional narrative incline towards redemption, whether through identification with the main character of the story or by social and cultural causes. In similar fashion, Robert Eaglestone, in *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* (2004), places the problem of identification at the centre of the critical debate, arguing that "the reading that fiction requires too often demands the sort of process of identification that 'consumes' the events" (132). These are some of the major studies dealing with nuclear disaster narratives. In the present study, *Voices from Chernobyl* has been selected to analyze the ethical dimension of the reading process. The present study concentrates on select works of fiction and a work of nonfiction, where focus is on the traumatic subjectivity of the characters involved. It also attempts to highlight the problem of representation and the need for an ethical recourse as a surrogate. Not much research has been carried out in this regard as far as the primary texts are concerned.

The relevance of the study can be placed is both historical and ideological realms, and at both temporal and temperamental levels. Historically speaking, contemporary reality has been haunted by the horrendous events of the twentieth century which witnessed two World Wars, anticolonial insurgencies, nuclear disasters and political tumults like Fascism and Nazism. A life, always caught in the anxiety of existential insecurity, generates a culture and discourse designed to address the problems of the hour.

Consequently the academic discourses that got institutionalized towards the end of the twentieth century in general are tuned in studies of the human mind and its traumatic dimensions and responses. It has become the academic need of the hour to

cater to the chaos that permeates the social and psychological landscape of life. The present study assumes a significant position in the present academic research as it envisages the predicament of people caught in long lasting sufferings. Traumatic subjectivity, the key point of deliberation in the study, has been problematized in detail with meticulous attention to the people taken from the fictional and non-fictional narratives of contemporary literature. The narrative and representational impasse has become a debatable focus in researches and the present study intends to join the conversation with a view to addressing this theoretical impasse. The problems of ethics have been brought into question and it seems that a study in the ethical dimension of narrative representation sounds significant. The role of ethics both in the realms of writing and reading has been put into serious scrutiny during the course of the study. The study highlights the ethics of reading trauma literature in a world order where universal brotherhood rooted in a 'planetary' conscience has become a frantic requirement of the hour. Moreover, the works selected for study have nuclear disasters as their base. The greatest threat to humanity today lies in the indiscriminate proliferation of nuclear weapons. Science and technology too seems to be progressing at an alarming pace, mostly compromising on the ethical dimensions of the matters in question. It is highly relevant that an ethical footing is the need of the hour as far as science and technology is concerned and the present study is relevant in this context too.

A brief outline of the novels that come under the gamut of the present study is given below.

The Road (2006) by Cormac McCarthy is a novel that deals with survival in a post apocalyptic background. This magnum opus of McCarthy details the precarious

life of a father and his son in the bleak background of a nuclear torn landscape and mindscape. They make a solitary walk along the burned landscape of America. They are accompanied by nothing but the ash on the wind. The biting cold adds to the sufferings of their travel and the dark sky reflects the gloomy emptiness of their search. The world the father and son journey through is a ghastly site of a burned countryside and ashen landscape, both literally and metaphorically. Postmodern nihilism works throughout this search and the very destination set in the coast is unknowingly unreachable to them. They are equipped with nothing but a pistol to defend themselves in times of danger. They are left with just their clothes and food and one another. The novel boldly envisages a future completely devoid of any hope but the mutual love and care suggest the ethical aesthetic of the novel. Filial love and paternal care dominate the whole ethical dimension of the novel. Human predicament is unflinchingly meditated throughout the episodic evolution of the novel that oscillates between the trauma of destruction and the ethics of tender love. The present study looks deep into this contrastive aesthetics in the novel. Cormac McCarthy is an American novelist, playwright, and screenwriter.

Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) too is a gripping tale of destruction and trauma. This novel too is at once disturbing and poetic, as well as traumatic and ethical. Cast in a narrative frame of pulp fiction, this work presents a future society where books are censored and firemen like Guy Montag is supposed to burn books at a temperature at which papers become combustible; where the title of the novel is drawn. As Bradbury himself has stated, he wrote this novel to address his concerns and apprehensions about the McCarthy era which alarmingly threatens individual security and freedom. This book is a commentary on how a technologically

predominant culture reduces human interest in reading literature. The plot is set in an unidentified city at an unspecified time in the future to outline the phases that can lead society and culture to something as traumatic as banning literature. *Fahrenheit 451* employs the science fiction motif of dystopia where a totalitarian system of thinking with complete oppression of social organizations, stifle individual expression and freedom. In one sense, the motif of book burning is synonymous with the irrationality in the twentieth century, and the traumatic subjectivity of the people around is tellingly depicted in the novel. Ray Douglas Bradbury was an American author and screenwriter. He worked in a variety of genres, including fantasy, science fiction, horror, and mystery fiction.

Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959) which is taken for study in the present project is more apocalyptic in its vision than dystopian. This novel too is set in a post nuclear war scenario. The novel explores the fears and concerns that Americans faced during the Cold War. It details the terrifying account of the life of people in Florida when they make frantic efforts to survive in a situation where even the government fails to carry out the mission. When a nuclear holocaust devastates the whole of the United States, obliterating a thousand years of civilization and killing millions of people at a single stretch, the one and only small town in Florida alone thrives to survive. With horrifying note of threat and trauma, the novel details an ambience of war that can change the rhythm of life not only of the present generation, but of the generations to come. The collective aspect of traumatic subjectivity is problematized in the light of this novel which reinforces the notion that collaborated efforts and cooperation forms the essential criterion for survival. The resilience and hope in the face of war shown by the residents in Florida brings

out the ethical aesthetics in the novel. Technology in human life is a point of serious concern in the novel and the ethical dimension of technological advancements is also problematized in the analysis of the novel. Pat Frank is the pen name of the American writer, newspaper man and government consultant Harry Hart Frank. His best known work is *Alas, Babylon.*

Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) is a post apocalyptic novel set after 'nuclear World War III' which destroys a major population of people across the globe. The novel depicts the plight of a group of people who survive in southern Australia, awaiting in panic the fatal radioactive cloud approaching them, a gruesome sign of their imminent death. This unforgettable vision of a post-apocalyptic world depicts how ordinary people might face the most unimaginable nightmare in such a background. This book is charged with intense emotional tone framed in a contrastive tension between joys and sorrows, survival and desperate remedies. Founded on a realistic narrative frame, the novel is a beautiful fusion of war and love the one intensifying the effect of the other in the evolution of the plot of the novel. The work presents itself in an ironical framework in the sense that the characters wish to lead a conservative live, doing nothing out of the ordinary but later end up to be the most adventurous lot in the frantic effort of survival. Love of different sorts mature and bloom throughout the novel despite the inevitable arrival of tragic death resulting from the nuclear fallout. This contrastive portrayal adds to the traumatic effect of the novel and the traumatic subjectivity of the victims. Nevil Shute Norway was an English novelist and an aeronautical engineer who spent his later years in Australia.

It is again community concern that is the focus of study in M.K. Wren's *A Gift Upon the Shore* (1990). This novel presents a post apocalyptic era in the Pacific Northwest. This work is a poignant and poetic narration of the haunting tale of two women and their desperate attempts to survive the disaster they encounter. The novel is rich in its characterization drawn in the background of nuclear meltdown. This is the story of a friendship between an artist and a writer and the friendship becomes one of the gifts that they foster upon the shore though they are compelled to face different tests upon the shore. When their existence is threatened, it is the ethical dimension of the novel that is highlighted through the humanizing influence of books, art, Nature and community living. Nuclear winter coupled with firestorms and earthquakes shatter the West Coast of America. Mary Hope and Rachel Morrow, the protagonists are the embodiment of ethical resolve in the novel and they are determined to see things set right where culture can survive.   These two women set out to preserve the wisdom and knowledge of the yesteryears by saving every book they come across. The would-be library marks the ethical icon of contemporary culture in the novel. Their courage and resolve in the wake of a move by the enemies of culture to destroy the repertoire of books become one of the crucial points of discussion in the critical analysis of the novel. Desperate but ultimately hopeful, this work traces the lives of survivors in the context of nuclear war and its aftermaths. Martha Kay Renfroe was an American writer of mystery and science fiction who published works as M.K. Wren

Another novel set in the background of nuclear war is *Children of the Dust* (1985) by Louise Lawrence who writes fantastic science fiction for teenagers especially that are set in contemporary society or in some arid city in another galaxy

or another time. This novel is a post-apocalyptic, dystopia novel detailing the story of three generations of a family during the aftermath of a nuclear war. As in A *Gift upon the Shore,* the survivors are forced to encounter both with nuclear winter and social feuds. The radiation-induced mutations present a horrendous reality in this novel by the portrayal of the formation of a new species, *Homo superior* in the bleak background of the afflictions. The new species equip themselves to face a landscape that is devoid of ozone layer. They are also insensitive to the radiation. This book which is split into three sections, Sarah, Ophelia and Simon, details three generations of the Harnden family presenting the traumatic aftermath of the nuclear war and the horrifying reality it brings. With an ethical slant, the novel offers some rays of hope that humanity could survive the horrors of war with a trust in a better world order rooted in humanitarian concerns. Elizabeth Holden popularly known as Louise Lawrence was an Irish writer writing English works of science fiction.

Voices from Chernobyl (1997) by Svetlana Alexievich is a work of nonfiction and presents a polyphonic view of the survivors of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster of April 26, 1986 which is deemed to be the worst nuclear disaster in history. Based on the moving monologues of the interviewees, the book creates an oral history where the reader too participates in the production of meaning of the past in an ethical platform. Catastrophes in the past function as primary sources and models for apocalyptic novels in dystopia mode as we find in many of the novels mentioned here. Therefore the inclusion of a work of nonfiction becomes mandatory in the context. Traumatic events in the past act as catalysts for retrospection and memory to recount an experience which turns to be a prime agent in traumatic subjectivity. The novels as well as the nonfiction included here are very much influenced by this

recounting process. The inseparable relation between memory, history, and post-apocalyptic narratives is examined in the course of the study.

The present study titled "Traumatic Subjectivity and Ethical Resolve: A Study of Select Nuclear Disaster Narratives" has been divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter outlines the thesis statement, methodology, the review of literature, the relevance of the study and a brief sketch of the themes of the nuclear disaster narratives selected. The second chapter expounds in detail the key concepts and developments in Trauma Studies and also explicates the notion of subjectivity, the evolution of its epistemological progression and the paradigm shifts in its theorization over centuries.

The second chapter titled "Expounding Trauma and Subjectivity: Histories Memories and Narratives" explores the theoretical and cultural significance of trauma studies as one of the grave concerns of contemporary academic and social domains. The major areas of discussions include the conceptualization of 'trauma', its epistemological and ethical debates concerning the representation of the concept and its evolution in theoretical platforms as an academic discipline. Its imperceptible relationship with the notion of identity formation and subjectivity also is detailed extensively here. The ethical turn in trauma studies also is sparingly mentioned in this chapter. The theoretical evolution and the historicity of trauma related debates in literature are traced with substantial references to the writers and theorists who made critical deliberations on the experience of trauma in the fictional and non fictional modes of writing. The concept of "transgenerational empathy" as a remedy for the ethical and epistemological problems of identification is also put into serious scrutiny.

The third chapter " Rupture in the Self: Traumatic Awakening in *Fahrenheit 451, The Road, Alas, Babylon* and *On the Beach*" alludes to the understanding of the working of trauma in the backdrop of a nuclear devastation and its effect on the subjects in the novels - *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank, *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute. Each of these works narrates the traumatic subjectivity of the characters victimized by the panic ambience of nuclear disasters. These novels become memory-sites for recalling the past, traumatic moments and they represent trauma, as a phenomenon which manifests itself belatedly as intrusive images and compulsive reenactments. The chapter also highlights the role of redemptive identity and ethical aesthetics which evidently constitute the key argument of the research.

The fourth chapter "Between the Wound and the Voice: Locating the Self in *A Gift Upon the Shore, Children of the Dust* and *Voices from Chernobyl* examines *A Gift Upon the Shore* by M.K. Wren, *Children of the Dust* by Louise Lawrence, and the non-fiction *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich in the light of the traumatic experiences of the characters, both real and fictional. It explores the complications involved in the representation of trauma not only in fictional writings but also in the nonfiction in the background of the political tumults and anxieties of the contemporary era. Both the individual and the community aspect of traumatic subjectivity and the notion of ethics outside the normative patterns of social framework are comprehensively examined here. The chapter particularly explores women's subjectivity, their potential, their weaknesses and their mutual operation with people around them in the backdrop of the catastrophe.

The fifth chapter titled "Towards an Ethical Turn" explores the narrative aesthetics of the works in the light of the disasters and the consequential trauma that transport the characters and the readers to a realm of ethical transcendence. The space of ethics which springs from a negotiation between the reader and the text and how this space is designed and configured by the nature and intensity of the trauma that the subjects in the texts undergo are the crucial questions which this chapter addresses. The chapter also explores how the values recovered and refined in the readers synchronize with those of the text leading to an empathetic understanding. The therapeutic value of fiction and the relevance of such values of literature are some of the points of discussion in modern ethical deliberations. In the contemporary cultural scenario, trauma fiction demands graver attention in the ethical dimension of its reading. The importance of the humanist and empathetic aspects of reading is thus explored in the backdrop of the seminal texts by Wayne C Booth, Martha Nussbaum, Richard Rorty, Colin McGinn and others. This chapter also explains the operation of transgenerational empathy that works in a framework of a proximity that the readers keep with the traumatic subjects. The present study argues that when representation is complicated due to the symbolic transaction in fluidity of language, and further by the re-presentation of the traumatic experience felt by somebody else, it turns to be a nostalgic yearning for a resolve which is eventually located in an ethical centre. All the works in the corpus of the present research share this ethical turn as a narrative resolve towards the end. The sixth and the final chapter sums up the ideas discussed in the core chapters.

CHAPTER 2

Expounding Trauma and Subjectivity: Histories, Memories and Narratives

The narrative conscience of contemporary literature is often infused with the aesthetics of fear and violence. The present study problematizes the notion of 'trauma' in literary and critical platforms as one of its main concerns. It is critically and theoretically argued that contemporary prose narratives are perhaps the writers' empathetic responses to this century's predominant concern with violence and catastrophe. These writings, fictional and non fictional, are generally products of the horrid awareness of traumatic effects on the human psyche as a result of the World Wars, post colonial insurgencies, civil strives and above all nuclear disasters.

The works under the present study are examined in the theoretical backdrop of trauma studies with an ethical concern of reaffirming and rearticulating the lives and voices of the victimized subjects. In the course of the study, the very notion of 'subjectivity' is problematized and thereby the Western conceptions of the autonomous subject are rejected recognizing the enigmatic relations of intersubjectivity and multicultural dimensions of social negotiations and interactions. A detailed account of 'subjectivity' is given in the second half of this chapter.

In the contemporary academic scenario 'trauma' has become an informed concept, especially in the areas of cultural and literary studies. The bewildering experience of trauma in the fictional and non fictional trajectories of the writers selected is put into analytical scrutiny by exploring the ways in which discourses like psychoanalysis, literature, and literary theory conceptualize the testimonies of traumatic experiences. Drawing theoretical insights from critics like Cathy Caruth,

this study navigates into the complex and imperceptible connection between individual and collective nuances of trauma and moreover juxtaposes the political and ethical dimensions of trauma theory as it is applied in the corpus of the project. While the study focuses on the epistemological and ethical debates around the textual representation of the traumatic consequences of the nuclear disasters, it looks at the various formal and thematic subtleties in select writers from the contemporary literature.

In the post nuclear disaster and post 9/11 world order, prose narratives dwell largely on the traumatic events of the mid twentieth century. Literary historians have even designated a genre called Holocaust literature. This body of writings addresses the issue of reproducing the synchronization of the actuality with its representation. The temporal and spatial distance from the event by thematizing memory in a self-reflexive manner becomes a constant concern in these works. These works are peopled by characters whose subjectivity is horrendously designed by the nightmarish memory and the fear inherent in the act of recollecting an event so far from the authors' experiences which too provoke a powerful feeling of proximity in the form of emotional response to the suffering of victims. Hence history and memory neatly fuse in the narrative space of these works. The subsequent chapters of this study showcase how trauma affects upon the subjectivity of the victims and how writers assert their roles in an ethical discourse.

Trauma is a genuine thematic concern in the literature of the day and its literary potential has become predominantly visible in Holocaust literature. Though some of the works taken here are not Holocaust texts, it could be argued that the polemics brought out in Holocaust literature have been rearticulated in

conceptualizing global and personal trauma of much of the modern and postmodern literature which explore the contours of trauma. Moreover a nuclear disaster can be an equally extensive traumatic event.

Coming to the conceptualization of 'trauma,' it can be seen that literature and creative expressions have often been intricately interlaced in the backdrop of trauma. Right from the beginning of textual representation, one finds humankind as pitted against a traumatizing other and it is from this confrontation that the great pieces of literature emerged. If it is Man versus Fate in Greek literature, it is the conflict between Divinism and Humanism in Renaissance literature. The invention of rationality too brought about a conflicting subject in the later eras of literature as one finds in the eighteenth century and Victorian literature. The crises in sensibility found in Renaissance literature and Victorian literature is a telling instance for the conflicts that triggered creative writings.

It is in the present century and last century that the institutionalization of trauma studies got widespread currency and thus academic endeavors got focused in the field. It was only in the wake of Freud's psychoanalytic theories in the nineteenth century that the word came to be applied to psychological wounds suggestive of its affective state and impact. It is the historical calamities that these two centuries faced paved way for such a widespread importance to the same. World Wars, Holocaust, 9/11 are some of the unforgettable instances. It is here that Shoshanna Felman's remark on our age as 'the era of trauma' – becomes so relevant. The present decades have witnessed in different cultural productions like literature and film, an upsurge in studies on trauma and its representation.

As a phenomenon, trauma is too panicky to fully register and on the other hand it only manifests belatedly somewhere else in intrusive images and compulsive reenactments. This challenge to traditional notions of referentiality becomes a major concern of the present study. The fictional representation through the behavioral patterns of the characters gives ample insights into how trauma works upon the subjectivity of the individuals and society. This argument can be validated while we read Julian Wolfrey's comments on trauma in her *Criticism in the 21st Century*:

> To read trauma is to register the sign of a secondary experience and recognition of the return of something spectral in the form of a trace or sign signifying, but not representing directly, that something, having occurred, has left its mark, an inscription of sorts on the subject's unconscious, and one which, moreover, can and does return repeatedly, though never as the experience as such. (55)

Cathy Caruth, one of the key figures in contemporary trauma theory, has famously defined it according to "the structure of its experience" in her *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*: "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it…the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time" (153).

In her reformulation of the Freudian conceptualization of trauma, Caruth reiterates a belatedness in inhering the traumatic moment itself; the traumatic experience is not fully registered in the beginning, but experienced as trauma only later and somewhere else when and where it re-surfaces in a fragmented form as nightmarish flashbacks, paranoia, fear, intrusive thoughts, and repetitive re-

enactments. Apart from being remembered as something that occurred in the past, then, the trauma becomes part of the survivor's very agency and subjectivity, and is compulsively performed in the present as though it is a real occurrence in the present time. For Caruth, it is precisely this obfuscating of past and present, blurring boundaries of spatio-temporal fixations and the collapsing of the distances that constitute the force of trauma.

Her theorization of trauma's intrinsic spatio-temporal structure in turn raises issues of representation, memory, and witnessing with specific implications for literary studies. At the very core of trauma studies, the problem of representation is highly important. As it is posed by Caruth: if trauma, by escaping conscious expression upon impulse, manifests itself as an epistemological crisis that upsets the perceptions of time and space and instead it repeatedly returns as intrusive images and compulsive behaviour – in Freudian words; is re-enacted rather than remembered or understood – then how can it be testified to, represented, read, and, perhaps, textually worked over? This question becomes one of the major thesis questions that this study proposes to ask. Caruth writes: "In its most general definition, 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 (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 11).

Her preoccupation with the spatio-temporal understanding of trauma epitomized in almost all her works offers a pivotal starting-point for the key concerns of the present study. She brings these concepts of time and space into sharp focus and consequently temporalizes and spatializes traumatic witnessing, through references such as disruptions, displacements, re-enactments and relocations. As

trauma disrupts normal parameters of temporality and spatiality, it seeks for alternative representations and solutions by repossessing time and space to bring about psychic reassurance. In addition to centralizing time and space in traumatic telling, Caruth focuses her exposition of trauma on Freud's notion of latency or belatedness, as he stated in his "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920). Here literature is viewed as the forgotten unforgettable place of trauma and this space demands what Caruth calls a "new mode of reading and of listening," a new creative mode that, as this study argues, would entail the reading of the temporal and spatial hiatuses that remain after traumatic experience . The delayed response or manifestation of trauma is generally termed as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PSTD) which is crucial in deciding the plight of the characters in the works under the present study. Caruth defines this phenomenon at the start of her introduction to *Trauma*:

> While the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, most descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (Caruth 4)

This states that the cardinal feature of trauma is that the victimized subject is not fully aware of the trauma at the time of its happening. As a result of the abruptness and the unexpectedness of the event, the human mind cannot process the shock and shudder so immediately and a gap between the occurrence of the trauma

and the return to full consciousness is created. Caruth's conceptualization of this distancing is drawn much from Freud's notion of this latency as defined in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), where we read:

> It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave physical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a 'traumatic neurosis'. This appears quite incomprehensible and is therefore a novel fact. The time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the 'incubation period', a transparent allusion to the pathology of infectious disease… It is the feature one might term *latency*. (Freud 84,)

The disparity between the actual trauma and its representation through narrative correlatives has been a point of much critical attention both in Freud and Caruth. When we examine the historicity of trauma concerns in literature, it can be traced back to Greek literature. The effect of trauma is quite visible in the dramatic and epical works of Greek literature. Many of the creative outputs from Greek tragedy reflect a preoccupation with violence and trauma. The patricide of Oedipus, the suicide of Ajax, the madness of Heracles, the rage of Achilles, and the trials of Odysseus are some of the striking examples. Most of these works were written at a time of an inescapable conflict in the Greek world where warfare was a looming menace in the air. The Aristotelian notion of "catharsis" is to be associated to the notion of "cultural therapy" theorized by the contemporary trauma critics.

If Renaissance is taken as one of the key moments of western literature, we can easily find out the importance of how trauma related readings are being attributed to the writings of the time. In literature of the time as it is mentioned above the conflict between the Divine centered world order of medievalism and the Humanistic concerns of renaissance is quite dominant as it is reflected so powerfully in Marlowe's works. Most of the Elizabethan tragedies epitomize trauma narratives, and a traumatic aesthetics that disrupts the closure that tragedy seeks to enact. Marlowe's heroes present a tragic and traumatic predicament that reminds us of the so called contemporary traumatic subjects.

Literature of the Romantic era too reflects an ongoing debate between two conflicting impulses as we find in the poetic trajectories of writers of the time. As Geoffrey Hartman writes in his *On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies*, Blake's poetic vision was a literary correlative for man's infinite tussle between two contrary elements:

> The hyperbolic picture of trauma we find in Blake is justified when we recall a child's impressionability and vulnerability, qualities that constitute, as Winnicott and others have observed, a necessary, even creative part of development. Despite the miracle of maturation, adults do not overcome that childhood phase. If the infant imagination projects itself onto what appears to be a giant, that is, a grown human being, and if it had the capacity to articulate its moment to moment fears and fantasies, might we not approach a cartoon of Blake's fantasmagoria? And might not the ironies and ambiguities in the poet's mature vision, or the vacillating and often confusing sequences of enchantment and

disenchantment, reflect a very early developmental ambivalence or even

dualism? (Hartman 538)

The above quotation from Hartman establishes how writers and critics are aware of the relevance of trauma studies in Romantic literature.

A historicist account of the trauma studies and theories of mind is inevitably dependent upon the body of literature that reflects a subject with a quandary mindset. Victorian literature perhaps designates a conundrum of the binary preoccupation between Faith and Rationality, Religion and Science and Spiritualism and Materialism. It is seen by critics and historians how the ideological freight of recurrent, structuring binaries such as agency/passivity being revealed in Victorian texts as well as the contemporary fiction. At the turn of the nineteenth century the British trauma novel emerged in response to the growth of individualistic conceptions of personal integrity and to the increasing value given to human life. In these novels we can find unending moments of intense suffering and traumatic violations of the boundaries of identity and cultural ethics.

It is only at the close of the twentieth century that one finds a widespread discussion of trauma theory in academics and cultural platforms. A great number of publications devoted wholly to trauma and emotion studies and the question of how they can be represented emerged in the last two decades. This critical paradigm continued to face the problem of depicting apparently unsayable events and perhaps make clinical observations through these non-experiences. In an 'era of trauma,' literature in various fields like psychiatry and historiography explores how these non-symbolizable wounds' can be represented and what it entails to testify to trauma emphasizing the need to narrate the experience with verbal and visual media.

This historical impasse demanded a rethinking of the notion of representation of trauma and consequently a coterie of contemporary trauma theory was founded in the 1990s by literary critics like Shoshana Felman, Cathy Caruth, and Geoffrey Hartman, all of whom were very much influenced by the American deconstructionist literary critic and theorist Paul de Man of Yale University. The inception of this school brought about fresh insights in the academic field of literature that deals with trauma. In 2004 Anne Whitehead gave currency to the genre "trauma fiction' with the publication of her book with the same name. She observes that there is an inseparable influence between trauma theory and fiction, "in which each speaks to and addresses the other" (Whitehead 4).

Among the leading critics on trauma fiction LaCapra assumes a significant position for his problematization of the difference and relationship between literature and historiography. Trauma writing, LaCapra argues, constitutes the panoramic study of historiography depending on the testimony of survivors or witnesses of traumatic events to present first-hand accounts of experiences from either available documents or from memory in an attempt to reproduce and represent the reality of the occurrence. One key statement that LaCapra makes is by drawing insights from Cathy Caruth who talks about the distance between the event and representation. He argues that literature in its metaphorical role of providing narrative correlative creates a sense of distance from the event itself in the process of writing (124). Here he focuses on the philosophical, political and aesthetic factors that contribute to the narrative framework of trauma representation.

Here the role of the novelist and that of the historian is visibly different in the fabric of representing trauma. While a man of literature brings about a platform for

the readers to actively engage through aesthetics of affective stylistics and realms of empathetic identification with the subjects of trauma, a historian keeps an objective stance with factual distance with his meticulous concern for the actuality of the events. So trauma studies being more of a discipline connected to emotive humanities rather than objective science, the role of creative writers is to be taken into critical analysis in academic endeavors. In a realm of emotive stylistics readers are put into contingent agencies that are free to construct and often reconstruct experiences as writers present before them in a fictional framework. Here a reader turns to assume the role of a witness though through the inward eye of imagination and memory. In the fictional representation of trauma the reader, perhaps more than the author is trapped in a state of constant anguish just like the survivors as well. Hence this study relies more on fictional representations than factual reproductions.

The Holocaust is supposed to have generated a number of literary works based on the traumatic experiences of the time. LaCapra speaks about how the Holocaust is vaguely connected to a historical event and it is not mere metaphysical rumination to narrate it. Theodor Adorno's remarkable statement- "to write poetry after Auschwitz is bar-baric"- is worth quoting here. Theodor Adorno in his essay "An Essay on Cultural Criticism and Society" suggests that the trauma of the Holocaust cannot be rendered in language: "The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today" (Adorno 34). It is suggested here that it is only the imaginative realm of language that can try to comprehend the trauma at least in its partial sense. James Wood has pertinently added to this view on the

disparity between the representations in history and fiction. In his article "On a Darkling Plain" published in *The New Republic*, he assesses Ian McEwan as a historian and novelist in the light of his novel *Saturday* and the September 11 attacks:

> In Schlegel's famous aphorism, the historian is a prophet facing backward. We could describe, in the same spirit, the novelist as a historian facing inward. This in-ward historian, or historian of inwardness, holds up no clear mirror but rather the mind's mirror – cloudy perhaps, stained, and losing some of its backing – to the world;... this historian watches how his or her fallible characters interpret reality, how they inhabit it, how they distort it and force it to accommodate to their men-tal cosmos. Novelists, then, are consumed by the question of representation twice over. They themselves see the world and describe or redescribe it; and they must describe their characters' own descriptions, too … Most fictional characters think more slowly than reality passes; they are internal expansionists. (Wood 4)

This passage beautifully illustrates LaCapra's thoughts on the same. To put shortly creative writing like the novel intersects with history in providing the right platforms to explore issues similar to autobiographical and historical representations of trauma.

Maurice Blanchot is another important name in any discussion on the dichotomy between narration and representation regarding trauma. Lisa Saltzman and Eric Rosenberg in their work *Trauma and the Visuality in Modernity* alludes to Blanchot who states something in similar lines that human calamities fail to be

represented. When a disaster speaks through a subject or victim or one who witnesses, it presents something that falls short of representation. Though the phenomenon is inexpressible, it demands an expression and in the process of achieving it language moves away from proper representation, from 'being' to a realm of 'meaning' (Saltzman and Rosenberg 33). Derrida's explication of Blanchot's story *The Instant of My Death* is a brilliant work in poststructuarlist mode regarding the role of language in the representation of trauma.

The publication of *Between Witness and Testimony: The Holocaust and the Limits of Representation* by Bernard-Donals and Richard Glejzer is another key moment in the evolution of poststructuralist theories around trauma. For poststructuralist critics, language cannot effectively communicate the complex and psychological impact of a traumatic event and its effects on the psyche as language constructs an experience; trauma deconstructs its representation in language.

Trauma in its amorphous and affective rupture does not permit any narrative closure as a conscious experience as it lies, as Freud suggests in the dark recesses of the subconscious. Trauma is thus represented by deconstructing the visual elements embedded in the subconscious and as Blanchot states the traumatic void gets partially healed as "being" is sacrificed to "meaning." Writing, narration and literary imaginativeness are inseparably linked in almost all the works taken in the present study. Here these works suggest the possibilities and the limitations of language in representing trauma.

Theorists and academic researches today generally focus on literature in their attempt to formulate the effects and consequences of the phenomenon of trauma culturally. Felman as well as Caruth emphasize on the potential of fiction as an

indestructible realm for representing traumatic experiences. Literature provides a platform for a belated enactment and witnessing of what can be referred to as an unclaimed moment of a traumatic event. Caruth's image of the wound to refer to the fact that trauma can only be perceived through literary or symbolic language is a striking one. She writes about the wound "that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (*Trauma* 4). Caruth postulates that the epistemological crisis in trauma is brought about by its state as an interface between psychoanalysis and literary language: "it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet" (*Trauma* 3). In the case of Felman too, one finds that the problem of the representation of trauma creates an aporia that is inseparably linked to literary language and to witnessing. She argues that as trauma renders impossible a witnessing from inward, a belated figurative and literary representation of traumatic experience displaces the referential truth or reality (*The Juridical Unconscious* 86).

In the evolution of trauma theory, the meeting point between the literary and the linguistic aspects of representation on the one hand and the cultural and ethical dimensions on the other are a crucial one. Poststructuralism in the wake of 1990s gave ample insight into these meeting points and the Lacanian formulations of representation through language are analysed in the socio-historical, political, cultural, and ethical backdrop of trauma. It is the concerted effort of Caruth and Felman that gave a lucid shape to the theorization of trauma merging between language and culture, as well as psychoanalysis and deconstruction.

The narrative conscience of a trauma fraught fiction is often concerned with the socio-political, historical, cultural, and ethical issues and functions rather than focusing on the depiction of factual reality. By ethical function it is meant that it presents the causes and the consequences of a particular traumatic event in a rather expressive, realistic mode with quite lyrical integration. According to Laurie Vickroy, novels that deal with trauma "bring a kind of socio-cultural critical analysis that helps readers formulate how public policy and ideology are lived in private lives" (Vickroy 221).

The actuality or the reality in terms of the experiential truth is pivotal in the context of trauma especially in a post truth age where trauma fiction is placed precisely in the space between the real world and the world of writing with imaginative insights by reworking history's unspecified traumatic events. Dominick LaCapra's view in his book *Writing History, Writing Trauma* is to be noted in this context. He writes: "narratives in fiction may also involve truth claims on a structural or general level by providing insight into phenomena such as slavery or the Holocaust, by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible 'feel' for experience and emotion which may be difficult to arrive at through restrictive documentary methods" (LaCapra 13). This holds true for nuclear disaster novels too.

Fictional narratives of trauma transmit both aesthetic and cultural meanings and they become emotionally valid and psychologically relevant. In a New Historicist line of thinking even the unimaginatively factual accounts too are subject to challenges. The presumably uncolored historical documents and autobiographical accounts are fictionalized the moment they are narrativized. In the process of

reviewing the past in the present, past experiences can never be literally or exactly reproduced, but they are necessarily bound up with subsequent events as well as fantasies and other memories reconstructed in the vantage point of the present. The nonfictional work *Voices from Chernobyl* can be looked at from this vantage point.

The novels taken in this study are analyzed using the narrative tools of realism, modernism and postmodernism with special attention on their emotive potentials. Realism has been traditionally accepted as a reliable mode of narrative than figurative representation until the wake of modernism where critical theorists promoted a non-realistic approach to representing trauma. In this context it is interesting note Kalí Tal's remark in her study *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*, where she considers that literary representations of trauma "are mediated by language and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience" and hence she validates only trauma narratives written by survivors with primary experiences. She adds that the "the traumatic experience is reinscribed as metaphor and only those writers who have experienced trauma directly as survivors know and can write the signs of trauma" (Tal 16). She denounces imaginative writing as myth-making. She believes that in the signifying process an event passes on to signify other things than the real traumatic experience as a coherent cultural and a political wound.

The modernist innovations and techniques were rejected by critics like Kali Tal and she was supported by an array of critics in the similar mode. For instance Jane Kilby writes in support of realistic narrative: "Experimental fiction is no more or less language bound than conventional testimony, and thereby it offers no more or less privileged access to the truth of trauma. On the other hand experimental writings

serve to privilege the powers of the author, when trauma, as I understand it, puts authorial power in crisis" (Kilby 50) But many a critic in the modernist line of thinking views that the experimental literature can explore into the incommunicable realms of a traumatized psyche. Julian Wolfrey's arguments in this regard sum up the whole debate about the need for innovative methods in representation. She believes that traumatic understanding is "incommensurable with any strictly realistic representation or adequate knowledge" and literature is doing so "through the symbolization of what remains unsymbolizable and unrepresentable" (Wofrey 141). Anne Whitehead's book *Trauma Fiction* is also instrumental in this discussion. She believes that: "more experimental forms emerging out of postmodernist and postcolonial fiction offer the contemporary novelist a promising vehicle for communicating the unreality of trauma, while still remaining faithful to the facts of history" (Whitehead 87).

Trauma fiction, according to Whitehead "relies on the intensification of conventional narrative modes and methods" on the levels of narrative, style and plot in the form of "recurring literary techniques and devices" such as repetition and intertextuality and defamiliarization (Whitehead 84). From this it is to be understood that the seemingly proper representation of trauma demands sufficient amount of alienation and distortion.

In the light of the above thoughts, the gap between the time of representation and the actual experience negotiated in narratives becomes a serious concern in this study. When we survey the discourses that problematized this gap we come across different kinds of critical stance. Among these narrative stances, the works from US in 1990s command special mention as having a pioneering role. In *Testimony: Crises*

in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History, Felman and Laub talk about a model in which the subject of a tragic event testifies in the presence of a listener or therapist and this constitutes a narrative fabric for the reading public. Critics of this area confronted with the issue of the listeners getting identified with the trauma and a critical distancing getting absent resulting in a secondary trauma. This secondary trauma is given an outlet by the process of remembering and telling, giving vent to the traumatic predicament. When an analogy is drawn between this subject of secondary trauma and an author of fictional or nonfictional narration the problem of identification takes place and the question of total cure appears to be endemic as it is in the case of Holocaust literature. Critical debates continue to address this issue of identification while representing trauma.

Another landmark in this realm of addressing this gap is the conceptualization made by Jean-François Lyotard and Gillian Rose. Both dwell on the untranslatability of a traumatic event like the Holocaust and the consequent becoming of the event as esoteric and ineffable. But this could be an escapist view whereby they resort to mystify anything enigmatic. To add to the ongoing discussions, the views given by Michael Rothberg in his *Traumatic Realism* regarding Holocaust, where he categorizes the 'realistic' and 'anti realistic' attitudes in narrative too needs attention:

> By realist I mean both an epistemological claim that the
>
> Holocaust is knowable and a representational claim that this knowledge
>
> can be translated into a familiar mimetic universe. [. . .]. By antirealist I
>
> mean both a claim that the Holocaust is not knowable or would be
>
> knowable only under radically new regimes of knowledge and that it
>
> cannot be captured in traditional representational schemata. (Rothberg 3)

According to Michael Bernard Donals and Richard Glejzer as they argue in *Between Witness and Testimony*, the process of narrativization brings about a kind of redemptive release in the secondary victim and to an extent in the primary victim too. Robert Eaglestone's view in this regard is very crucial. He brings the realm of ethics to trauma studies as a consolatory measure. In his *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* he problematizes the notion of ethical turn as a solution whereto the writers resort to as we find in many of the works taken up in the present study. The ethical concern that the writers who deal with trauma maintain, will be examined in detail in the later chapters of this study.

The process of identification becomes an issue of serious concern among many critics and the academia. When one deals with traumatic incidents like the nuclear holocaust, the need to be empathetic becomes compulsory; a sort of identification process with victimized subjects is necessary.

This identification process entails an ethical disparity due to the wide divide between the actual experience and the empathetic representation of the same by another one. Much of the critical debates that revolve around this objective distance tend to ensure a productive role of transference which plays the role of an eye opener in our ethical conscience. Critics even made a distinction between simple identification and the more complex identification in the instance of empathy. It is Dominick LaCapra who theorized the notion of empathy in this regard. He defines it as "an affective relation, rapport, or bond with the other recognized and respected as other" (*Writing* 212-3). He is largely concerned with the role of the historian more than a fictional writer and tries to see how empathy can be productively applied to contemporary Holocaust narratives. He problematizes the concept of

"transgenerational empathy" as a remedy for the ethical and epistemological

problems of identification resulting in the divide between the subject and the writer.

The "transgenerational empathy" designates an approach to the memory which is

self-reflexive, draws on ideas of past time, reminiscences bygone generations, and

moves both towards and away from the victims of the past in a structure of

proximity as well as distance. This approach reminds us of Gadamer's notion of the

"fusion of horizons" between past and present.

In the critical trajectory of Holocaust literature and its analysis in the

backdrop of trauma, the notion of identification and its intricate relationship with

empathy is definitely an important issue. In this regard Geoffrey Hartman noted in

1995: "The predicament [for those who consider the traumatic past] is how to

acknowledge the passionate, suffering, affectional side of human nature without

sympathy turning into over-identification" ("On Traumatic" 545). So this realm of

distancing becomes a crucial point for discussions in studies like the present one.

Hartman advocates this kind of alienation as an important factor for the ethical

domain of the universalization of the victimhood. As this study turns to the ethical

dimensions of trauma studies, the conceptualization of empathy commands utmost

importance.

When we trace the studies related to ethical turn in trauma related writings

the name of Robert Eaglestone assumes a noticeable position. In his *The Holocaust

and the Postmodern* (2004), he differentiates between testimonials and fictional

writings where in the former identification is bigger than in the latter. Drawn from

the academic ambience of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism , the epistemology of

trauma studies inevitably gets connected to the domains of ethics.

The ethical dimensions of trauma studies come as a solution to the dubious philosophy of poststructuralism in representing trauma and it is only in the ethical frame that the proper identification with the subject takes place. Similarly the notion of empathy whose simultaneous gesture of sharing and understanding the feelings of the victimized subjects, keeps the notions of identification and comprehension, though a choice between the self and other is to be consciously avoided. One sees any theorist right from the institutionalization of trauma theory somehow getting connected to the concept of ethics. Freud's pioneering efforts in the therapeutic methods and their ethical leanings in the form of psychic health demands an empathetic engagement with the subject. It is only in an ethical parlance that we can talk of the other's trauma. In the realm of empathetic conscience it becomes a collective duty from the part of academics and the reading public to enshrine the tragic memory of a catastrophic event, though it is not a product of the primary experience. The insidious dangers involved in secondary witnessing of a traumatic incident constitute an important topic for the students of literary representation.

In *Bearing Witness* which is one of the epoch making texts in contemporary trauma studies, Dori Laub, the psychiatrist , says that "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself" (Laub 57) and this statement fortifies the need for empathetic oneness with the victim in trauma ethics. Two other important critics who problematize this notion of the disparity between representation and experience of a traumatic event are Giorgio Agamben and Shoshana Felman, who speak about different but equally disturbing ways of copying and invading into the traumas which are not their own. These two writers are

instrumental in bringing about an arena of the importance of the synchronization between reality and representation in trauma studies. The very notion of representation of experience itself is a problematic concept in theory. The traumatic representation as theorized by Giorgio Agamben and Shoshana Felman was contested by theorists in representation aesthetic.

Giving an Account of Oneself by Judith Butler is one of the key texts in this area. She dwells extensively on the presumable impossibility of representation of someone's experience. She argues that we cannot even give a final shape even to our own stories and how it would be possible to mirror others' story. It is in this kind of a theoretical crisis that the importance of the ethical dimensions of representation turns valid. Though the ethical turn has been slightly presented to be illogical in the philosophy of absurdum by thinkers like Albert Camus who postulates an ethical impasse in the *Myth of Sisyphus,* many of the later critics and thinkers fall in line with an ethical solution as a surrogate for the representative chaos in ontology and epistemology.

The corpus of the fiction taken in the present study represents a residue or semantic flux through which the questions of ethical choice and action are posed in the narrative subtleties of these works. Any textual analysis of literature from the concerted perspective of ethics and aesthetics presents itself at the core of many critical approaches even in New Critical schools which focus on the very ontology of texts. In the 1980s and 1990s "the ethical turn" became popular in literary theory and moral philosophy, the most relevant of which became Trauma Studies, and Theory of Affects. As against New Critical perspectives one of the leading traits of the current debates of trauma related studies of ethics open up vistas of inter- and

trans-disciplinary character, combining elements of history, philosophy, anthropology, psychoanalysis, sociology and aesthetics among others.

Several of the socio-cultural and historical necessities were instrumental in the emergence of this new trend of the ethical turn in trauma studies. The unending effects of the two World Wars where the nuclear disasters wounded the global psyche had manifested many debilitating conflicts. The clash of cultural multitudes and values, the political turbulence of neo-colonialism and globalization, and the ontological alienation brought about by the new technologies and digital explosion and largely the consumer society with no ethical conscience are some of them. As mentioned above, given its origins at Yale University, Trauma related theories gives utmost attention to the literature of the nuclear Holocaust and most of the novels in the present study deal largely with this narrative background.

This school of theory in its ethical inclination focuses on works that point to cultural and historical fields which problematize interracial traumas and resultant hatred in the global level. Critics like Pierre Nora, Andreas Huyssen, Anne Whitehead and Roger Luckhurst are important when we make a review of the studies related to trauma and ethics. These critics' names appear in any academic platform that discusses the relationship between postmodernism and trauma literature both of which keep an attitude towards history as "grand narrative". These two branches epistemologically share the complexity of memory in its representation as a formal fabric.

Postcolonial studies can also be related to the academic field of the cultural trauma where studies connected to ethnic, gender or religious minorities share the same preoccupation with the recovery of memory and the acknowledgment of the

marginalized, repressed or the neglected in the main stream academia. Feminism too is connected to Trauma Studies in the sense that it deals with individual traumas related to domestic abuse, gender and sexuality. Judith L. Herman is one of the key names in this area.

Among these trajectories of trauma studies the rationale of this present work emerges from the theoretical background of ethics related trauma studies and it situates itself at a critical juncture that recognizes the traumatic memories of individual life and community through the socio-political backgrounds. The tragic events are narrativized in the works and the analysis of the same is the major concern of the study.

In the realm of a trauma study where individual memory and experiences are problematized, it is essential to discuss subjectivity and agency. The next part of the present chapter dwells largely on the notion of subjectivity in general and traumatic subjectivity in particular. In broader terms 'agency' designates the contingent agent who formulates semantic and ontological variables in a given domain of existence. Individual agency and collective agency, which is constituted in the communicative domains, work together in the discourse of symbolic order. All human expressions present themselves in a discursive community and here the realm of empathy and ethics become pertinently crucial. In the Ethical domain of agency and its articulation there is a fusion of both epistemic crisis and ethical crisis. This obfuscation can be presented as the conjunction of epistemic and epistemological crises since subjectivity in the ethical domain possesses both an epistemic awareness of the domain in which it is structured, and an epistemological awareness of the domain of symbolized meaning, upon which it reflects. In the Ethical domain, the

epistemic and the ethical fuse and subjectivity here possesses two distinct means of "knowing." In other words, the subjectivity keeps an epistemic awareness of a crisis reflecting upon the symbolized field of meaning and expressions resulting in a *crisis of ethics* which we find as confronted by most of the characters in the fictional works taken in the present study. Almost all the ethical discourses concerning trauma arise as the individual subjects grapple to come to terms with the merging of boundaries between Self and Other. Such discourses focus on the human element by deleting all the points of rational thoughts in the symbolic order.

In simpler terms, the epistemic eruption felt by the excess of the symbolic current in the ethical domain stems from an origin beyond reason. This can be called non-reflective subjectivity which is structured in the Ethical domain. Finally this impulsively vehement outburst of the ethical crisis derives from the fact that the crisis which is experienced as an epistemic is a 'speechless' crisis of the Self overwhelmed by what has been perceived to be Other (Chandler 150). The truth, perhaps, is that the question as to whether trauma should be expressed as an epistemic or an ethical crisis is always a point of critical contention in trauma research. It is unresolvable as both represent a separate awareness of the same crisis. When agency gets structured in the Epistemic domain, it manifests epistemic crisis as psychosomatic experience and therefore subjectivity in the Ethical domain manifests as epistemic crisis. It is brought about by the inconsistency and instability in the difference between what belongs to self and what does not belong to self, i.e., Self and Other.

This instability is further enhanced when the critical integrity of the *inside/outside* opposition becomes instable. This instability is well perceived by

considering the position of the Ethical domain between the Epistemic (somatosensory) domain and the Idiolectic domain which is seen in symbolic terms and relations. When multitudes of experiences pass from the Epistemic into the Ethical, and from the Ethical into Idiolect, the Ethical domain finds a way out to mediate between both the preceding and the following domain. Each domain in the symbolic order of human culture plays this kind of mediating and negotiating role between the domains immediately preceding and following it. In a psychological realm the systematization of the Epistemic which is devoid of any evaluative logical operators results in the incapacity to remove experience and as a result heterogeneous experiences are retained to challenge the ethical domain by demanding accommodation in the conscious world (Chandler 151). Trauma studies are inseparably connected to Freudian psychoanalysis as noted in the early pages of this chapter.

In a world of psychoanalysis the concept of trauma and tension are well discussed and the entry of ethics is necessitated by the moment of someone else's involvement in the same. It is not so easy for the ethical domain to change its innate structure by reanalyzing the inside/outside distinction of Self and Other in order to reduce the tension produced by heterogeneous experiences held in the Epistemic domain. When the semiotic flow is passed to the ethical domain it should be accommodated by the symbolic order in terms and relations of Idiolect. Zizek's statement 'trauma as non-symbolizable wound' (*Mapping Ideology* 67) is quite relevant here. The discussion of empathy emerges in the point of the symbolic meaning when it is constrained by the need to communicate with others. Symbolized meanings are created both by the individual in response to his personal experiences,

and by the discursive community of which s/he is a part. Semantic stability is supposedly generated by the negotiation of the individual with the community.

The role of subject in the symbolic order is an important point in trauma studies and its ethical connections. Subjectivity in the ethical domain is caught between the matrix of the semiotic current from the epistemic domain and by the constrained Idiolect of the individual, which is held in check by the imperative to maintain shared symbolic meaning. Individual sensory experiences as theorized by psychologists cannot not have free reign to materialize our conception of reality. As a result of its position between the biological necessities of sensory perception and the symbolic order of social imperative, the inside/outside distinction of Self and Other formed in the symbolic domain becomes vulnerable to unresolvable tensions. It is here that the relevance of an ethical way out becomes pertinent.

The novels taken in the present study, especially in the background of nuclear holocaust, as explicated in the subsequent chapters presents trauma within cultural contexts to reiterate the narrative and expressive aspects of acute circumstances. Though language may fully not do justice to the representations of the traumatic experiences of the survivors, these novels provide multi-faceted perspectives that make the reading public as well as the critics and sociologists meditate on the various ways in which people respond to shocks and horror. The present study focuses on the individual, social, cultural, situational, and narrative aspects of trauma arguing that the novels and works taken here depict the various fields of narration and representation. By closely analyzing how cultural values and ethics influence traumatic experiences, the study attempts to argue how the socio-cultural fabric of one's life makes inevitable impact upon the very identity and subjectivity of an

individual. To understand the responses of a survivor to a traumatic event, the core chapters in this study scrutinize the narrative subtleties of these works. The character sketch of the individuals in a trauma event speaks much of the varied responses and differences in representation and experience.

Any discourse on Trauma is incomplete without elaborating on the notion of **subjectivity.** Academic endeavours that deal with human consciousness and its representation in language and culture demands a theoretical exercise around the notion of subjectivity. This part of the chapter problematizes the concept of subjectivity, its evolution in epistemology and the paradigm shifts in its theorization. The imperceptible connection of *subjectivity* with the traumatic consciousnesses of the characters in the novels taken in the present study, features as the pivotal concern of the subsequent chapters. The effects of the nuclear disaster upon the subjects are analysed in the core chapters which delve deep into the psychological workings of the temperamental fluctuations of the people in these works under reference.

The body of the narratives in the works here takes not only the socio-political backgrounds as the conceptual centre, but trauma and the subjectivity too, in a psychological terrain. The socio cultural effects turn out to be a mere expression of the traumatic subjectivity in the life of the victims. It is explored through the narrative conscience of these works, how traumatic subjectivity gains significance in the light of the depressed plight of the people in the fictional as well as the nonfictional works where self-alienation and the alienation from the immediate environment take place. By examining the meaning of trauma and its effect upon the subject this study leads to the ethical and psychological surrogates that the victims resort to in the necessary imagination of the writers.

When one reflects on the theoretical and methodological diversity of the conceptualization of the phenomenon of subjectivity, it ranges from the very linguistic dimension of the concept to the theoretical and epistemological dimension of human ontology. The term 'Subjectivity' is often used interchangeably with the term "identity," but subjectivity, more accurately denotes our social constructs and consciousness of one's identity. One commonly speaks of identity as a flat, one-dimensional concept, but subjectivity is much broader, wider and more multifaceted. It is social and personal as it exists in negotiation with broad cultural definitions and our own ideals. One may have numerous discrete identities, of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and a subjectivity that is comprised of all of those facets, as well as our own imperfect awareness of our selves.

As this study focuses on subjectivity in a body of works where political and cultural trauma encircles the whole environment, it takes political and psychological dimensions as the major concern. Though in social sciences in general, words like agent, subject, individual, person or social actor are used interchangeably, these terms connote in a wider significance to different theoretical meanings in the parlance of social psychology. In the contemporary academic scenario, critical conversation is directed towards the notion of subject and subjectivity in the framework of cultural and historical platforms. Moreover, the present study involves the realms of gender, ethics, aesthetics and techno scientific ambience of the characters in the background of traumatic nuclear catastrophes and thus subjectivity becomes crucial to the study.

As Derrida remarks in his work *Who Comes after the Subject*, "This question of the subject and the living 'who' is at the heart of the most pressing concerns of

modern societies" (115) and a study in contemporary fiction fastidiously demands the need of a critical debate in subjectivity. The attention on the self and subject as the centre both of lived experience and of the constructed meaning has become one of the pressing issues of postmodern and postmillennial cultures.

Contemporary literary cultures are presented and conceived in the backdrop of perpetual crisis of the alienated individuals and subjects. The fictional world in this era prepares the site for the intensification of the self as the central position of human experience and its incessant sense of internal fragmentation and tumult and thus, academics and theorists of the day problematize subjectivity as their concern.

The word 'subject' unlike the word 'self' encompasses the sense of social and cultural entanglement and it refers to shared concerns in our day to day life. Once we trace back to historicity of 'subjectivity' as a concept, the Descartean cogito 'I think, therefore I am', itself gives an element of commonality, that is the "I" here doesn't mean Descartes. This philosophical formulation tries to designate a faculty of perception that links human interiority and inner experience together everywhere. So the very beginning of the philosophisation of subjectivity results in the formulation of inter-subjectivity. Thus it is realized that the self is not an isolated and singled out entity, but rather one that operates at the intersection of general truths and shared principles as it is etymologically understood the subject as 'placed under' a shared platform. So the political and cultural context in which the subject is placed turns to be important in critical debates and academic researches. In the present study, the nuclear holocaust has been taken as a traumatic background in shaping the subjectivity of the characters.

The notion being so oblique and abstract the discussion is framed by those theorists and philosophers whose formulations exerted influence upon humanities in general and in literary and cultural studies in particular. The theorisation of the notion of subjectivity in the present century has stimulated a huge body of various models and approaches. These multi-layered interpretations open the field of studies in self and ontology in contemporary academics.

This chapter, to use Michel Foucault's terminology, is using a *genealogical* rather than *metaphysical* (113) method of analysing the historicity and conceptualization of subjectivity in a humanities and cultural studies paradigm. A metaphysical exploration tries to find out truth by the well thought out analysis of ideas in the light of available arguments. Such an analysis would critique theories of subjectivity in such a way where a presumable finality of truth and theory could be formulated. For example when psychoanalysts may come out with one conclusion the discourse theorists on the other hand come out with some different findings. Here the metaphysician believes that all these different theories are just the different paths to the ultimate theory which beckons us to the horizon of our explorations and final findings.

But in a genealogical method, it is self-conscious and the approach itself is an object of study. The reflection that this approach makes is not the truth that will ultimately make further explorations redundant, but how the exploration itself defines the way we live and represent ourselves. This open ended method is particularly chosen because the very notion of subjectivity itself is open ended that defies any sort of finality of explanation. This open-endedness is not similar to the notion of the romantics who believe in the idea that the human soul is unique and

amorphous, and that any rational or analytical process will deny any final conclusions. Subjectivity, broadly defined, is an experience, and remains permanently open to inconsistency, contradiction and (un)self-consciousness.

In the genealogy of the theorization of subjectivity the Enlightenment assumes an important position in the paradigms of the evolution of the same. Almost all the theories of subjectivity that dominated the last decades of the twentieth century and in present century of literary and cultural studies reject the idea of the autonomous subject which evolves an expression of its own unique essence. This collectively concerted view on subjectivity is a rejection of the Enlightenment notion of the subject.

Enlightenment shortly defined is the gestation period of the modern empirical bent of mind which accepts the substitution of the cult of personal sensibility for collective systems of beliefs like religion. The liberal self has been asserted at the very outset of the essay "What is Enlightenment" by Kant:

> Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another. *"SapereAude*!" "Have courage to use your own understanding!" – that is the motto of enlightenment. (1)

This passage itself reiterates the importance of the self-reliance of man in the wake of Enlightenment. Here one is reminded of Rousseau*'s Confessions* (1781) which too emphasizes uniqueness and autonomy, the complete freedom of agency, of individual experience. He writes in the very beginning of the treatise:

I have resolved on an enterprise which has no precedent, and

which, once complete, will have no imitator. My purpose is to display to

my kind a portrait in every way true to nature, and the man I shall portray

will be myself. Simply myself. I know my own heart and understand my

fellowman. But I am made unlike any one I have ever met; I will even

venture to say that I am like no one in the whole world. I may be no

better, but at least I am different. Whether Nature did well or ill in

breaking the mould in which she formed me, is a question that can only

be resolved after the reading of my book. (Rousseau 17)

Both these passages quoted above highlight the importance of the autonomous self in

the Enlightenment notion of subjectivity.

In the contemporary parlance of theory the humanist conceptions of the

subject which highlighted the Enlightenment idea of a self-identical, united and

autonomous agency have been rejected from a variety of theories now. These

theoretical perspectives share the same concept of assuming a linguistically and

socially constructed subject, such as poststructuralist and postmodernist theories

which speak of the constructive nature of identity. This decentered subject is

ideologically constructed and textually determined. In a trauma related discussion

the psychoanalytical approaches take our concern to the operation of unconscious

drives that strongly influence the human thought processes and action. This

perspective inevitably results in contradictions, while the philosophical

hermeneutics, in poststructuralist vain, talks of the precedence of language and the

universal nature of linguistic world-experience. Moreover the cultural-philosophical

theories focus not only on the human thought processes as the products of ideologies

and the dominant discourses, but also on the contradictory concepts that coexist in human cognition.

As Rosi Braidotti remarks in her epoch making book *The Posthuman*, the posthuman theories mark a further development after the postmodern and poststructuralist notion of the subject. The concept of the 'posthuman' for her seems to be the most credible concept to designate the temperament of globally connected and technologically mediated cultures. She reflects on the theoretical developments after postmodernism and poststructuralism and creates an important itinerary in the intellectual development that evolves from humanism through anti-humanism to posthumanism (50).

She believes that the poststructuralist philosophers, the feminist activists and the postcolonial critics can be considered as representing the anti-humanist turn where they challenged the autonomous and humanist notion of the subject with its Eurocentric universalism and the androcentric and imperialist leanings. These critics question the classical notion of European subject in terms of Humanism, Enlightenment rationality and the patriarchy tuned universality. Their view was not only in opposition to Humanism, but they also created other visions of the self. She presents a positive and critical posthuman stance which builds on the anti-humanist legacy and moves further to the digital era. She opines that "a posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of interconnection between self and others, including the nonhuman or 'earth others'" (Braidotti 49).

Notions of the decentred subject brought about fresh debates and issues for many of the critical studies like narrative theories and gender studies both of which earlier presupposed a conventional self-identical, self-exploring and self-realizing

subject and these were prompted by the results of poststructuralist theories to reconsider their basic tenets. For example one notes the conceptions of the decentred subject questioning the cardinal categories of classical narratology where the authorial voice dominates the narrative. Consequently the authority of the author and the idea of a coherent authorial voice get ruptured. Postmodern subjectivity created an unresolved tension and triggered countless debates within the ranks of feminist criticism and narrative theories.

In narrative theories, the concept of 'decentred subject' is to be taken into critical understanding. The basic tenets of the most prominent postmodern conceptions of the subject are summed up in the phrase decentred subject. It is in the Freudian psychoanalysis that we find the pioneering effort in suggesting a subject which is not merely the sole agent of meaning production. His theoretical assumptions were followed by Jacques Lacan, who in his theoretical trajectory fused linguistics and psychoanalysis and thereby promoted a subject who is subordinated to the operations of linguistic manifestations. According to him desire drives the subject towards fresh desires perpetually newer and so it leads towards newer signifiers while the referent – the signified – remains unreachable and transcendental. Lacan's conceptualization of the linguistically constructed subjectivity supports the decentering of individual consciousness, which means that this consciousness can no longer be considered an authentic source of meaning and significance.

According to Lacan a kid in its infancy is devoid of a consciousness of identity and is not able to consider itself a separate entity from the 'other', i.e. everything that lies outside it. In the 'mirror stage' the kid turns to 'recognize' itself as separate from this outside space. This 'recognition' is identification with an

'imagined', unified and autonomous self. The kid, in Lacanian theory, can turn to be a complete subject only by entering language, and in order to eventually enter the society in which it was born, the child must enter the symbolic order which is the signifying systems of society, culture, the most important of which is language.

In its development the infant comes to recognize itself in a variety of subject positions (as male or female, as a 'boy' or a 'girl') from which cultural discourse becomes intelligible to it and to others. 'Identity' or subjectivity then is no more than a web or matrix of subject positions in which the different positions do not necessarily correspond to one another – in fact, they may even be contradictory (Belsey 595–6). As Catherine Belsey understands from Lacan's theory, subjectivity is linguistically and discursively constructed and constantly shifts along a chain of discourses (18).

The problematization of decentred subject has raised further issues as well as new problems for many studies, for instance narrative theories and feminist theories. These two branches of studies were previously supposed to be self-identical, self-exploring and self-realizing subjects and were developed later by postmodern theory by its indeterminacy and provisionality. The notion of decentred subject questions the most rudimental categories of classical narratology such as elements of characterization and narrative techniques. The understanding and recognition of this decentred subjectivity of the narrator questioned the authority of the authorial voice and the very idea of a coherent narrative horizon.

Poststructuralist conceptualization of subjectivity triggered unresolved tension and critical debates within the trajectory of feminist theories. In feminist theories, the emphasis was on the centred subject in the past and it was primarily due

to an interest in its emancipatory function. This confidence in unified subjectivity got ruptured with the arrival of the decentred notion of postmodern subjectivity. It could be argued in this light that the most relevant difference between feminist theories and postmodern theories lies in their envisaging of the subject. As feminism exclusively addresses the interests of the women folk, it cannot escape the presupposition of well-defined subjectivity and call attention to women's interests despite the postmodern preoccupation with the multiplicity of identity. So it is a challenging platform to address the issue of gender in any discussion regarding traumatic subjectivity.

The deconstructive concept of subjectivity in all its various nuances —from the post-Lacanian focus on the subversiveness of desire to the Foucauldian genealogies of disciplinary and sexual Subjectivity and those of critics like Kristeva, Irigaray, Virilio, and Deleuze and Guattari – are inevitably postmodern. One of the most renowned explication of the concept of the postmodern subject comes out in Fredric Jameson's article "Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" in which he tries to argue that what characterises postmodern life is our lack of 'cognitive maps'. When the world we live in is dominated by consumer, multinational or global capitalism, and the older theoretical frames which we used to critique the so called foundations of established thoughts are no longer valid. For instance Ideologies like Marxism are developed under very turbulent social conditions to our own capitalistic and industrial atmosphere. As a result one loses confidence in these formerly grand ideological apparatuses and one feels alienated and thereby a complete lack of faith in ideological statements in general. Consequently one thinks oneself as adrift in a world devoid of reference points that

the nineteenth-century and modernist liberal humanism had provided. On the other hand in the contemporary scenario we are to move from one domain, perspective or context to another in a haphazard fashion which provides the walking individual with a sense of absolute alienation from his autonomous subject.

In a post-industrial, post postmodern cities it is of much symbolic significance to see in fiction the streets as deserted, destroyed and dangerously threatening to human self. Not only in the cityscape that one occupies now, but the social structure where class and economic realms direct and redirect one's work and the national cultures too are supposed to define and design one's subjectivity. So Jameson argues that the cognitive maps that would allow us to position ourselves in this world to locate where we are have disappeared. Jameson calls this disorientation of emotion as the 'waning of affect'. He writes:

> As for expression and feelings or emotions, the liberation, in contemporary society, from the older *anomie* of the centred subject may also mean, not merely a liberation from anxiety, but a liberation from every other kind of feeling as well, since there is no longer a self present to do the feeling. This is not to say that the cultural products of the postmodern era are utterly devoid of feeling, but rather that such feelings . . . are now free-floating and impersonal, and tend to be dominated by a peculiar kind of euphoria. (Jameson 72)

So for him it is the function of contemporary critique to make attempts to redraw the cognitive maps that will allow the postmodern condition to be realized, authentically felt and absolutely transformed. So the subject in the postmodern and postmillennial scenario is a disoriented one that wanders in a world that cannot

accurately conceptualize its own interiority and a sense of intense feeling and meaningful position. Jameson is perhaps very much drawn towards the modernist versions of cultural politics, of Frankfurt School especially those of Adorno and Horkheimer who have extensively written in the background of Nuclear holocaust.

As mentioned earlier Enlightenment and its grand theories were totally rejected by major theorists of the postmodern and postmillennial writings. Jean-François Lyotard is one of the key examples in the context. His much influential work *The Postmodern Condition* emerges from the need to explain how knowledge is validated and legitimised in contemporary thinking. This book sums up the idea that theories and 'knowledges' are to be termed valid and true if they match or help develop the fundamental visions of the world that societies use to define themselves in the construction of their subjectivity. This desperate search for a larger and much more stable narrative, or even mythic, structures as a way of regrounding and re-establishing human experience and has become a widespread concern in late the twentieth century and the present century as well. It is in this context that the relevance of a turn to an ethical dimension becomes pertinent. The present study analyses the writers taken here resorting to an ethical frame of thought as an escape from the trauma torn subjectivity.

It is also interesting to note as Marilouise Kroker designates the contemporary world order is a sort of *panic*: "Panic is the key psychological mood of contemporary culture … panic culture . . . as a floating reality, with the actual as a dream world, where we live on the edge of ecstasy and dread" (Kroker 13–14). A complete attempt to characterise the tempo of contemporary order emerges in Brian Massumi's discussion of fear in "Everywhere You Want to Be: Introduction to Fear"

from the edited collection *The Politics of Everyday Fear*. Massumi writes that our fear is inseparably connected to our individual space in the contemporary realm of economy. It is the very act of purchasing that designs our selfhood. 'I buy therefore I am' is one of the axioms of the present (Massumi 7).

A selfhood thus derived from an act of consumption is a selfhood woven outside and is not a manifestation of one's interior reality or quintessential realization of the inner being. Ontologically one feels his/her ground slipping away and an abyss like platform keeps on providing space for consumption so as to enunciate his/her subject. "Identity is an act of purchase predicated on a condition of groundlessness" (Massumi 6). Postmodern man lacks the meaning and a sense of place in the world and this flawed subject makes attempts to construct individual identity in the face of this abyss in the form of incessant acts of purchases where he attempts to clarify some distinctive character that one can presumably call one's own: "our generic identity . . . is the accident form; our specific identity . . . is the sum total of our purchases" (Massumi 7). He also adds that one is bound to live permanently in the shadow of the 'imminent disaster' (10). He further states:

> Society's prospectivity has shifted modes. What society looks toward is no longer a return to the promised land but a general disaster that is already upon us, woven into the fabric of day-to-day life. The content of the disaster is unimportant. Its particulars are annulled by its plurality of possible agents and times: here and to come. What registers is its magnitude. In its most compelling and characteristic incarnations, the now unspecified enemy is infinite. Infinitely small or infinitely large: viral or environmental. (Massumi 11)

When the contemporary world order is permeated with violence and fear one finds no political machinery or national boundary protecting him/her from these silent disasters like holocaust. No scientific agency can save one from the fear and trauma stemming from the dangers that one confronts now. The characters that one encounters in the works analysed in the present study register their life in an ambience of fear which is perhaps a hysterical fusion of the realistic and the fantastic. Massumi states, "'*Fear is not fundamentally an emotion. It is the objectivity of the subjective under late capitalism'* . . . It is the most economical expression of the accident-form as subject-form of capital . . .When we buy, we are buying off fear and falling, filling the gap with presence-effects. When we consume, we are consuming our own possibility" (Massumi 12).

Critical debates today evoke a mixed realization between the optimistic and sarcastic reality that provides our contemporary frustration and dilemma with an intense, almost orgasmic, catharsis in the midst of an ever-widening exhaustion. Hence almost all the postmillennial theories of literature and human representation are both a confession of defeat and uncertainty and a celebration of creativity and improvisation. The subject in the present century as we find in some of the works taken here for study are faced with intense trauma which includes the discourse of loss, anxiety, accident fear, panic, groundlessness, defeat, disorientation, solipsism, meaninglessness, paranoia, self-indulgence, indifference, debasement and paralysis in the end, after which one may have become accustomed to it and the subject might turn to be a 'void subject' as Zizek would name it in his *Interrogating the Real* (29).

In a discussion on subjectivity in the backdrop of Nuclear disasters, it is necessary to make critical enquiry into the relationship between technological

advancements and subjectivity. Subjectivity which was once regarded as potentially knowable and conceptually one-dimensional entity has now become fractured, and digitally mediated as mentioned earlier. This complexity was doubled in recent theorizations by the complex debates and the multiplicity of our interactions. In the postmillennial scenario, science and technology have even more dramatically complicated the ongoing conversations on identity and agency. The cultural, social and personal impact of technology upon life has become one of the pressing issues in contemporary thinking. The angst about technology in this post human era prognosticates an anxiety of irreversible dehumanisation. Paul Virilio is one of the most influential cultural theorists of the contemporary discussion on technology and human subjectivity. He conceptualizes the ambivalent aspect of progress in the present traumatic era.

Virilio writes extensively on the cultural and technological conditions of contemporary life which is fundamentally determined by the exponential escalation of war, and its unparalleled potential to chaotically transform societies and alter the size of populations immensely. To Virilio, war is the defining condition of the twentieth-century life, and its presence cannot be ignored. Wars beings wars of the machine-like motorised vehicle, the tank and the aircraft and most recently nuclear deterrence, he visualised of a subjectivity rigidified by the metalisation of the human body. He was much concerned about the speed of the latest war technologies. In his *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, Virilio writes: "The invasion of the instant succeeds the invasion of the territory. The countdown becomes the scene of battle, the final frontier ... The violence of speed has become the location and the

law, the world's destiny and its destination" (Virilio 49, 57). Again in *Critical Space* he writes:

> The will to power of industrial nations implementing in practice the technologies of *total war* at the beginning of the century, is succeeded in this very moment by the theoretical implementation of a total involuntary war, by post-industrial nations investing more and more in information, automation, cybernetics, societies in which the utility of the labour force of humanity is declining, the *direct* responsibility of individuals to the advantage of the powers of 'anticipated' or 'deferred' substitution, power of the system of self-guided arms, of networks of self-programmed detection, *automatic answering machines*, which lead humanity to the confinement of desperate expectation. (Virilio 69)

These passages show the impact of war technologies in defining the human subjectivity in the contemporary era. Here he argues that war technologies beyond doubt threaten the very subjectivity we have inherited, by shortening and belittling our decision-making ability to a progressively narrowing domain of choices. This decrease of time and space by speed gives the subject increasing access to the world. Similarly a globalised subject achieves unlimited access in the present scenario. Here the subject is no longer limited and designed by locality, or even nationality. Thus the subject is open and dispersed amongst a preponderance of technological streams. The horizons of the subject are at once expanded and reduced.

John Searle, the great philosopher of consciousness has made some particularly intriguing questions about the debates regarding technology and subjectivity interface. His famous book *The Rediscovery of the Mind* is so radical in

the sense that it even explicates on the limits of consciousness and conscious intent by speculating on what might happen if an individual's brain were gradually altered through the introduction of increasing numbers of silicon chips. He concludes on three possibilities; the first, that the subject's outward behaviours and consciousness would remain absolutely unaltered; second, that the subject's behaviours would continue to remain the same but consciousness of selfhood would slowly disappear; and lastly, that the subject's consciousness might remain the same but external actions would gradually cease (Searle 113).

His major concern is that subjectivity or consciousness, should always be thought of conceptually distinct from external behaviour. He emphasizes this point with another hypothetical case in which completely conscious, highly skilled robots are given the task of creating copies of themselves with exactly the same skills but without consciousness. This would result in components whose outward behaviours are precisely the same, but they lack consciousness. Searle thereby argues that we can never observe external behaviour and render definitive judgments about consciousness. These theoretical formulations and hypothetical arguments are highly important today as we struggle with the gruesome consequences of the interfaces between human consciousness and technology, including medicinal field. The concept that external agents can alter the consciousness can be easily argued by the fact that we live in a world of mind-altering pharmaceuticals. So the traumatic subjectivity that we see in the characters that we study in the present work is to be scrutinized not only in the light of the external tragic events like nuclear holocaust but their consciousness of their surroundings and, the technocratic world and in their relationship with each other.

Questions regarding the blurring boundaries of selfhood have been made by Deleuze and Guattari in both *Anti-Oedipus* and in *A Thousand Plateaus* in which they argue that the present era is one in which humans no longer "use" machines in traditional ways:

> ... cybernetic and informational machines form a [new] age that reconstructs a generalized regime of subjection: recurrent and reversible "humans-machines systems" replace the old non recurrent and non reversible relations of subjection between the two elements; the relation between human and machine is based on internal, mutual communication, and no longer on usage or action. (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 458)

Eliciting insights from Deleuze and Guattari's reflections, Brian Massumi suggests that:

> there is no [longer any] self-sufficient agency that can qualify as intentional. There are varying degrees of choice at successive threshold states. The "will" to change or stay the same is not an act of determination on the part of a unified subject in simple response to self-reflection or an internal impulse. It is a state of self-organized indeterminacy in response to complex causal constraints. It constitutes a real degree of freedom, but the choice belongs to the overall dissipative system with its plurality of selves, and not to the person; it is objectively co-caused at the crossroads of chance and determinacy. (Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schezophrenia* 81)

For traditionalist academics, this self-organized indeterminacy might be bewildering or rather appalling but as of now this debate represents a transparent occasion to rethink what we mean by subjectivity and agency in a postmodern, technology dependent world, a world far removed from that of Descartes and his theory of cogito.

The cultural critic Donna Haraway is very instrumental in eliciting a relationship between technology and human subjectivity. Her ideas have caused a deepening interfacing of humans and technology as the occasion to rethink subjectivity in radical and moreover in the ethically *responsible* ways. These ethical dimensions of her theories are crucial to the present study. Her well known "A Cyborg Manifesto," which appears as a chapter in her influential book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* states that in "the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics" (Haraway 150). Cyborg roughly defined is a key term in both science fiction and late twentieth-century cultural theory used to describe a melding of the human and the nonhuman within a single entity. A concrete example of a cyborg would be a person whose abilities are enhanced by robotics, such as portrayed in superman comics. In a wider sense of the term, the theorist Donna Haraway uses it to point to the growing interrelationship and the increasingly murky boundaries between the human and nonhuman that we now experience in our dependence upon Web-based communication, controlled living environments, pace-makers, mobile phones and even contact lenses.

In the above statement she is reiterating the many ways that our lives and consciousnesses depend upon, and fuse ontologically with, a variety of nonhuman entities, including computers, mobile phones, artificial limbs and organs, and controlled living environments. She states that there are two ways of looking at a cyborg world. On one hand it may appear as a final line of control on the planet but on the other hand it could be about bridging kinship with animals and machines. She encourages balancing both perspectives (154).

Here Haraway's most important conceptualization about theories of subjectivity is her demand for a self-conscious embracing of "permanent partiality" (173). She sums up her major points in the last paragraph of "A Cyborg Manifesto,":

> ... first, the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality, probably always, but certainly now; and second, taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts . . . This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. (181)

She exhorts us to struggle with the often-ignored intricacy of our materialist existence and in ways that place responsibility and ethical choice at the centre of our discussions of contemporary subjectivity. Ethical choice turns to be of cardinal importance in the critical parlance of contemporary discussion on subjectivity. Critics now together agree on this point of ethical aesthetics in academics and critical investigations. This acknowledges the necessity of struggling with the issue of social

accountability and responsibility in an environment in which we grapple with issues of human rights, class inequities, and the effects of technology on ourselves and our interactions with each other and the environment. As Zygmunt Bauman argues,

> One might say that postmodernity is an "era of morality" in one sense only . . . it is possible now, nay inevitable, to face the moral issues point-blank, in all their naked truth, as they emerge from the life experience of men and women, and as they confront moral selves in all their irreparable and irredeemable ambivalence. Paradoxically, it is only now that actions appear to the moral selves as matters of responsible choice . . . The denizens of the postmodern era are, so to speak, forced to stand face-to-face with their moral autonomy, and so also with their moral responsibility. This is the cause of moral agony. This is also the chance the moral selves never confronted before. (Bauman 42–43)

It is in such a background that the academic world addresses the issue of trauma and the subjectivity brought about thereby. So in the present framework of thought we can rewrite Descartes's cogito to read: *We think . . . and rethink . . . and therefore we are* (Hall 130). It is only by pluralizing our critical engagements and activities by recognizing community and foregrounding the necessary, ongoing deliberations of those engagements we can dream of a finer ecology for life. The human is to render significantly different from mechanically driven beings of the hour. Even when we blur those boundaries between human and animal, and human and machine it should be with an empathetic engagement with the deserving like the traumatic victims. It is only in a concerted effort that we create the conditions of our own survival or destruction.

When we confine the whole conversation to an interface of subjectivity and trauma, the reflections on the same in the last century become crucial to a study like the present one. It is in the twentieth century that the discourses around psychology trauma emerged as a dominant concern both in academic debate and cultural conversations. In the midnineteenth- century the discussion on subjectivity was not that much dominant in epistemological trajectories; psychology too was confined to the pathological realm of medicine and physical trauma. In the twentieth century, on the other hand, the notion of trauma and its relationship with subjectivity was problematized extensively transcending the realms of medicine, and challenging the fundamental assumptions regarding cognition, ethics, individual identity, and social identity.

The cardinal point in dealing with a subject afflicted with trauma revolves around a response to an event or experience that besets the individual's alternative mechanisms in his subjectivity. A traumatized subject is characterized by a plethora of, perhaps, paradoxical symptoms such as a disruption to cognition, identity resulting in self alienation and even in an inability to formulate a narrative of the trauma in a coherent form. It is in such a context that the analysis of the literature that deals with the victims' subjectivity in a framework of transgenerational empathy become academically significant in the present scenario where researchers are often varied as to whether trauma is mainly an epistemological crisis or an ethical crisis, whether it is the traumatic subject or the societal agents that can speak more authentically on the issue. As it is mentioned earlier one of the major concerns of this study is in the problematics of the representation of trauma as whether unmediated

testimony or literary representation in fiction or the like, appropriates as a medium of expression for traumatic subjectivity.

The theoretical leanings to trauma that evolves in this study attempts as seen above to expand existent theories as to how subjectivity and meaning come into being rather than attempting to force our understanding of psychic trauma into existing notions of meaning, identity, and representation. In a cognitive platform it is examined how trauma could inform our understanding of both subjectivity and of the way in which meaning comes into being. In a nutshell a theory of subjectivity and of cognitive function of tragic correlatives have resulted in a theory of trauma, especially in the present century and the last decades of the last century where discourses on an indeterminate subject became so rampant and such a subject is termed to be "the traumatized individual."

The crisis of representation which is detailed in the first half of this chapter becomes doubly complicated in the portrayal of the traumatic subject. The fragmented and ruptured nature of meaning and identity, distorts the representation of a traumatized experience and testimony or narrative that brings heterogeneous content to social discourse weakening the linguistic bond that ties the participants within a discursive community to one another. Traumatic experience, however, indeed poses a singular difficulty for the survivors, the witnesses, and the discursive community to which they belong. Thus traumatic subjectivity as an entity is unique among the human experiences in the *degree* to which it demands the redefinition and reorganization of meaning and identity.

When the survivor is the only individual who can identify and represent his own unmediated experiences of a tragic event, the question of any attempt to speak

for the survivor or to interpret his traumatic crisis becomes an attempt at another individual's own apprehension of the experience. In such mediated representation of the traumatic subjectivity, the testimony or narrative comes to the domain of social discourse and consequently the heterogeneous nature of that narrative breaks the authenticity in the limits of the shared symbolized meaning. The "non symbolizable wound," (qtd. in Applebaum 113) to quote Derrida, is reiterated in the fictional fluidity of representation and the traumatic subject is alienated in the crisis of representation and an ethical turn is necessitated as it is envisaged in the present study.

In a post-representational era, the conflicted meaning, as it is conceived and articulated by the traumatized subject is expected to resolve in a single locus of symbolized meaning in a flux, in modern philosophical terms, a social domain which is characterized by instability and flexibility. Social domains are theorized by concepts like Lacan's *symbolic order*, and Foucault's *episteme* all of which complicate the singularity of experience and its articulation.

When confronted with the frantic need of maintaining a singular and monolithic concept of the articulation of subjectivity and symbolized meaning, it is demanded in academic researches a correlative surrogate in narrative aesthetics, and it is here that the ethical turn comes as a prominent theory in the present decades. It is only in shared social ethics of the symbolic order that the traumatic subjectivity can be addressed from the academic perspective of thinking.

When the issue of addressing the traumatic subjectivity in an ethical frame, a dynamic and pluralised model of subjectivity is enunciated in a shared social domain

or symbolic order and it no longer necessitates the demand of a "true" and authentic narrative of traumatic experience.

Lacan's conceptualizations of subject and symbolic order are very crucial in any understanding of traumatic subjectivity. The inseparable connect between alienation and trauma gets complicated in Lacan's theoretical formulations of language and subject. In the Lacanian approach to the emergence of subjectivity, it is presumed that human beings enter the world prematurely with absolute inability to manage our bodies and communicate our needs. Deprived of language, humans cannot categorize and manipulate the world in discursive practices. On the other hand, the early phase of our ontology is characterized by an undifferentiated consciousness and a sense of fragmented self made up not of discrete elements and structures, but continuum of being. It is among this flux of fragmented self of drives and energies, slowly the structured language emerges and out of this individual, human subjectivity springs.

For the formation of the self, the individual should recognize that he is in the world and this recognition Lacan places in the mirror stage where the child becomes conscious that it has volitional control over its own body. It is here at this gesture where the seminal emergence of language takes place. The mirror image which Lacan identifies as a self-as-object in the world is comprising the subject in language. The alienation from the self with the self in language itself brings about the first trauma in subjectivity.

This normal subject who is already traumatic gets complicated in a social ambience of violence and sufferings. The traumatized individual perpetually occupies a divided site of subjectivity, and since each is authentic in its own terms,

he/she finds himself/herself hindered or even prevented from reconciling those positions to form a single discursive point of origin. The natural divide in the identity formation of a survivor's identity and his inability to speak of the trauma, couples in complicating the traumatic subjectivity of the victims under study.

Societal discourses resort to claim that the ethical treatment of trauma has a place and plays a critical role in bringing about a trans-generational empathy with the traumatic subjects. The division formed between the shared symbolized meaning and individual experience is an expression of the opposition that forms between the functioning of the subject within language and in transcendence of that language through varied individual experience. This ethical approach provided by society speaks only for the trauma which is *shared* by the victims and witness, thereby creating a dissolution of the linguistic bond between them in a narrative platform.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth persistently reiterates the ethics of trauma and its resolution. She writes: "I will suggest, that the shock of traumatic sight reveals at the heart of human subjectivity not so much an epistemological, but rather what can be defined as an ethical relation to the real" (92). What is to be processed according to Caruth is the ethical imperative to awaken from grief and to bear witness (105). Deviating away from an assessment of trauma via social ethics, she applies a yardstick of formalist ethics. Similar to Lacan, she too highlights the symbolic order as authentic subjectivity, and ultimate reality. In this juncture the theories of trauma have been studies of a narrative resolution to traumatic subjectivity. Caruth writes that "trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries

out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (*Unclaimed* 4).

The literary expressions of trauma as discussed in the next chapters demonstrate the fragmentation of subjectivity in the backdrop of nuclear holocaust. The crisis of narrative around trauma springs from the issue of addressing the "realities" and competing apprehensions of meaning and identity where the narrative should articulate more than the factual events of a traumatic experience. It should articulate the coexistence of mutually preclusive assumptions of meaning and identity placed in a covalent relationship with one another. Those competing apprehensions can neither be fused, nor can they be divided. In the superfluity of their dichotomous expressions they create the silence of traumatic crisis where a unified expression of experience should exist, but ironically it never does.

Theorists such as Felman, Caruth, and Henke, problematize a humanities-based approach and have clearly identified a linguistic basis for the phenomenon of traumatic subjectivity. Cathy Caruth as mentioned above has shifted the emphasis of her inquiry from the event that "caused" the trauma, and stresses instead the actual *structure of its experience* or its reception as definitive (*Trauma* 4). Similarly Julia Kristeva, in her work on the semiotic foundation of subjectivity, alludes briefly to the phenomenological discourse that conceptualizes the theoretical problem of divided subjectivity (*Revolution 22*).

Henke's reflections on the theoretical examination of trauma turns to be significant in the like of traumatic subjects analysed in the present study. She writes:

> Most psychoanalysts agree that traumatic experience generates
>
> inevitable psychic fragmentation – an aetiology that the Lacanian critic

might construe as a disruption and dismemberment of the imaginary

subject, the version of an integrated self that emerges from

méconnaissance or misrecognition of one's valorized mirror image.

Whether attributable to fantasy or social construction, such

misrecognition is vital to the individual's sense of agency and

subjectivity. In order to function as an effective being in the world, one

must necessarily cling to this Lacanian *mesongevitale* as an enabling

myth of coherent identity, despite its status as a fictional construct.

(Henke 16)

Here Henke aptly identifies the apparent nature of a subjectivity bifurcated by

trauma. Henke's approach clearly takes our emphasis towards the division of

subjectivity between the socially designed subject, and an implied subjectivity that

must find a suitable correlation between itself and that design. One notes such realms

of divided subjectivity in the novels that constitute the corpus of the present study.

Though some of the works like *The Children of Dust* belong to a narrative

conscience of popular fiction it provides a remarkably lucid illustration of the

traumatic subjectivity brought about by a problem of divided self.

In cognitive and linguistic terms, trauma forms a transgressive and

potentially destructive knowledge that must deform the symbolic and the social order

in order to be articulated and to find resolution. Trauma thus takes on forms that

reveal the instances of subjectivity which is a subjective knowledge and the instances

of ethics which is socially validated orders.

It is only by pluralizing our critical engagements and activities by recognizing

community and foregrounding the necessary, ongoing deliberations of those

engagements, can we anticipate a finer ecology for life. The human is to render

significantly different from mechanically driven beings of the hour. Even when one

blurs those boundaries between human and animal, and human and machine it should

be with an empathetic engagement with the deserving, like the traumatic victims.

The core chapters draw extensively on the insights presented in the present chapter.

CHAPTER - 3

Rupture in the Self: Traumatic Awakenings in *Fahrenheit 451,*
The Road, Alas, Babylon,* and *On the Beach

This chapter examines *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *The Road* by

Cormac McCarthy, *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank and *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute, in

the light of the traumatic awakenings of the main characters and the narrative aspects

which engender empathy in the minds of the readers. The traumatic experiences of

the main characters, both the survivors and the victims, and the conflict – both

external and internal, through which these characters pass lead them to resort to an

ethical recourse in their choice of life and death. The works that are analyzed in this

chapter provide narrative space for a world of ethical illumination of the self after a

phase of trauma associated with nuclear attacks. Most of these works are interspersed

with innumerably rich imagery and visual illustrations and thereby transport the

readers to a realm of futuristic transcendence. The narrative textures of these works

are designed in a way where verbal pictures are drawn with a view to providing

scenes of self-realization and ethical reformation. Typical of the narrative conscience

of contemporary fiction, these works too are marked with the deepest core of

ontological quandaries and disillusionment of the self.

This tumult in the inner space, perhaps, culminates in the production of a

heavily traumatic ambience in the evolution of the plot of these works providing

shocking turns and miraculous consequences in the life of the protagonists and the

people around. The narrative is framed in a way so as to exert heavy impact upon the

readers, whose conscience is constantly disturbed, engendering a kind of trans-

generational empathy. In a backdrop of science fiction, holocaust narratives, digital humanities and virtual realities, the selected works place their fictional trajectory in a distorted mindscape where trauma looms large and is intricately woven with the vicissitudes of love, revenge, hatred, fear, sympathy, menace and suffering, all in a neat balance of the narrative aesthetic.

Technology has been problematized in all these works while they look at the sinister notion of universal progress in quite an ironic fashion. A dialectics between traditional ignorance and technological enlightenment is put into scrutiny in these works where devastations have become footnotes to contemporary culture.

Among these works *Fahrenheit 451* is probably one of the most telling and acerbic novels that characterize the various endangering and alarming features of the present world in the backdrop of a nuclear devastation. The novel is generally presented by popular verdict to be a work of social criticism that cautions us against the dangers of censorship and the curtailing of freedom of thought and expression. This book employs the conventions of science fiction to articulate the message that any oppressive system of thought, left unchecked, does irreparable damage to culture. The central thematic concern is placed in a technocratic and totalitarian society that demands order at the expense of individual rights with a dystopia motif running through the initial pages, as quite popular in science fiction.

Contrary to the narrative time and space, the thematic time and space of the novel is placed in the distant future (time and place being unspecified), but at the same time condemning not only the anti-intellectualism of Nazi Germany, but also America in the early 1950's. Even though the novel was published in 1953, it presents a futuristic world run by technology, violence and mind control. It is also

pertinent to note that works of powerful social criticisms such as Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *1984* and Skinner's *Walden Two* were published around the same period. All these works exhibit a kind of societal trauma and futuristic threat regarding the US turning into an oppressive and authoritarian force in the late twentieth and early twenty first centuries.

The setting of the novel is not specified by Bradbury. It can be deduced that it is some time in the new millennium from what the protagonist mentions: "We've started and won two atomic wars since 2022! Is it because we're having so much fun at home we've forgotten the world? Is it because we're so rich and the rest of the world's so poor and we just don't care if they are?" (69). These lines also set the tone for the internal and external trauma experienced by the main character Guy Montag. The physical space of the events is also not specified clearly. Since there are references to Chicago and Georgia, it can be interpreted that the place is predominantly America. The novel relates the eventful life of Guy Montag, the thirty-year-old- protagonist who is working as a 'fireman' ironically or rather literally as his job is to set fire and, not to put them out for safety as generally expected of a fireman. He together with his colleagues set fire to books in a very uncanny fashion.

At the very outset of the novel, one sees Montag taking weird pleasure in his burning profession assuming himself to be a happy man. The pleasure of burning and the contentment of seeing books die with orange sparkling whirls that make the wind darker, now clouds all the happiness that Guy Montag has in his life. The brass nozzle spitting the Kerosene to burn the books and the houses which keep them leaves only the charcoal ruins of history (5). The fierce grin spread over all the faces

of his coworkers delineate the inescapable trauma of being cut off from the past, knowledge of all sorts and all creative enterprises, the very outcome of burning books. Fireman Montag's helmet numbered 451 symbolically represents the temperature inside and outside of him. It is the temperature at which a book burns.

Later on we see him as the one who begins to interrogate the ethics of his profession and, in turn, the value of his life. He gradually develops a relationship with his seventeen year-old neighbour, Clarisse McClellan. It is probably her humanist philosophy and inquisitive nature that prompts Montag to examine his own self. Clarisse is creative, nature loving and soft hearted in contrast to every single character the reader encounters in the novel. Her face makes him wander through the distant lands igniting the gentle light of candles of his childhood memories. To her question whether he had ever read any of the books he burned, his answer is "That's against the law!" and further recites the slogan, "It's fine work. Monday burn Millay, Wednesday Whitman, Friday Faulkner, burn them to ashes, then burn the ashes. That's our official slogan" (3). The slogan indicates the apathy of the fireman and how he has been doctored to do so. The author deftly captures the sentiments of the two characters in these disarming lines:

> They walked still further and the girl said, "Is it true that long ago firemen put fires out instead of going to start them?"
> "No. Houses have always been fireproof, take my word for it." "Strange. I heard once that a long time ago houses used to burn by accident and they needed firemen to stop the flames." (3)

Clarrise and her conversations are surprisingly shocking to Montag as he had never closely watched the nature around him before as expressed by her. Her subtle

references to the beauty of nature obviously pique his consciousness. When she asks

him whether he knows about the morning dew on the grass, it irritates him. When he

is asked if he is happy, it makes him wonder whether he knows what actual

happiness is. But later all these have a positive influence over him.

Clarisse is able to make a great impact on Montag. After meeting her, it is her

words that dominate his thoughts. He finds her memory beautiful as she has an

incredible power of identification and empathy. Returning to his house, the readers

are introduced to his wife Mildred, whom he compares to a cold body, displayed on

the lid of a tomb and his thoughts about her expose his unhappy married life. The

conflicting natures of Clarisse and Mildred, serve as an analogy for the contrast

between hope and despair. His wife's obsession with death marks his trauma as well

as hers. On reaching his place, the bombing outside shakes the house but what

shocks Montag is the realization that his wife has attempted another suicide,

consuming an overdose of sleeping pills. The medical aid team explains to him that

there are so many cases of suicide each day and their apathy and the thoughts about

life's insecurity bewilder him:

> "First, why don't you tell me if she'll be all right?"
>
> "Sure, she'll be O.K. We got all the mean stuff right in our suitcase
>
> here, it can't get at her now. As I said, you take out the old and put in
>
> the new and you're O.K."
>
> "Neither of you is an M.D. Why didn't they send an M.D".
>
> "Hell!" the operator's cigarette moved on his lips. "We get these
>
> cases nine or ten a night. Got so many, starting a few years ago, we had
>
> the special machines built. With the optical lens, of course, that was

new; the rest is ancient. You don't need an M.D., cases like this; all you

need is two handymen, clean up the problem in half an hour. Look"-he

started for the door-"we gotta go. Just had another call on the old ear

thimble.

Ten blocks from here. Someone else just jumped off the cap of a pillbox.

Call if you need us again. Keep her quiet. We got a contrasedative in her.

She'll wake up hungry. So long."(13).

Meanwhile Mildred on the other hand argues with Montag to install a new television

in their fourth wall which he rejects. Both her attempts to commit suicide and her

subsequent amnesia are probably symptomatic of her trauma, resulting again from

both external and domestic conflicts. She suffers from a strange kind of selective

memory loss, where she does not recall her suicide attempts and is oblivious to the

situation. This could be a kind of repressive mechanism on the part of Mildred who

is traumatized. This condition of hers can probably be categorized under what

psychoanalysts call 'repressed memories,' memories that have been unconsciously

blocked due to the memory being connected to an overdose of stress or trauma

(Loftus 520). Breuer and Sigmund Freud hypothesize that a memory that is

traumatized is sometimes repressed but "acts like a foreign body which long after its

entry must continue to be regarded as an agent that is still at work" (Breuer and

Freud 6) and may reflect as the symptoms of the trauma. More so, it could be another

of the symptoms like the repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or

behaviors stemming from the event that Cathy Caruth talks about. Unlike Montag

who has Clarisse, there is no one to redeem or rescue Mildred from her repressive

and oppressive state.

The traumatic ambience resultant from technospheric rationality is symbolically presented in the novel with the introduction of the hound which is an electrical robot shaped as a hound which always threatens Montag. The hound is a mechanical monster programmed to root out suspects: "Light flickered on bits of ruby glass and on sensitive capillary hairs in the nylon-brushed nostrils of the creature that quivered gently, gently, gently, its eight legs spidered under it on rubber-padded paws"(22). It released a sedative on capturing its prey. The hound is representative of the autocratic state that works to wipe out all emotion, imagination and culture. It reflects a society that has forgotten to love and feel for others. The threat of a nuclear attack stifling human imagination and feeling has been represented by many writers. In one of her nonfictional works the Indian writer Arundhati Roy writes explicitly what Bradbury tries to present symbolically. In the essay "The End of Imagination" which is her take on nuclear tests, she states: "Something had died but it wasn't me. It was infinitely more precious. It was a world that has been ailing for a while, and has finally breathed its last. It's been cremated now. The air is thick with ugliness and there's the unmistakable stench of fascism on the breeze" (9). The destructive technology that the state uses to control people finds a parallel here. The tone of threat permeates throughout the novel as we see in the case of the captain who suspects him of having a guilty conscience about something. This traumatic conscience marking the narrative is always contrasted with the romantic ambience brought about by the presence of Clarisse in the novel. She takes him to a world of senses by touching the flowers, tasting the rain, fondling the plants and studying everything alive around them. The best part of his regular meetings

with Clarisse is when she subtly highlights the redemptive power of nature; her presentation of the last of the dandelions of the year is a point in case.

Montag's traumatic subjectivity is hyphenated between conflicting forces. Both destructive and redemptive forces have their toll on him. When Clarisse questions him regarding his book burning, he feels "his body divide itself into a hotness and a coldness, a softness and a hardness, a trembling and a not trembling, the two halves grinding one upon the other" (11). Again, later her disappearance hurls Montag into a traumatic world of loneliness and aloofness.

The traumatic tone of the novel is persistent with the references to war and its devastating effects. Captain Beatty whom Montag approaches to clear his doubts, suspects him of having books secretly kept though there is an alarm to spot the hidden books.

> Beatty arranged his cards quietly. "Any man's insane who thinks
>
> he can fool the Government and us."
>
> "I've tried to imagine," said Montag, "just how it would feel. I
>
> mean to have firemen burn our houses and our books."
>
> "We haven't any books."
>
> "But if we did have some."
>
> "You *got* some?"
>
> Beatty blinked slowly.
>
> "No."(31)

The episode where an old lady is unwilling to move from the top of the books and immolates herself is a tone setter in the whole fictional framework of the book. Montag's thoughts about how all the burnings happen at the nights are answered by

the show of the yellow flames darkened with fear. His journey back to the fire house is highly traumatic; Montag recollects the last words spoken by the woman before she ignites herself. "We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out!" (33). Beatty explicates the sentence spoken by a man named Latimer to Nicholas Ridley as they were being burnt alive at Oxford for heresy on 16th of October 1555. Another instance of traumatic awakening is seen with the arrival of Sieve and Sand uneasily bringing the terror of an impending fall of the fireman.

Life of Montag takes a turn with the shocking revelation of his secret collection of books that he had kept under their air condition board, to Mildred. There were twenty books which he had secretly seized from the houses he burnt. Mildred is shocked to see the books inside her house and she protests fearing that their house may be burnt at anytime if the authorities come to know of it. Montag tries to convince her to keep them for a few days more only to check whether they confront with the things Beatty had accused them of. The first section of *Fahrenheit 451* ends with Montag curiously opening a book with a bewildering heart, an act that may change his world forever.

The books become the forbidden fruits which prompt Montag to think, thus resulting in his own fall. Montag becomes the Adam tempted by the Eve, Clarisse, to read and reason, where books being the forbidden fruit of knowledge banned by the State. The universal trauma of the Fall of Man is alluded to and the biblical echo of the sin of knowing also is evoked in this segment of the novel.

Montag is disgusted with his own self and those around him as well for embracing the shallow, pseudo façade of life rather than examining what underlies it.

In complete dejection he turns to Professor Faber for solace. Faber is a veteran scholar who preserves the contents of important books in his head intact. Montag's inner conflict and his contempt for his ignorant society are brought into an impasse when an alarm brings the firemen to his own home. Montag awaits the birth of a new world where truth and knowledge are again respected.

Getting associated with Farber transforms Montag entirely as he was properly instructed on how books become hated and feared by men. Montag plans to burn all the firemen's residences everywhere with the help of old professors, former writers, linguists, historians, and actors who have not acted Pirandello or Shaw or Shakespeare for years. Faber warns him that civilization is flinging into pieces and cautions him to stay away from the centrifuge.

In the episodic evolution of the structure of the novel the section titled "Burning Bright" prepares the site for the clash of ethical and traumatic sensibilities in Montag. The conflicting emotions in the mindscape of the characters are presented tactfully by the author. The mutually opposing attitudes in the traumatic landscape of the events disturb the readers' conscience too. One witnesses the anguished scene of Mildred leaving the house lamenting over the plight of a poor family with nothing left. Faber asks Montag to run away while Beatty philosophizes about the beauty and power of fire as it "destroys responsibilities and consequences" (109). It is not just the physical pages of the books that is destroyed here but histories, legacies, free-thinking and the narratives of love and tolerance succumb to the flames as per Beatty's perception. But Bradbury is not totally pessimistic. Montag does not find the destructive beauty of fire appealing. But rather, he likens the burning books to

birds, dancing with wings ablaze with red and yellow feathers. The phoenix image of burning and resurrection sums up Montag's traumatic subjectivity.

Montag reaches a position where an escape is impossible unless there is Faber to redirect him and he runs through the pavement into the shadows hoping to find the destination he waits for. The house of Mrs. Black offers him a place to hide the remaining books. Later he meets Faber and explains how he lost the audio capsule and burnt all the firemen. Faber remarks that for the first time in years he felt alive and happy. He anticipates that death may strike him any time and helps Montag rebuild a life of hope. He directs him to a group of people at St. Louis among whom he hopes Montag would find solace.

 Later, Montag gets integrated with a new group among whom there are people like Fred Clement, former occupant of the Thomas Hardy chair at Cambridge which has now been turned to an Atomic Engineering School. The group included Dr. Simmons from UCLA, Professor West from Colombia University, Reverend Padover and so on to whom Montag offers the Book of Ecclesiastes and tries to acclimatize to their ways. They have photographic memories by which they preserve all the knowledge they have acquired. The thematic profundity of the novel's transgenerational aspect of discourses is revealed when Montag was asked about his interest in reading Plato's *Republic* or meeting Jonathan Swift or Einstein or Gautama Budha or Mahatma Gandhi or Mr. Lincoln and the like. Bradbury tries to emphasize the regenerative and therapeutic power of books and writers by referring to a range of thinkers from across the ages, transcending boundaries:

> "Don't try. It'll come when we need it. All of us have
>
> photographic memories, but spend a lifetime learning how to block off

the things that are really in there. Simmons here has worked on it for

twenty years and now we've got the method down to where we can recall

anything that's been read once. Would you like, some day, Montag, to

read Plato's *Republic*?"

"Of course!"

"*I* am Plato's *Republic*. Like to read Marcus Aurelius? Mr. Simmons

is Marcus."

"How do you do?" said Mr. Simmons.

"Hello," said Montag.

"I want you to meet Jonathan Swift, the author of that evil political

book, *Gulliver's Travels*! And this other fellow is Charles Darwin, and-

this one is Schopenhauer, and this one is Einstein, and this one here at

my elbow is Mr. Albert Schweitzer, a very kind philosopher indeed. Here

we all are, Montag. Aristophanes and Mahatma Gandhi and Gautama

Buddha and Confucius and Thomas Love Peacock and Thomas Jefferson

and Mr. Lincoln, if you please. We are also Matthew, Mark, Luke, and

John."(145)

This group stands for the ethical recourse that the author adopts in the novel.

He asserts through the group that they have to pass on the books like Thoreau's

Walden to their own children by word of mouth. As Montag tries to see the men's

faces, someone reminds him not to judge a book by its cover. He shares his feelings

for his wife with Granger and surprisingly reveals he does not feel a bit of sadness

even when she passed away. When he looks back he sees nothing but a city of ashes

and debris. Montag perceives that Mildred has been dead and gone to oblivion long

back in his heart. The city has been turned to a heap of baking powder. Trauma of the past does not destroy Montag. But as mentioned earlier, he sees hope as long as humans have books and lofty thoughts stored in their memories, as these have the power to obliterate hate and destruction. They commemorate the phoenix myth and its power to resurrect. The walk upward the river and Montag's dreams of a life full of hope and peace, free from man-made threats, place the novel in the gambit of ethical discourses.

Among the novels that narrate post-apocalyptic anxiety *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy assumes similar position as that of *Fahrenheit 451*. This novel too like the latter pictures the existential uneasiness of the trauma of post-apocalyptic imagination of a depopulated world of devastation brought about by ecocide, war and cosmological nihilism. Like any post-apocalyptic fiction McCarthy's *The Road* too provides a site of survival and resistance in the horrendous background of traumatic experience. Situated in a bleak wasteland and tampered by an unspecified catastrophe, the novel probes into the different realms of trauma - ecological, psychological, and sociological in a neatly worked out motif of a journey.

The journey is set out by a man and his son in the dreary background of the woods which lends an ambience of loneliness and menace in the novel. As characteristic of any novel set in a post-apocalyptic space *The Road* too leaves the date and place unnamed. All the same, the reader is given a space for assumption to locate the novel in the United States, going by the textual cues. The identities of the characters too are kept unrevealed in order to reiterate the universality of appeal of the events here. In form, the work adopts a fragmented narrative style which is devoid of a proper chronological sequencing of events, reflecting the barren and

murky landscape through which the main characters make their journey. McCarthy's fear of an ashen future and his inability to capture the extent of an actual apocalypse in the language before him prompts him to place his narrative in an unrecognizable spatio-temporal terrain. Moreover he experiments with form and language in order to do some justice to the representation of his theme.

McCarthy's preference to avoid quotation marks and punctuations synchronizes with the chaotic and tumultuous trajectory of the thoughts and dreams of the protagonist in the novel. The psychological resonance of the traumatic setting is unraveled in a panic ridden narrative where one reads about the man's strange dreams. The dreams that the man has are intricately connected to the foreboding ambience of the ashen and barren landscape and finds apt expression in McCarthy's surreal use of language.

One of the first dreams he has is that of a creature with a dripping mouth and that which "stared into the light with eyes dead white and sightless as the eggs of spiders (1). At the outset this reminds one of the robotic hound found in *Fahrenheit* 451, an image foreboding death and destruction, as well as the erasure of all human sentiments. But on the other hand, this creature does no harm to the man and the son. Somehow it seems to sense their presence there, making them feel uneasy. It has a ghastly look and swings its head from side to side, and later gives out a low moan and lurches away in the dark (1). This leaves the man with the interpretation and hope that he and his son probably would be protected from the desolation and evil around them, even though initially he finds them prognosticating death. He also has pleasant dreams and they are what transports the man to his pre-apocalyptic world, reminding him of love and nature and all the colours associated with those happy

times. At one point he dreams of his wife: "In dreams his pale bride came to him out of a green and leafy canopy […] She wore a dress of gauze and her dark hair was carried up in combs of ivory, combs of shell. Her smile, her downturned eyes. In the morning it was snowing again. Beads of small gray ice strung along the light wires overhead" (25). McCarthy combines both the memories of the beautiful woman and the pristine nature in this surreal image of a dream. Dreams are both recollections and reminders here. While they still provide anchorage to the man by reminiscing him of the past beauty, they also warn him of the dangers of complacency in his present existence. Dreams and nightmares are thus defining characteristics of the man's traumatic subjectivity. The boy has no dreams of the romantic past because he has not witnessed a pre-apocalyptic world.

The good dreams also function as tools of escapism for the man. But he also realizes the dangers inherent in this diversion. He knows that hanging on to the past will endanger the present life of his son. It was in fact the nightmares that gave him the impetus to fight. The assertion of the inverted values in the post-apocalyptic scenario is made by the sense of good dreams as seen frightening and menacing while nightmares are seen to be reassuring, as they show what the two characters are persevering in the world they inhabit.

The ethical consciousness underlying the novel runs parallel to the traumatic turns in the novel. The concern of the father for the son shows the ethical turn of the novel as a permeating preoccupation. At the very outset one is convinced of the fact that the man is worried about nothing but his son. The man feels that it is his duty to protect the boy. He always keeps a pistol with him with this purpose and the pistol is handed over to the boy when they go inside the house.

Hard times of winter and snow symbolically work well in the narrative density of the novel. The phrase "nuclear winter" is highly significant both to the material and spiritual space of *The Road*. It is through this winter that the boy and the man move on towards the south with a hope for a better life though the man is convinced of the fact that hope is all in vain. The crisscrossing of hope and despair, fear and safety of the characters is seen throughout the journey. When they carry a grocery cart full of their belongings and provisions for their travel, the readers are able to note their optimism for future, but simultaneously the readers are also always made aware of the ironic gloom of them being without enough food and other necessary provisions. Another thing that keeps the readers and the characters disturbed is the man's persistent cough which has served an ominous sign from the beginning. Towards the end the father is caught in a bad cough and he spits blood on the grey snow. Both pathos and chaos find expression in this symbolic gesture.

Again, the myriad images that pass before the man remind him of the past and the reader is caught in a dichotomous oscillation between past and present throughout the narrative. The present remains of shells and the remnants of the bygone world like houses and billboards clash with each other giving them happy memories of his romantic days with his wife and the evenings he spent with his uncle. The montage effect turns gruesome when mention is made of the wife's death which she had called on herself to escape the world of trauma.

Despite all the dangers and cannibals that the father-son duo come across, a desperate attempt to achieve a life of solace and pleasure is always made by the man and the incident at the grocery store where the man finds a pop machine with a single Coca-Cola in it tellingly presents the same. He gives it to the boy and similarly he

makes such little attempts to make this doomed world a little more pleasant and hopeful. McCarthy tries to intermix these pleasant instances with the constant threat of the road agents that roams around in the background. The man even reflects on the murdering the boy to save him from the road agents though he is worried about the moral validity of the same.

The book throughout functions as mentioned above on two levels. At one level the author presents a future with a dystopic vision. Reality of the event and the style that represents it is fragmented. This disruption is instituted with the purpose of also presenting the inadequacy of language in expressing reality and has been dealt substantially in the previous chapter. In this novel, language is insufficient to encompass the traumatic experience as well as the destruction responsible for it. Language thus cannot codify both the physical and psychological landscapes of the wasteland that the protagonist navigates.

However, the coterminous relationship between the word and the world is beautifully dealt with in the narrative subtleties of the novel. The end of the world is simultaneous with the end of the word and McCarthy proposes a language that should represent the dejection and trauma of mankind as it is seen. A catalogue of memories is attempted by the author to mirror the present with a contrastive tension. In a world of misrepresentation and chaos the boy and the man attempt to maintain their moral integrity and humane sensibilities that evoke the ethical dimension of the novel.

In *The Road* the narrative is haunted by the contemporary historical moment just like any post-apocalyptic work. This could be the reason behind the novel leaving the causes of the global catastrophe ambiguous and unaddressed though one

is very much haunted by the cosmological hazards everywhere. This novel had its

birth at a very definite moment says Dianne C. Luce. McCarthy was with his young

son John at a hotel in El Paso, immediately after the September 11 attacks. She states

how McCarthy recalls looking out of the window at two or three in the early morning

and wondering how the city might look like in fifty or a hundred years. Luce quotes

him "I just had this image of these fires up on the hill and everything being laid to

waste and I thought a lot about my little boy. And so I wrote those pages and that

was the end of it" (qtd. Luce 9). This strategy of disclosing the actual spring of

calamities is perhaps to suggest the inescapable trauma of the contemporary living.

The apocalyptic sense of the ultimate fate of mankind being sealed sounds to be an

apolitical stance from the part of the writer. The author's attention seems to fall on

the state of contemporary gloom and trauma. The following passage from the text is

highly eloquent:

> The blackness he woke to on those nights was sightless and
>
> impenetrable. A blackness to hurt your ears with listening. Often he had
>
> to get up. No sound but the wind in the bare and blackened trees. He rose
>
> and stood tottering in that cold autistic dark with his arms out held for
>
> balance while the vestibular calculations in his skull cranked out their
>
> reckonings. An old chronicle. To seek out the upright. No fall but
>
> preceded by a declination. He took great marching steps into the
>
> nothingness, counting them against his return. Eyes closed, arms oaring.
>
> Upright to what? Something nameless in the night, lode or matrix. To
>
> which he and the stars were common satellite. Like the great pendulum in
>
> its rotunda scribing through the long day movements of the universe of

which you may say it knows nothing and yet know it must. It took two

days to cross that ashen scabland. The road beyond ran along the crest of

a ridge where the barren woodland fell away on every side. It's snowing,

the boy said. He looked at the sky. A single gray flake sifting down. He

caught it in his hand and watched it expire there like the last host of

Christendom. (15)

It is this "ashen scabland" that comes to the focus of McCarthy more than the causes

behind these. The bleak backdrop of the events and the monotonous world of debris

are evoked in a bare bone style with minimum amount of diction and punctuation.

The above passage shows the brevity of McCarthian prose. Conversational passages

are rendered in trimmed syntax and are completely free of quotation marks. This

conversation between the man and the boy is an example:

You think we're going to die, dont you?

I dont know. We're not going to die.

Okay.

But you dont believe me.

I dont know.

Why do you think we're going to die?

I dont know. Stop saying I dont know.

Okay.

Why do you think we're going to die?

We dont have anything to eat. We'll find something.

Okay. (100)

The lack of punctuations and coherence shows the incoherent events, uncertainity and the devastations in the reality outside. It also reflects the man's own internal conflicts. A sense of denial both in life and its expression is lucidly narrated here to highlight the picture of a world reduced to cinder and debris professing an air of complete breakdown. A civilization devoid of any regulative measures is mirrored in a language sans any punctuation marks. This social breakdown is shown through the structural incoherence of the narrative pattern.

But McCarthy makes it a point to intersperse the grim narrative of the novel with romantic lines as well. Lyrical passages in the novel typify the passionate leanings of the protagonists with a grim sense of nostalgia. *The Road* speaks out the nature of a post-apocalyptic poetic mode in presenting the doleful reality of the time. The lyrical and romantic aspect of the novel is evident in passages where he reminisces about his past. The part where he teaches his son to swim and enjoys the sight of the waterfall also evokes beauty. The description of the waterfall through which they swim together and thereby instructs the boy on the poetics of floating in water is a beautiful embodiment of the fusion of the tragic and the lyrical in the novel. Tender moments like these suggestively reincarnate the man's memory of the old world of hopes and meanings. These moments of joy shared together in between the circumstances of uncertainties and misgivings still harbinger a dream of a world where paternal love and care turns valid in the society. Again these words add to the sedate progression of the readers' thoughts:

> He lay listening to the water drip in the woods. Bedrock, this. The cold and the silence. The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered and

carried forth again. Everything uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported

in the ashen air. Sustained by a breath, trembling and brief. (2)

In the man, one finds hope for a better future that would kindle courage,

values, justice and other humane sentiments as opposed to the dog eating dog world

outside. The boy's constant concern about whether they are "carrying the fire" is

highly symbolic of the hope for a warmer and better future. The man is very

particular in telling his son stories of justice and moral values as lessons from the

past with a view to equip him to trust in the future. The disintegration of their travel

is always invoked traumatically with a number of geographical dislocations in the

linear narrative of the work and this is precisely what the title "The Road" stands for.

As the man and the boy move on, they keep trace of their location on a tattered map,

which they often should fuse together like a puzzle, every time they look at it.

McCarthy takes the readers by shock at many points. This probably is a

technique to emphasize with the unpredictability of the bleak situation before the boy

and the man. The flashes of 'happy' passages are suddenly snatched away by

gruesome descriptions. When the readers are tuned in to a narrative ease marked by

memory and dreams, the sudden description of the frightening episode of the

appearance of the road agents augments the tragic and traumatic predicament of the

characters.

The road is a metaphor for both the hardships faced in the physical terrain of

the journey by the duo as well as the conflict ridden mental state of the man trying to

protect his son. On the road they confront a band of road agents peopled in a truck

and they hide themselves in the dense forest nearby. Meanwhile the truck breaks

down and one of the road agents sees them in their hiding. As one of these road

agents tries to grab the boy, his father shoots him in the head and both the father and the son escape into the dark woods. As the pistol now is left with a single bullet, it is kept for the boy for later use. It is the ethical conscience that is evinced by the boy's innocent query regarding their crime of a murder and still being good. The man reassures the boy about their moral goodness despite the felony.

On another instance, they come across three men and a pregnant woman carrying a black thing skewered over the coals. The boy suddenly notices it and buries his face against the man. McCarthy writes: "Oh Papa, he said. He turned and looked again. What the boy had seen was a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit. He bent and picked the boy up and started for the road with him, holding him close. I'm sorry, he whispered I'm sorry" (276). Here the author is successful in presenting what catastrophe can do to man. The worst face of humanity is portrayed in the preying of the young infant. This stands in contrast to the ethically inclined father and son duo who still hinges on to what makes humans human.

The divine inclination of the man is always defined in terms of his relationship with the boy who is considered to be a holy being, sacred as a source of light for the man in these times of tumult. The man is convinced of the fact that if there is an evidence for God, it is the boy.

In a traumatic world which is unhinged by overwhelming devastations, the possibility of a wholesome representation through the medium of language of the old order is nullified. As a major concern of the present study it is not just that language is unable to capture the traumatic experience of the destruction of nature and human culture, but with the destruction of the 'signifieds', the signifiers too are endangered:

The world shrinking down around a raw core of parsible entities.

The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors.

The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one

believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much

was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its

reality. (88-89)

All that is there in the world exists by way of language and all of language

depends on the world and the human race. The devastation of mankind is literally the

erasure of language- "The last instance of a thing takes the class with it" (28). The

broken sentences and terse dialogue thus reflect a world that is emptied of values and

hope. His neologisms like 'parsible' also offers more scope for interpretation.

The physical and materialistic response to the traumatic outside is represented

by the characters' starvation in the chill night. While they travel, they are on a

constant search for food, clothing, shoes, and provisions as well as the panic-stricken

lookout for road agents. In one of the towns, the boy perceives that he has seen a

dog and a little boy and he tries to chase them. His ethical conscience makes him

worried for this little boy for the remaining part of the novel.

Just like in any post-apocalyptic fiction here too one finds an episode with

cannibalistic intrusions which adds to the dark ambience of the novel. There is a

scene in the novel where the man and the boy find a couple of naked people kept

alive for others to feed on. The father and son flee just as the road agents return.

They hide in the woods again through the dark and chilly night with no way out. The

man even feels that it was this day that he would kill his son to protect him from a

more gruesome death by the cannibals. But they survive this incident too and escape unnoticed.

The traumatic subjectivity of the two characters is neatly presented with the mysterious menace they pass through in the vicissitudes of their life. The trajectory of their journey down the road is marked by a number of markers, mostly dark ones. As they move on in this desperate journey with the pressing cold and biting hunger, nearing death, the man's dreams take happy colours with the thoughts of his wife. The man and the boy also stumble upon another mysterious experience as the man feels something strange and mysterious under his feet as he steps from a house they come across to the shed nearby. As he digs, he finds a plywood door in the ground. The little one is horrified and he begs his father not to open it. The sense of menace and fear looms large throughout the scene. He believes in taking risks and opens the door to find out what is hidden beneath. The chemical toilet that they find there is one of the powerful symbols in *The Road* that epitomises the technocratic world around. When they discover a bunker full of canned food and cots to sleep on, the man realizes that it is a sanctuary for them to live on. The boy feels so much gratitude to the people who leave it behind though the thought of their deaths disturbs him. He seeks solace in the belief that they may be in heaven. The boy's traumatic subjectivity is marked by his strong faith and sense of selflessness.

The real and the unreal, the past and the present and, hope and despair crisscross many of the events in this novel. The man whittling fake bullets from the branch of a tree to fill the pistol having just one genuine bullet so as to make the gun heavy and loaded is an example. An air of improbability hovers over their very existence throughout their journey. The episode where they meet Ely is laden with

memory of the past and good old days which are now placed in the background of uncertainties and mysteries. When they pursue their travel towards south, both of them come across moderate towns and landscapes that work as remnants of the old world, both literally and metaphorically. They catch sight of bones of dead animal and humans, empty houses, barns, and stranded vehicles. All these images try to elaborate the emptiness and uncertainties in the mindscape of the protagonists as well.

Pathetic fallacy dominates the whole narrative conscience towards the end of the novel and the mindscape and the landscape synchronize in orchestrating the horrendous situation around. When they arrive at the coast they find the water gray and this leads to complete disappointment but the father reassures the boy and he runs to the waves and swims in the water. This event raises their spirits.

As the plot progresses we find the boy getting a fever resulting in the total dejection of the man. When the boy recovers partly, they explore the beach and when they come back they find their cart and supplies stolen. They follow the thief to the road, and the man threatens him with the pistol. Despite the boy's cries and pleadings, the man strips the thief naked and gets back their cart. The ethical conscience in the boy upsets him over the plight of the thief. Nemesis follows and the father who gets shot in the leg with an arrow is left with a limp and a gory wound. When they travel further inland, their journey takes tougher turns and the man's wound gets worse. At the end he realizes that he may not be able to get up again. Earlier he had planned to kill the boy if he himself were to die to save the boy from the clutches of the cruel world. Now he drops the plan and tells the boy to keep going towards south "carrying the fire." The man dies with the boy by his side.

Three days are spent by the boy with the body of his father by his side and then he sets off all alone. He immediately encounters a group of good guys – a man and woman with a little boy and girl. The boy prefers to believe them when they ask him to join their family, and they set off together.

The novel ends with a beautiful lyrical memory of a brook trout that once lived in the mountain streams:

> Once there were brook trouts in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. Polished and muscular and torsional. On their backs were vermiculate patterns that were maps of the world in its becoming. Maps and mazes. Of a thing which could not be put back. Not be made right again. In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery. (37)

McCarthy concludes the novel on a note of hope, reassuring one's faith in man and the world he is familiar with. The fact that the son survives marks the survival of goodness, faith and innocence. The boy marks the beginning of a new world.

If *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Road* unravel the traumatic vicissitudes of individual lives in the backdrop of social unrest, *Alas, Babylon* borders on the societal and cultural aspect of trauma and the effect upon individuals thereafter. Unlike many of the post-apocalyptic works taken in the present study, *Alas, Babylon* does not relate just the story of individual subjectivity in the traumatic backdrop and his/her survival, but the novel narrates the traumatic subjectivity of a social group. But predominantly it is about the protagonist Randy Bragg who in the face of

disaster and trauma is able to rise beyond his indulgent life to build a sense of community amongst the people of Fort Repose founded on love, trust, sharing and caring.

The novel is based in America in the aftermath of a nuclear war and Pat Frank, the author places the presumable setting of the novel in the late 1950s, when the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union was at its extreme height. The novel provides us with a graphic picture of the pressing concerns of the Americans in these years. The writer's choice to avoid proper dates regarding any of the events in the novel suggests his faith in the fact that these events could happen at any time anywhere, again asserting the universality of his art.

This post-apocalyptic novel depicts the traumatic subjectivity of those who survive a nuclear holocaust that ravages the United States and devastates a thousand years of civilization overnight resulting in the horrifying death of tens of millions of people instantly. But the pivotal focus of the novel falls on the surviving community in a small town in Florida which is surprisingly spared with an option for confronting the darkness. It is the power of this new surviving community which kindles a small ray of hope in this bleak darkness and this forms one of the prime concerns of the present study. It is their hope, determination and faith that lead to the ethical turn of the traumatic subjects here. The following passage grimly reflects the traumatic ambience of the novel:

> The lights went out in the room, the radio died, and at the same time the world outside was illuminated, as at midday. At that instant Randy faced the window and he would always retain, like a color photograph printed on his brain, what he saw-a red fox frozen against the

Admiral's green lawn. It was the first fox he had seen in years. Thus the

lights went out, and in that moment civilization in Fort Repose retreated a

hundred years. (84)

Randy Braggs, a former soldier leads a community of his neighbours in

Florida in the sinister shadow of the nuclear holocaust with a faith rooted in the

ethics of brotherhood and solidarity. In a nutshell the plot line of the novel is set in

the 1950s and revolves around Fort Repose which is a normal southern town whose

apparent order and harmony is dubious in the backdrop of the post nuclear disaster.

Many of the instances in the novel point to the ambience of nuclear attack. Randy's

brother Col. Mark Bragg's warning about the imminent war through a telegram is an

example. The titular phrase "Alas, Babylon" is the warning code that Mark sends his

wife and children and he exhorts them to live with Randy in his hometown. An air of

menace is seen looming large in the narrative conscience similar to that of

Fahrenheit 451 and *The Road.* The house of Mark Bragg which is situated in Omaha

is a major target of the nuclear attack and he wants to ensure that his family is safe

and sends them to Fort Repose. However this place too is not completely insulated

from the effects. The people here too have to face problems with the lack of electric

supply and other necessities that humans normally take for granted.

At Fort Repose, the exterior serenity of the small town is complicated by the

presence of three communities whose temperamental variations are put into grave

scrutiny by the author. Characters like Edgar Quisenberry are portrayed as the

embodiments of a fear struck subjectivity. In contrast, people like Randy Bragg are

more afraid of the harm befalling the ones he loves. This novel too dwells on the

nuances arising from the complications of human-techno interactions. Uncertainty

becomes the footnote of these survivors' lives and this leads the novel's characters to attach ever closer to one another, constituting a community in the midst of the wreckage to pacify their terror torn existence. Here, traumatic subjectivity is drawn out in the background of the fear of collapse of the social harmony and ethical order as an aftermath of nuclear war.

Further, these communities are primarily constituted by the prosperous whites of Fort Repose, the black community living in the suburbs of the town, and the Minorcans and poor whites situated in the adjacent Pistolville. The community feeling that is necessitated by the traumatic subjectivity of each member is to be seen as a product of the ethical dimension of this work. The ethical bonding is strengthened by the sense of uneasiness that lurks in the background especially by the political climate rooted in the tug of war for nuclear weapons between the U S and the Soviets.

The aftermath of the disaster is evident from the trauma that the characters share:

> "Eight babies today, three of them preemies. I've got the preemies in San Marco hospital. I don't know whether they'll make it or not. The hospital's a mess. Cots end to end on every corridor. A good many of them are accident cases, a few gunshot wounds. And all this, mind you, with only three casualties caused directly by the war-three cases of radiation poisoning." "Radiation?" Randy said. "Around here?" Suddenly the word had a new and immediate connotation. It was now a sinister word of lingering death, like cancer. (78)

The temperamental anguish of the characters in witnessing a society collapse before their eyes and the debilitating sickness brought about by the radiation exposure evokes in the readers a kind of trans-generational empathy which is crucial in any trauma related studies. Suffering becomes a telling reality in the life of this new world order. Among the threatening order of the day, the persistent menace of starvation and death haunts them like a shadow. In such a simmering reality outside their community the traumatic subjects in the novel manage to overcome their affliction and pain by the concerted effort of uniting as a group with a united mission of a collective solace, under the leadership of Randy Braggs.

When the war breaks out, the big cities in Florida get attacked but Repose being far away is spared from huge damage. The city was spared even from radioactive fallout as a result of the wind nearby. The individual's response to the circumstantial surroundings is shown by Randy's realization that it would take new turns in the imminent future so he needs to begin to stock up on provisions along with Helen. Regarding the medical aid he brings Dr. Gunn to the hotel where he stays.

The individual pitted against the surroundings outside, confronting the trials and tribulations becomes an embodiment of traumatic subjectivity in almost all the novels taken in the present study. *Alas, Babylon* constitutes a model of such a space where the conflicting forces between the individuals' needs and the social reality resulting in the traumatic existence of life interact.

Here Frank explicates how individuals respond to unexpected twists and turns in the world order. The protagonist equips himself always. He rises to the necessary occasion keeping a calm composure marked by a conscience to care for his family

and community. The character Dan is an inevitable presence in any discussion regarding the individual's ethical response to the traumatic situations. He poses himself to be a medical expert to get along with the situation for himself and the people around. Societal consciousness of these characters is to be problematized in a space of trauma and ethics. Characters like Florence and Alice too belong to the same cluster of people who highlight social values in hours of trauma and crises. Their perseverance and ethical courage is placed in contrast to the behavior of Edgar Quisenberry, who holds the bank together in the afternoon and finally breaks down and commits suicide when he comes to realize that money has suddenly become worthless. The trauma related to the fear of the unknown is aptly captured in these words:" [Alice] had small fear of death, and of man none at all, but the formlessness of what was to come overwhelmed her" (38). Dan's epitaph: "Some people melt in the heat of crisis and come apart like fat in the pan. Others meet the challenge and harden" is highly suggestive in this context. This picture can be visualized in the metaphor of what Helen sees when she opens the freezer: "That morning, when Helen apprehensively opened the freezer, she found several hundred pounds of choice and carefully wrapped meat floating in a noxious sea of melted ice cream and liquified butter" (63). This stands symbolic of the physical destruction caused by the nuclear war as well as the inner consciences of the characters.

The ethical conscience in the traumatic background gets highlighted in many instances in the novel. When Randy knows that the water supply would fail once the electrical supply is cut off, he makes electric current by connecting his house to the artesian used by the Henrys. Soon he connects all the other houses in the locality, the well making a tiny community linked by the water supply. Within a couple of days,

the electricity fails and at this time, Lib McGovern's parents are taken to his house for rescue and safety. These lines sum up the power of the community knit by Bragg: "By then, the Bragg home was linked to the houses of Admiral Hazzard, Florence Wechek, and the Henrys not only by an arterial system of pipes [...] but by other common needs" (175). All these show the ethical dimensions of how a community functions.

Many of the chapters in the novel depict how ingenuity gets transformed to the commonplace during a necessary occasion when one comes to certainty that replacements are no longer available in a war torn atmosphere. Each character starts to perceive that what they once thought as necessities are merely luxuries, and now these superfluous luxuries are unlikely to be seen again in their lifetime. The excessive desire for material life threatens the town of Pistolville with radiation sickness when some residents barter for silverware and jewellery, completely unaware of the fact that these are all in fact radioactive in themselves. Money loses its symbolic value and turns back into mere paper and a barter economy where a primitive mode takes form. This tunes life again into proper rhythm. Randy builds a community based on trust and brotherhood. His decision to have more faith in the Henrys who are socially and economically less privileged, than the Mayor and the other well known people of the place projects his sense of democracy and intuition: "As they unloaded, Randy considered the Henrys. They were a special problem. They were black and they were poor but in many ways closer to him than any family in Fort Repose" (48). He knew they could help him more regarding his mission of unifying the people to fight adversities and Bragg is successful in his mission of

building this community in the face of apocalypse threatening them. His subjectivity becomes that of his people.

As *Alas, Babylon* concerns traumatic subjectivity both in an individual and collective line, Nevil Shute's On *the Beach* too assumes a significant position. The novels that are analyzed in the present chapter are not books of violence, though they are products of terrible disasters like nuclear holocaust and nuclear disaster. *On the Beach* for example is a lyrical and tragic story that speaks of the heart wrenching goodness of people, a pivotal dimension of the novel that makes it partake in the trajectory of ethical turns in contemporary fiction. The mutual care that the people render each other highlights the ethical resolve that the present study caters to inform.

The novel which is set in Australia, traces the fate of a mixed group of people who are dangerously awaiting the lethal radiation that is spreading towards them from the Northern hemisphere as a result of the nuclear war in the previous year in another part of the world. The community aspect of traumatic subjectivity can be easily traced in the novel. Though the book is a delicate presentation of the tragic note of war and a detraction of the same, it is also a celebration of humanity and its innate goodness at its very best.

The plot of the novel is set in motion after a nuclear war that has completely destroyed the Northern Hemisphere resulting in the unsettled radioactive dust adrift everywhere. The imminent arrival of the radioactive cloud in southern Australia leads to the traumatic experience of the affected group in the novel and their resultant subjectivity. In Melbourne, Peter Holmes, a Lieutenant Commander assumes the position of a liaison officer to an American nuclear submarine and is made to leave

his home, his wife and kid, and the narrative gets complicated by his troubled mind. He is concerned about the fact that the radiation is destined to reach Melbourne in six months and he is away from his family. The disturbing thought adds to the traumatic ambience of the whole novel.

The desperate attempts that Peter makes throughout the novel to save his people from the nuclear disaster are highlighted in the novel. His attempt to invite Dwight to protect his home in Melbourne shows his concern over the arrival of the disaster and its consequences. He has no hopes that this can be solved by an individual and thus resorts to Dwight, the captain of the submarine from North for support. He believes in working as a team and moves towards an ethics of hope. In contrast the young woman Moira Davidson, Peter's sister who tries to drown her worries of the inevitable death awaiting them by drinking, is a telling prognostication on the gloomy landscape of the narrative which in fact, presents many instances of such self-destruction. Even Moira, after developing a bond with Dwight, starts believing in countering destruction. Dwight too is seen to depend on Moira for support later. This kind of interdependence is seen later as a mode of mutual solace and redemption. But Nevil Shute, well aware of the devastating consequences of the nuclear disaster presents his characters resorting to self-destruction and the traumatic subjectivity of his characters is marked by the dignity they show in the face of trauma before their inevitable death.

Suicide becomes quite common in the novel and this reiterates the author's concern with self-destruction where he views the very act of amassing nuclear weapons suicidal. Like Moira who drinks herself to utter oblivion before the radiation reaches to destroy them, many of the characters in *On the Beach* are

consciously trying to find out means for self-destruction. Nevil Shute attempts to

argue that nuclear war is humanity's ultimate act of self-destruction and thereby

accentuates the apocalyptic nature of the novel. Dwight's solitary reflection in

church about his family in America even while he is certain that all in the Northern

Hemisphere are no more, but keeping a delusion that they are still alive and waiting

for his return to Connecticut is one of the most poignant episodes in trauma fiction:

> He said the conventional prayer that he had been taught in
> childhood and then he sat back, looking around. The little church was
> very like the church in his own town, in Mystic, Connecticut. It even
> smelled the same. In the tranquility of the church he set himself to think
> about his family, and to visualize them. He was, essentially, a very
> simple man. He would be going back to them in September, home from
> his travels. He would see them all again in less than nine months' time.
> They must not feel when he rejoined them, that he was out of touch, or
> that he had forgotten things that were important in their lives. Junior must
> have grown quite a bit; kids did at that age. He had probably outgrown
> the coonskin cap and outfit, mentally and physically. It was time he had a
> fishing rod, a little Fiberglas spinning rod, and learned to use it. It would
> be fun teaching Junior to fish. His birthday was July the 10th. Dwight
> couldn't send the rod for his birthday, and probably he couldn't take it
> with him, though that would be worth trying. (46)

This long lyrical passage quite poignantly shows the helpless and hope-

fraught condition of the people in any apocalyptic society. Loss of one's dear ones is

definitely a major instance of trauma and the mechanism of keeping them alive in a

delusional world is only symptomatic of the trauma affected person. This has to be related to the innermost hope of survival that humans wish for and to remember his family in an atmosphere of spirituality only reaffirms this thought.

Man's helpless confrontation with technology is another grave issue that defines his traumatic subjectivity. Almost all the characters in *On the Beach* have a complex association with technology and its byproducts. These characters are very much convinced of the fact that their existence will soon come to an end due to the unrestrained lethal potential of war weapons. But, it is also ironic to note that these people are not in a position to sever themselves completely from the progress of technology. This ambivalent attitude towards machines adds extensively to the traumatic subjectivity of these characters. Individual characters like John keeps a predilection for machines and the author gives meticulous attention to the way humans operate with machines.

Humankind's uncompromising love for a technocratic world is critically problematized in the novel. John's craze for his Ferrari is an instance of how man values machines more than man himself. Even at the racetrack, Shute tries to show how human beings are more concerned about the maintenance and efficiency of the vehicles, rather than taking responsibility for the health and safety of the drivers. Again, Mary's demand for an electric lawn mower even when she knows death is near points to man's inexplicable connection to the world of technology. Even when Sunderstrom is conscious of the imminent death that awaits him in his coastal expedition near Seattle, he is careful to show his affection for the transmitter which has gone dysfunctional and is producing misleading radio signals. He loves it despite its malfunctioning. His great admiration for the machine's manufacturer is a point of

serious deliberation in the novel: "He took his hands from the key and looked at the instruments. They had done an excellent job. They had worked for two years alone and without oil or care and they were still working!" (85).

Here Shute adeptly presents the ironic nature of technology. The transmitter is used to locate if there are any traces of human life surviving in the Northern hemisphere. Again, Lieutenant Sunderstrom cannot imagine the prospect of his gadget becoming defective, he turns it off, in a way, euthanizing it to protect it from a more debilitating and destructive end that is faced by most of the war victims. This act of switching off the machine is also metaphoric of the choice of self-death or euthanasia made by the characters. Though the characters in the novel are very much aware of the detrimental effect of machines that have led to the complete destruction of humanity, they look at scientific progress with alarming respect. The portrayal of John Osborne is another instance of those characters that cannot resist the charm of well-oiled machines:

> 'Yes. I've liked motor racing all my life. I've always wanted to
> race, but I've never had enough money. Then someone told me
> about this Ferrari. Bowles died in England. I went to Mrs Bowles
> and offered her a hundred pounds for it. She thought I was crazy,
> of course, but she was glad to sell it.'
> Peter walked round the little car.
> 'I agree with her,' he said.'You're crazy. What are you going to
> do with it?'
> 'I don't know yet. I only know one thing. It's the fastest car in
> the world and I own it.'(58)

Even in his bereavement of the ones dead, he is happy at the fact that he has a car and a motorboat. The novel is peopled by those who care so much for technology and many of them opt for machines as their final companions. When Moira and John decide to put an end to their life they take their pills in cars. The ironic relationship with a technologically permeated reality has been elaborated by the author in his exploration of the traumatic subjectivity of these characters. The following passage from the text shows the characters' proclivity for technology:

> "Thank God for the brown coal."
>
> The farmer turned to where the separator was still running. "That's right. We'd be in a pretty mess but for the electricity." He slipped an empty churn into the stream of skim milk deftly and pulled the full churn away. "Tell me, Mr. Holmes," he said. "Don't they use big digging machines to get the coal? Like bulldozers, and things like that?" The officer nodded. "Well, where do they get the oil to run those things?"
>
> "I asked about that once," Peter said. "They distill it on the spot, out of the brown coal. It costs about two pounds a gallon." (12)

The author does not take sides or criticize directly man's love of technology. Neither does he dwell at length on its ethical dimensions; rather, he presents a balanced view of the same. He is conscious of the inevitability of machines, but at the same time leaves the reader to strike a balance between the pros and cons of using technology from his/her reading experience. It is more of contemplation on whether man should be subjugated by machines or vice versa. The inseparable and imperceptible relationship between a technologically oriented and naturally inclined life of the modern man is beautifully presented in the following passage:

He left his bicycle at the garage that had serviced his small car in

bygone days. It serviced no cars now. Horses stood stabled where the

cars had been, the horses of the business men who lived outside the town,

who now rode in jodhpurs and plastic coats to stable their horses while

they commuted up to town in the electric train. The petrol pumps served

them as hitching posts. In the evening they would come down on the

train, saddle their horses, strap the attaché case to the saddle, and ride

home again. The tempo of business life was slowing down and this was a

help to them; the 5:03 express train from the city had been cancelled and

a 4:17 put on to replace it. (12)

The mutual substitutions or replacements that take place in the biosphere and

technosphere are highlighted succinctly in the above passage. The cyclic inevitability

that follows is subtly drawn here.

The nature-culture binary is a recurring thematic concern in *On the*

Beach as typical of many of Shute's novels. Here the major argument of the thesis in

its problematisation of the representation of traumatic subjectivity in the symbolic

order, is touched upon. The Symbolic realm of culture which is technologically

defined is now to be understood in its failure of communication, accelerated by

man's inevitable separation from nature. Shute brilliantly portrays this helpless

condition of man. The oscillation between delusion and pragmatics is predominantly

seen in the narrative complexities of the novel. Where to place being- within sanity

or delusion – becomes a point of deliberation in the novel. So much of the events

with their extreme intensity trouble the settled sense of consciousness of the

characters and they fail to define the true nature of normalcy and sanity. Dreaming

and re-dreaming play major roles in the life of people like Dwight who, for instance, as mentioned earlier believes that his family is alive waiting for him in Connecticut despite his staunch sense of practical wisdom and convictions. Delusion turns to be a practical sense of language to communicate at the time of traumatic existence and tragic situations. The characters alter their routine in a frame of love and hope rooted in their vocations. Work, as elaborated later, becomes a solace for them to cope with the situation.

An ambience of surrealism lurks in the background and characters appear slightly insane when they get completely involved in their routine. They turn comfortable with this insanity. Peter and Mary's obsession with their planning on how to arrange their garden years down the road appears ridiculous at first, but this assumes meaning when one relates the experience to the total fabric of the novel. But it is human hope for survival or at least to live with dignity as much as long as possible, that reasserts itself here. John and Douglas are slightly radical in one sense and they are probably the only two characters who appear to take advantage of the last few days to live out their dreams. The former with his racing, and the latter with his vintage wine celebrate their last days and they break away with conventions. Nevil Shute subtly projects the idea that among all the characters in this trauma trajectory these two men have the most realistic take on the situation they are enmeshed in. Assumption and knowledge, delusion and reality crisscross and are put to finer scrutiny in the novel.

Characters like Moira bring to light the inherent dangers of science and technology and they make space for an exploration of the subtle boundary line between accepted science and rational belief systems. When Moira asks if the

Australian government will provide a record of how to make a cobalt bomb her demand is all the more potential to its subtext. Her attitude is always presented in an ambivalent tone expressing the idea of the equivocal nature of technology. It is an acknowledged fact that scientific progress is good for humanity but the irrational and injudicious use of technology has led to its ruin. In the backdrop of this reality nuclear radiation will ironically be the one and only lasting legacy of technological progress and human knowledge, materializing the dictum- Knowledge leads to power and power to destruction. This pertinent concern of contemporary fiction is tellingly explored in *On the Beach.*

It is the ethical edge of the author's consciousness that dominates the text in one way and the characters seem to only define a strain of his subjectivity. The search for scientific knowledge at the cost of human safety is a common theme in contemporary fiction and the present novel gives categorical examples for human angst in the face of knowledge. Shute attempts to reiterate the idea that while scientists are repulsed by the war promoted by their own brainchild, they never cease to get involved in conducting lethal experiments.

John is determined to discover the effects of radiation poisoning irrespective of what it might do to people and unmindful of the ethical dimension of it. It is precisely this attitude that has lead to the creation of weapons of mass destruction in the first place. Though Moira is quite opposed to John's scrupulous ideas, he is not apologetic for his deadly viewpoints. Throughout the author too is objective in his presentation and observes human behaviour with deliberately contrived objectivity. He leaves the judgments to the readers. Having presented the devastating consequences of nuclear war in a telling narrative, it is obvious that the readers'

conscience requires no struggle to make ethical judgments. The novel again assumes an important position in the ethical parlance of reading when we evaluate the novel in the light of reflections from critics like Wayne. C. Booth who argues: "Ethical criticism will be any effort to show how the virtues of narratives relate to the virtues of selves and societies, or how the ethos—the collection of virtues—of any story affects or is affected by the ethos of any given reader" (12).

The traumatic subjects on the other hand, do not find their ethical resolves in the conventional pattern of ideologies, but they find it in mutual dependence and societal anchoring. The way they operate with the symbolic order adds to the ethical dimension of the novel. The characters in this novel try to handle the idea of an imminent devastation and the related trauma with dignity. Once they know their end is near, they do not succumb to the fear in the conventional sense. They draw an ethics of redemption by the acceptance of the reality. They try to draw courage in the face trauma by getting connected to what is close to them, be it being close to their loved ones in a delusional world; getting linked to their material passion; engaging in their vocations knowing well they need not work further for their sustenance; or administering a dignified, self-imposed death.

The motif of work most strikingly appears in the novel for the first time when Peter decides to leave his family for work when radiation sickness was sure to destroy their lives. He is not ready to go desperate, instead he finds meaning in life by being true to his career. He is passionate towards his work as many of the characters in the novel are. The following passage from the novel shows his excitement over the job he is going to carry out:

The red Oldsmobile was fading to a dream. It was only fifteen

months since he had driven it to the airport, but now he could hardly

remember what the instrument panel looked like or on which side the

seat adjustment lever lay. It must be still in the garage of his Connecticut

home, untouched perhaps, with all the other things that he had schooled

himself not to think about. One had to live in the new world and do one's

best, forgetting about the old; now it was push bikes at the railway station

in Australia. (24)

Here Peter is shown to be stoic and his last days are being spent in work

which is both a spiritual salvation and a distraction from his traumatic sense of being

attuned to hopelessness of a bleak and empty future. On the other hand Moira finds

solace in drinking but she also turns to respect work, especially towards the end of

her life. Many minor but subtle instances are incorporated into the narrative to

reiterate the respectability and dignity of work. During Peter's last trip to Melbourne,

we find him taking a ride on a tram driven by someone who is resolved to continue

driving to his last breath: "It had a driver, but no conductor; the days of paying fares

were over. He spoke to the driver. The man said, "I'll go on driving this here bloody

tram till I get sick, cock. Then I'll drive it to the Kew depot and go home. That's

where I live, see? I been driving trams for thirty seven years, rain or shine, and I'm

not stopping now" (268).

Shute also proposes the idea that all the characters do their jobs not in the

normative sense of the term but they do it in a delusory way without thinking deeply

about why they are doing it. Surrealism is at work. The question of agency is at risk

in traumatic subjectivity and the author tellingly presents the idea in a couple of

characters' attitude to work. Those who are employed in the government machinery are interpellated to follow orders without much reflection on them. For example one finds Peter fighting in the war for a short while without an idea on why he was fighting. Conformity without agency in the military, especially among its leadership, seems to be one of the crucial reasons for the unchecked progression of war which further complicates the traumatic selves of the people involved. Shute, going by his usual style, subtly attempts to present the other side of the coin as well.

However, how the characters cope with the inevitable end in the face of a post-apocalyptic scenario is the predominant theme of the novel. Suicides are not a moral wrong here. Humans are normally expected to exhibit violence or abnormal behaviour at moments of extreme trauma. But here most of the characters maintain their composure and exhibit unity even in their choice of death. Peter could have outlived Mary and his daughter but they take their pills peacefully and wait for death in their bed. The very announcement by Dwight that he is going to America with his submarine and his men is in fact, a declaration of another kind of a suicidal mission, as there is no coming back. Their traumatic subjectivity is marked by a sense of oneness.

Here their ethical turn is not rooted in religion and they find means of salvation through their work as a spiritual experience. Just like almost all the works by Shute, *On the beach* too is stoic in its approach and presents a community who finds self-fulfilment in the experience where the characters work to the last day of their very existence. It is not just one individual that is highlighted here but rather a community that exuberate calm in the face of devastation. Unlike the other novels

taken up for study, Shute does not leave hope for survival. But he makes his stance clear in spite of his objective way of presenting the nature-culture conflict.

The novels discussed in this chapter present the existential unease brought in by war, pestilence and ecocide which together can be categorized under what is defined as post-apocalyptic fiction. These novels are set in a world put to waste and ruin by catastrophes, exploring the ecological, emotional, and sociological traumas that take place in the dawn of the apocalypse. Common to the novels is the role of memory –memory of the past giving way to the onset of the days to come. Trauma narratives are inevitably inescapable from memory and narrative is impossible without language. By invoking memory these novels undo the devastation in a surrogate of language and narrative.

These novels also share the apocalyptic anxiety as it is generally seen as a historical articulation in the contemporary artifacts reflecting the freight of existential pressures and ontological insecurity. Though it is usual to get this anxiety reflected in literature even in the earlier years, it became problematized in the institutionalized form of theoretical conversation with the publication of writings like the novels under reference. This traumatic version of imagining the end of existence has been installed itself into artistic and fictional imagination producing arid wastelands on the one side brave new worlds on the other side and where we place the ethical turn of these works.

The urge for apocalyptic form of narrative has been conceptualized by critics like Teresa Heffernan who informs about the resurgence of apocalyptic narrative in fiction, poetry, film, politics, and religion, with "its strange pleasure in the catastrophic cleansing of the world, its reassuring division between the righteous

and the damned, and its disturbing comfort in knowing absolute finality and order"
(150). A new literary landscape and ideological underpinnings were necessitated by
the chaos in the post 9/11 conscience, the war in Iraq, ecological disaster like global
warming and so on. This world order brought about a space for a narrativization of
existential trauma which would turn to be an effort to come to terms with the crises-
ridden present and to move toward a hopeful future. So as we see in the present
project the post-apocalyptic works in trauma literature are to be place and analysed in
terms of their historical specificity as well as their traumatic dimension of universal
appeal.

All the works taken for study are ethically oriented but in some works one
notes a sense of biblical echo working in the background. *Fahrenheit 451* is a
brilliant example for this biblical echo. As Frank Kermode puts it in his *The Sense of
an Ending*, the catastrophes of the present era is to be understood in terms of
apocalypse, an idea widespread due to the widespread influence of the Bible, and in
turn in designing the narrative frameworks of trauma literature. The term apocalypse
is always linked with ideas of resurgence and revelation in the history of its religious
and ethical paradigm. Teressa Hefferman writes about this biblical influence in her
essay "Can the Apocalypse Be Post?" She states that the biblical model like the
familiar model of history has been ingrained into the Western cultures to understand
reality as progressing from a beginning to an unavoidable end and Western readers or
rather readers in general anticipate literary works to reflect their own knowledge and
perception of the world, more often wanting a conventional closure. Heffernan states:
"For such readers, and for Kermode, fictional endings are mini expressions of a faith
in a higher order or ultimate pattern that though itself will remain perhaps forever

obscure, nevertheless, lends a sense of purpose to our existence in the world"

(Heffernan 4).

Both in *Road* and in *Fahrenheit 451* the influence of biblical notion of

apocalypse is quiet obvious. James Berger in his *After the End: Representations of*

Post-Apocalypse speaks about the universality of an apocalyptic sense of narrative in

the trauma fiction. :

> The end itself, the moment of cataclysm, is only part of the point
>
> of apocalyptic writing. The apocalypse as eschaton is just as importantly
>
> the vehicle for clearing away the world as it is and making possible the
>
> post-apocalyptic paradise or wasteland. Temporal sequences become
>
> confused. Apocalyptic writing takes us after the end, shows the signs
>
> prefiguring the end, the moment of obliteration, and the aftermath. The
>
> writer and reader must be both places at once, imagining the post-
>
> apocalyptic world, then paradoxically "remembering" the world as it
>
> was, as it is. (Berger 6)

As we see in these novels, the writers resort to an attempt at imagining what

is unimaginable and unknowable which Berger calls the "post-apocalyptic

representational impasse" (6). It is here that we see the relevance of a school of

reading rooted in trauma drawn from Freud, Lacan and Derrida. As it is mentioned

in the second chapter of this project, a traumatic event cannot be fully and adequately

represented in apocalyptic narratives as we are provided with a medium with

limitations to symbolize them. Instead what the writers attempt is to project the

eschatological anxieties and misgivings from the past to the future. So the post

apocalyptic novels can be presented to be not foresights but retrospections of fears, traumas, and memories.

One of the major concerns that the present study addresses is the capacity and incapacity to symbolize and represent the anxieties of the contemporary societies and this issue constitutes the quintessential reason behind the popular appeal of the post-apocalyptic fiction. This genre provides us a panoramic glimpse of a future tuned in fears and fantasies derived from the sociopolitical context which provides a nightmarish site where the world has ceased to be. Here all the works make a desperate travel across an arid, devastated, corpse-strewn landscape which has obliterated much of civilization and culture from the face of the earth. This kind of a presentation reinstates the devastating consequences of nuclear war and disturbs the readers' conscience to rethink and remodel the notions of national security, progress and development.

Moreover, in these novels one finds the ambiguous relationship between the world and its representational tool, language. The representation is ruptured as language can no longer adequately codify the barren and disrupted physical and psychological landscapes of the wasteland that the protagonists in these novels navigate. The authors set the narrative consciousnesses in memories and hopes where culture, society, religion and virtues are buried deep beneath the ashes of a vanquished land. The uncertainty of expression results in the incommunicability of language where the end of the world becomes the end of the word. The narrative landscapes of these works desire a new language which should mirror the desperate situation that besets humankind. The haunting days of the past catalogue the memories and the problematics in their representation become the pivotal issue in the

novels, despite the novelists' attempts to use creative language and narrative strategies.

Post apocalyptic narratives are characterized by the current historical moments and an ambiguous sense pervades throughout these novels. These novels focus more on the fact of the ultimate fate of mankind getting sealed rather than disclosing the proper source of the devastations as it is especially seen in the work of McCarthy. The desperate aspects of such events are reiterated by asserting the impossibility of getting the disasters prevented. The incommunicability and desperate remedies complicate the traumatic vehemence of these writings. Individual and social trauma is highlighted in these, especially *Alas, Babylon* and *On the Beach* not as an overt social criticism or political commentary but a psychological probing into collective and individual conscience of a disaster torn folk.

These works of fiction, like many other novels, operate within the framework of language which is bleak, reflecting a fractured world marked by tragic memories and obvious frustrations. The inevitable impasse brought about by the absence of linguistic correlative and artistic inexpressibility due to the lack of proper stuff of fiction invokes the past, attempts to reverse the ruin, and animates memory in an arid landscape of utter hopelessness. This desperate hopelessness has been symbolically transmuted in these novels. The emptiness of the landscape as well as the space void of referents in fact justifies the fact that many of the characters are not accorded with proper names. Even the haunting memory of the lost past has been symbolically transferred with the gruesome images of simmering debris as it is tellingly pictured in *Fahrenheit 45*.

Here, language is presented as a tool for expressing the hauntology (Collin Davis coinage) that carries with it the remnants of past glory, of bygone memories of things with traces of long lost beauty. Though these works present devastated, battered and charred lives and landscapes, they also leave a glimmer of hope beneath the ashes of the present. This glimmer metaphorically typifies the fire of humanity which would transport him to an ethical haven. The ironic beauty of these works, especially in *The Road* lies in the proclamation of the end of language and reality, of beauty, and of ethics, all the while acting as a witness against itself. The simultaneously pacific and violent, lyrical and rough, causes an uncertainty in an expectation of an ultimate ending, the kind of narrative closure as it is conceptualized by Kermode in his theoretical paradigm. That is why many of the novels taken here tend to leave us without a proper sense of ending. In post-apocalyptic narratives "the end is never the end", says Berger (5).

Another major concern that these novels addresses is the trajectory of science fiction- its validity and problematics in representing human misery and trauma.   Being a form of writing that deals primarily with the impact of the real or imagined science upon society or individuals, it concerns itself with the consequences of scientific discovery if proper science is more concerned with discovery itself. It is the visionary nature of fiction artists to predict the aftermath of nuclear weapons and scientific advancements.

Despite the limitations of language the novels under present discussion prepare fictional grounds for the proper portrayal of the tragic imagination. As Isaac Asimov writes, "modern science fiction is the only form of literature that consistently considers the nature of the changes that face us, the possible consequences, and the

possible solutions" (201). Ray Bradbury seems to be fully agreeing with Asimov in the light of his statement when he says "Science fiction is the history of towns and cities yet unbuilt, ghosting our imagination and lifting us to rise up and find hammers and nails to build our dreams before they blow away" (*Yestermorrow* 123) and the present novel is a case in point.

Other novels too make use of a science fiction narrative mode as resolve to represent the traumatic experiences caused by the perils around scientific progress. In such traumatic events it is inherently presented the tension between memory and forgetfulness is implicitly presented. Despite the wounds of their memories, the traumatic subjects usually fear that a release from the past to resort to the present would mean a kind of negation of their identities together with the obliteration of their past. To acclimatize with this complex situation writers resort to science fiction as a narrative mode with a view to presenting the psychological responses to the scientific advancements. As Cathy Caruth writes on the paradoxical aspect of representation which presupposes trauma's unrepresentability, in integrating the traumatic memory as part of the past, there is the risk of understanding "too much," to lose "the event's essential incomprehensibility" (*Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 154). Anne Whitehead eloquently envisages this problem as inseparable from trauma fiction: "Narrative needs to understand enough, so that it can convey a forgotten and excluded history, but it should simultaneously resist understanding too much, so that it can also convey the disruptive and resistant force of a traumatic historicity" (Whitehead 160).

The works analysed in the present chapter open up a space for visualizing trauma belatedly, as an engagement that allows for dialogue for both the characters

and the readers thereby instigating a textual memory – a site for housing the past traumatic moment framed in a poetics of science fiction. The novels are haunted by aesthetics of survival that constitutes acting out and working through recursively. The stories could be seen as some form of narrative rediscovery to heal the characters engaging in emotional communication with themselves, reconstructing their traumatic memory entirely in the devastated background of science and lethal progress. While creating a narrative space for traumatic subjects' voices to stand witness to their own suffering and come to terms with their loss and ruin, these novels simultaneously engage the readers, in an attempt to empathize, which is elaborated in the fifth chapter of the present study.

CHAPTER 4

Between the Wound and the Voice: Locating the Self in
A Gift Upon the Shore, Children of the Dust* and *Voices from Chernobyl

The novels *A Gift Upon the Shore* by M.K. Wren and *Children of the Dust* by Louise Lawrence are analysed in the backdrop of large scale fictional nuclear disasters in this chapter as in the previous one and it also attempts to study how the traumatic experience of the characters at the catastrophic junctures define the narrative aesthetic of these works of fiction. These novels written by women, give importance to women characters and reflect on women's subjectivity in the background of nuclear catastrophe. Both these works are noted for their haunting narratives that present the grim but gritty experiences of the traumatic subjects in the desolate backdrop of post-apocalyptic times. This chapter in particular presents a group of women whose traumatic subjectivity is marked not by the negation of the catastrophe that has affected them but by a will to replant and resuscitate a new life order in the background of a collective trauma. *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* is a popular work of nonfiction, by the well known writer Svetlana Alexievich who presents a realistic picture of those affected by the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl. Select testimonies from her work have been taken to augment the dangers of nuclear disasters and to authenticate the measure of the traumatic experiences of the characters in the fictional works.

Like most of the post-apocalypse stories, these works too, engage in an involved examination of the nightmarish scenarios of people awaiting the deadly arrival of lethal radiation spreading towards them from nuclear calamities. The two

works of fiction here revolve around the post-apocalyptic consciousness in a lyrical language capturing the frightening realism in arresting prose

The traumatic realization of the apocalyptic reality prepares the fictional and narrative landscape for novels and reportage selected. In the light of these works, it is argued that a peculiar genealogy of nightmarish imaginaries operate themselves on a level of haunting memories repressed but revealed through images and narratives of traumatic happenings in modern history, like the nuclear disaster. The traumatic subjectivity of the victims is revealed through the proliferation of images of humans who are literally reduced to the state of the living dead in the gruesome order of the day.

M K Wren's *A Gift upon the Shore* is another influential work that deals with post-apocalyptic trauma and also borders on the theme of conflict between knowledge and religion. This novel explores the dystopic imaginaries of contemporary trauma fiction in the background of the political problems and anxieties that these liminal ontological landscapes raise in the contemporary era. It also traces the traumatic subjectivity of the characters with a societal consciousness, set in a space immediately after a massive destruction of human civilization. The fictional setting is placed at a farmhouse on the Oregon coast where a small community survives after the colossal destruction. It is the traumatic subjectivity of this community that becomes the point of analysis here.

The story revolves around the small group of survivors caught in the aftermath of catastrophe and specifically explores the traumatic subjectivity of the women in the novel. The narrator, Mary Hope and the artist Rachel Morrow along

with other women resuscitate the miniscule population from sinking into regression and how they manage to do so add to the ethical angle of the novel.

Mary Hope describes her life as a survivor, 40 years after much of humanity has almost got destroyed. Her life on a seaside farm with a couple of survivors including old women forms the first post-apocalypse generation. This community of survivors constitutes a literalist Christian group, though Mary Hope is not actively involved in their rituals and services. Her role as a teacher to the kids of this community gives her a space to probe into the intellectual landscape of their lives.

The narrative thread of the novel zigzags between the first-person account of Mary in the present and her own cataloguing of memory to her apprentice Stephen. She relates to him her grim story of the apocalypse and what ensues in the years following, and writes the story down for him to keep. Her memory recounts how she came to the farm at a time when the world was disintegrating into trauma laden chaos. She shares how the bus she travelled by was attacked by a group of "Rovers," and how she was saved by the artist Rachel Morrow who lived single on the farm with a flock of animals. It is from Mary Hope that Stephen learns how these two women foreseeing the imminent disaster had managed to escape when their neighbors were brutally killed. They sensed the horror of the contagious trauma stricken days and the imminence of the end of life and thus managed to hide out in a well-stocked basement for two weeks till things cooled down.

As noted in *Fahrenheit 451*, this novel too concerns largely with the ethical dimension of books, their humanizing effect and the wisdom preserved therein. Rachel and Mary are determined to preserve a huge body of books they have salvaged for the generations to come. They decide to keep all the books sealed until a

time when printing gets reinvented and later generations get an occasion to reproduce

them. Amidst the desolate and trauma stricken consciousness that is all pervasive in

the narrative of the novel, one finds the author making deliberate attempts to lend an

ethical edge to the episodic development of the plot. The episode where Rachel and

Mary nurses the sick man wandering in the beach back to his health and the

ideological deliberations that appear in the novel together add to the ethical

conscience of the writer:

> Whether he would remain alive was moot. Mary and Rachel
>
> carried him up the mud-slick path, and once they got him to the house,
>
> they put him in Mary's bed and stripped off his clothes. They saw the
>
> scars then, the white weals across his back, and Rachel said tightly,
>
> "Man's inhumanity to man hasn't abated, I see."
>
> His fever registered 103 degrees on Rachel's old mercury thermometer.
>
> Through the remainder of the morning and into the
>
> afternoon, they alternately bathed him with wet cloths, then when
>
> the chills struck, covered him with layers of blankets, and in the rare
>
> moments when he roused to semiconsciousness, plied him with water and
>
> willow-bark tea. They couldn't leave him alone at any time. (188)

Mary's decision to get married to Luke and have children is another instance

of the character's attempt to escape trauma through the ethical responsibility of

procreation, something that defines her traumatic subjectivity. The alternate plot line

is largely narrated by keeping intact the ethical dimension of the narrative and the

author does this with a view to helping the future generations. In this second

narrative strain, Mary tries to highlight her companion Rachel whose history and

beliefs Mary particularly tries to chronicle for Stephen to teach the later generations. When the narrative shuttles back to the present life of Mary we find that Luke is already dead and many of the earlier survivors too. An ambience of gloom pervades the whole narrative tenor, and one finds the subjectivity of Mary marked by her ethical consciousness.

It is also to be noted that her traumatic self at a point gets worsened by the later developments wherein Jeremiah's sister Miriam, who is quite suspicious of Mary's vocation, is resolved to discredit Mary's attempts. Miriam is a member of the Christian fundamentalist commune which is not ready to accept anything outside the Bible. It is the tug of war between Mary's beliefs and Miriam's commune that ironically represents the fight between open-mindedness and close-mindedness. Mary is worried about the books that Rachel has laboured so hard to procure and preserve. She even suspects that Miriam would be conspiring to murder her. She says:

> It was a terrible time, and I always had the feeling that the darkness was the shadow of death. Every night I dreamed of death, dreams that woke me up, left me shaking. I think we might've given up if we'd only had ourselves to consider. But we had the animals. We lost two goats and more chickens and rabbits, although we did get a wood stove set up in the garage. And we lost Cyrano, one of our male kittens, but the animals that lived depended on us. (145)

It is her selflessness and concern for other living beings that projects her ethical consciousness and defines her traumatic subjectivity. This she draws from the regenerative and humanizing power of books and she wishes to pass it on to the

future generation before they get engulfed by the regressive ways of the Arkites, the community of which Miriam a member.

The ordeals of Rachel Morrow are also equally relevant in the expression of women power in the face of trauma and the consequential traumatic subjectivity. The survival ethics dominates the whole of *A Gift upon the Shore* and the same has been tellingly presented in the portrayal of Rachel Morrow. The futuristic aspect of the novel has been traced in the subjective perspective of this woman and she envisages the future as a cluster of disasters that would reduce the world to debris and this fear and threat design her motives and actions. The locale, Amarna, initially witnesses the two women characters turned coldly numb with the nuclear winter. She along with Mary Hope encounters anarchy and vandalism unleashed by a couple of lunatics which add to the misery which has been metaphorically represented by the massive earthquake that ravage the whole landscape and the mindscape of the people. It is not just the physical destruction around her that disturbs her but rather the chaos stricken new world order that fails to align itself, is what agonizes her. She staunchly believes that the goodness of their culture can be restored only by educating the people and making the youngsters familiar with books. This is why she helps Mary seal the books from the Arkites who believe that any written word outside the bible is blasphemy.

The ethical leaning marking her traumatic subjectivity is complicated by the interaction between the Bible oriented and institutionalized moral conscience of the others in the commune and the personally tuned in ethical conscience of her own belief resting in a broader vision. The fanatic aspect of spiritualism in the orthodox Bible is pitted against the socially framed ethics cherished by Rachel Morrow.

A new community gets formed by the latter dimension of ethics endorsed by Rachel and Mary, completely antithetical to the strictly rationalized version of ethics advocated by Miriam who is a determined woman in her ideals. The subjectivity of Rachel is drawn in contrast to the views of the people and values around her. Rachel upholds the value of a democratic version of ethics stemming from personal and social aspects of the semantics of life, in stark contrast to the values of Miriam who advocates the philosophy of upholding Bible alone and destroying all secular texts. The secular and democratic dimension of ethics outlined in the background of their traumatic experiences is beautifully delineated in this novel.

To preserve the secular and democratic values of life, Stephen, a young and precocious boy is taught all the values preserved in Rachel's books. The threat of the destruction of books adds to her trauma and by endeavouring to protect them, she augments her ethical senses all the more.

In fact the whole narrative thread of the novel revolves around the women's conscience in general and Mary's subjective exploration of reality in particular. The novel, perhaps, could be analyzed as a novel about women subjectivity as well; their potentials, their limitations, their mutual support systems and their relationships with the other people around them. The male folk in characterization are much less scrupulously defined in this novel and they depend on the women for enlightenment and knowledge. Rachel, Mary and Miriam are noted for their strength and resourcefulness in moments of catastrophes and dangers. Rachel and Mary are seen to survive the most traumatic moments with dignity and are successful in carrying out their sublime task of solacing mankind in moments of peril. Women as both type and as individual operate with an inborn strength in the fictional world of Wren.

Even though Miriam is portrayed in a negative light, trying to thwart the attempts of Mary trying to preserve the culture of books, she is definitely presented to be a powerful woman who is strong in her own beliefs and fights for her commune. The women in *A Gift Upon the Shore* is committed to preserve their culture and they are concerned about the education of the young and the future of the community.

This women concern is typified through the portrayal of Mary Hope and Rachel Morrow. Their characterization is etched out through the narrative subtlety of the novel in a remarkably well crafted and lucid prose. Right from an impetuous idealist to a resilient survivor, one sees Mary Hope's evolution as typical of a vollendungsroman. A 'vollendungsroman' is a novel of 'completion' or 'winding down' that normally focuses on the challenges faced by one in late life unlike bildungsroman which is a work about the protagonist's coming of age and growth towards adulthood. Mary's words mark her strength at this juncture of her 'winding down':

> I stayed healthy, except for occasional colds and a few teeth I had to extract myself. And, of course, the menopause. The design of the reproductive system in the human female leaves a lot to be desired. Sometimes I looked in the mirror and saw how old I was getting, and I began to have a little arthritis and some other symptoms of the decline of various other systems. The winters were the hardest times – the nights are so long at this altitude -- but I held on to my sanity and I accomplished what I had to do. (373)

These lines also project Mary's sense of affirmation and pain. Like other vollendungsroman novels like Margaret Lawrence's *The Stone Angel, A Gift upon*

the Shore too oscillates between the present and past memory. The ultimate wisdom achieved in the process turns to be, perhaps, the focal point of the whole writing. The transition leading to wisdom is credibly crafted with a purpose to frame the novel's meaning in democratic beliefs and ethics. As part of the ethical concern of the novel the author even problematizes Christianity. The institutionalized versions of dogmatic religions are put under critical lens by Wren and she advocates spiritualism very much rooted in a wider scope of ethics and universalism.

The rigidity of truth is completely discarded in the novel in a postmodernist fashion. The following conversation between Mary and Stephen from the text reiterates the problematics of faith in the novel:

"What else did you ask?"

"I asked if he believed the universe was created in seven ordinary days."

"How did he answer that?"

"He said, 'I don't know.' Profound words, Stephen. When you can say 'I don't know,' you've freed yourself to find the answer."

"That's why you decided to let us stay here?" (376)

Mary is more interested in discovering spirituality her own way and she is not interested in blindly accepting what was right for Rachel and what was dogmatic. Instead of asserting the dogmatic aspects of religion, the multifaceted nature of spirituality is profoundly analysed in the novel. Rachel and Mary are presented as engaged in a quest for truth in their conviction that God is found not only in the ritualistic platforms of religion and the Bible but in every volume of human discourses like poetry and science.

The traumatic subjectivity of the protagonists is enmeshed by a wave of memory of the past and the anxieties over the present and future. Mary's present anxiety which is narrated in the first thread of the narrative can be taken as a traumatic response to the haunting peculiarities of traumatic memory. Herman's observation is so crucial at this point,

> Traumatic events produce profound and lasting changes in physiological arousal, emotion, cognition, and memory. Moreover, traumatic events may sever these normally integrated functions from one another. The traumatized person may experience intense emotion but without clear memory of the event, or may be remembering everything in detail but without emotion. She may find herself in a constant state of vigilance and irritability without knowing why. Traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become disconnected from their source and to take on a life of their own. (Herman, 34)

The notion of recovered memories has been problematized in many of the trauma related discourses both in theory and in creative literature. This becomes crucial in the realms of gender and society in defining traumatic subjectivity. It is important to look at how the roles asserted by society play a major part in shaping one's traumatic subjectivity and how gender roles' performances differ while going through traumatic circumstances. Analyzing subjectivity from the perspective of gender in traumatic literature is inseparable from personal events as in many works taken up here or collective issues like war, nuclear bomb attack and so on as in *A Gift upon the Shore*. Studies in recent trauma literature are framed around areas that

merge gender concerns with the collective unconscious of the patriarchal social order.

As outlined in "The Politics of Trauma," a chapter by Richard McNally, in his book *Remembering Trauma*, the traumatic subjects themselves design techniques "to recover hidden memories of trauma often resulting in the inadvertent creation of psychologically compelling but false memories of abuse" (McNally 15). This is highly complicated in the case of Mary Hope. Certain deliberate attempts are made to resist "the forces of patriarchy that silence the voices of survivors" (McNally 18). The traumatic recall of Mary contributes much to the total fabric of the narrative thread.

One finds in *A Gift Upon the Shore* that the traumatic subjects as located in the dynamic process of memory, feeling, assimilating, or recovering from the bygone wounds. Here trauma gets constituted by a range of causes and effects, which oscillate between past and present, and away from a focal point in an interior and isolated psychic space seen in the traditional trauma mode but staggering towards an alternative trauma mode that interacts with the societal aspect of trauma. But both Mary and Rachel also draw on their ethical sense to overcome it and create a better space for the future.

The author has been meticulously careful about the way in which she mounts the tension in readers with her skill in charging the narrative with lyricism and pathos. The poetic aspect of the novel softens the reading pace of the novel and an ambience of melancholy and music accompanies the whole plaintive experience of reading. This kind of style eases the effect of trauma and infuses an optimistic tone to

the narration. The following passage from the novel is one of the most striking examples:

> A shadow of cloud hid the stars on the western horizon, but the rest of the sky was icily clear. Mary Hope looked up at Polaris, the North Star, the Lode Star, and wondered how many miles of trackless wilderness, how many leagues of unmapped sea human beings had crossed over the millennia, all guided by that constant star. Yet only an accident of location placed it in line with Earth's axis at this point in the planet's history. The wind blew chill out of the south, carrying the pungent scent of smoke from the fire behind her. It was too far away to provide any warmth, but she could hear the rush of flames. She sat on a ledge of rock with only a blanket to soften its cold hardness, sat cross-legged like a sadhu on a mountaintop, tranced in search of wisdom, and watched Cassiopeia and the Big Dipper swing around the fulcrum of Polaris. The Milky Way cast a veil of stars on the endless black of absence where silence echoed, and the accumulated light of all those distant suns served to make the sky lighter than the land only by the fine degree that was to her eyes discernible. She felt her eyes wide open, pupils large and dark, reaching into the dark of the land. The sky was full of suns, yet she denied them, sought one light, one small sun in the darkness below the myriad. (163)

This passage is one of the most lyrically eloquent passages and sums up the essence of the novel. The Polaris is defined by the other stars and the constellations Cassiopeia and the Big Dipper define the space of the Polaris which in turn is a

constant source of guidance, highlighting the Milky Way. The North Star's relation to the other stars and constellations symbolizes Mary's and Rachel's existence in relation to the members of their community and the traumatic subjectivity that ensues. The collective act of illumination definitely foreshadows the darkness of ignorance and monologism, particularly monotheism.

Children of the Dust by Louise Lawrence is another post-apocalyptic novel which presents a dystopian reality that pictures the traumatic state of three generations of a family whose traumatic experiences are outlined in the aftermath of a nuclear war. These survivors of the nuclear blast define their existence caught in an ambience of pain and wounds resulting from radiation, nuclear winter, fights among rival groups and radiation-induced mutations. This catastrophic reality leads them to the evolution of a new species called Homo superior which gets adapted itself to a world devoid of ozone layer and a space marked with radiation. This new species turns to be the dominant species on the planet. The novel presents the post-apocalyptic reality in a language marked by pathos and shock.

The novel is generally considered to be Louise Lawrence's cry against the most monstrous weapon men have made. The dust that remains unsettled throughout the novel gets spread into both the landscape and the mindscape of the people who are trying to survive from the nuclear attack. The psychological void and the traumatic subjectivity of the actual victims of the nuclear attack in the novel becomes one of the major concerns. Like the other novels, the narrative pays meticulous attention to the way innocent people address the tragic situation during the nuclear war attacks.

As mentioned earlier this three phased novel details the chaotic tale of three generations in an episodic framework addressing each other. The three episodes are titled Sarah, Ophelia and Simon. Like the other novel analyzed in this chapter *Children of the Dust* too details the domestic ambience in a trauma struck social order. Like Mary and Rachel in the *A Gift Upon the Shore*, it is the women that stand out in this novel. It is mainly their traumatic subjectivity that forms the basis of study.

The first part titled 'Sarah' is a distressing tale where one finds a family shelter itself in a tightly closed kitchen. Sarah, her stepmother Veronica and her half siblings Catherine and William live on some canned food and observe the world outside turning grey and gloomy. Sarah's father Bill, a lecturer at Bristol University is forced to move in with Erica, a leading authority on cellular cloning as he is not able to join his wife and children amidst the nuclear catastrophe. But this bit of information is mentioned only in the second phase as flashback.

Phase two of the novel titled "Ophelia" is placed after twenty years of the first phase when we find Bill, Sarah's father living in a government bunker being completely unaware of the condition of his family. Erica having a pass to the nuclear resistant bunker has provided shelter to Bill and many others. The bunker is equipped with all the amenities for survival and provides a new life to its inmates. The narrative shuttles between past and present just as in *A Gift Upon the Shore.* In the face of catastrophe and the resultant trauma Erica deems it her ethical responsibility to procreate and keep the human species going just like Mary Hope does in Wren's novel, even at the cost of losing her friend Rachel. Bill and Erica marry and they have a daughter, Ophelia who spends almost sixteen years of her life inside the

bunker with no connection with the world outside. Bill engages himself by teaching the youngsters English literature and politics instead of concentrating on science as expected of him by the authorities. He understands the need to reinstate and reinforce humanities as a subject in the curriculum to save man from becoming machinelike. His admiration for Shakespeare is reflected in the choice of the name for his daughter. More than Ophelia, the girl is Hamletian in her character as one learns in the novel.

Dwight Allison is another youngster and inmate of the bunker. He is greatly influenced by the teachings of Bill and dissents against the oppressive ways of General MacAllister, the person in charge of the bunker. On one occasion Bill, Dwight and Ophelia go out to warn the community outside of the General's intentions to embezzle their cattle. Ophelia accompanies them more out of curiosity and is not very happy with the world outside. It is here that the Hamlet in her is projected. Her loyalty oscillates between the two worlds. She is happy to see the freedom of the world outside the bunker but at the same time not comfortable with the insecurity and crudeness outside.

Bill also gets to meet his long lost daughter Catherine who is pregnant with her eighth child with the much older Johnson. She had lost her children owing to genetic mutation on account of the radiation. Ophelia finds this disgusting and thinks Johnson and the others are uncivilized. Like the two communes found in *A Gift Upon the Shore*, the communities inside and outside the bunker have hit on a different level of struggle and their collective traumas are defined by the oppressive regime of the fascist leaders inside the bunker and the reminiscent impact of radiation in the natural world outside, and their struggle to survive and adapt. The traumatic subjectivity of

these people, especially the women becomes a point of concern in the study. The tragic tone permeates the whole narrative texture of the novel where one finds in the opening itself, people waiting for death in installments.

It is the third part titled "Simon" that really makes this novel a post-apocalyptic work where the reader witnesses the human race getting mutated into a new species with supernatural powers. They are able to communicate by telepathy and fly planes using psycho-kinetic energy. The dystopian aspect of the work creatively, but disturbingly gets etched in the third phase of the novel.

It is primarily the exploration of the traumatic subjectivity of Sarah that is taken up with utmost concern. One finds her seeing the vague, confusing futureless dust as something predetermined and the uncertainty of existence is allegorized in the opening pages of the novel. Despite the extent of trauma she undergoes, she is optimistic. She believes in the cyclic nature of life. She is the one who realizes that there is a vast beautiful land yet to emerge from these ashes and dust. The dust that sets out speaks the story of destruction and decay of humanity and the tumult caused to women and children during the attack becomes the point of scrutiny here. An optimistic vision is foreseen when one reads the first section of the novel and an ethical turn is at work in the reading experience of the novel.

Women's subjectivity in a traumatic background seems to be a favourite theme for Lawrence and that is probably why the novel is largely peopled by women characters. Sarah who is introduced in the first part is a girl of fifteen with a visionary outlook and her hope in the future triggers the ethical edge of the novel. When Veronica, her step mother dies she takes charge to protect her little brother and

sister from the nuclear attacks. Through Sarah's selfless act, the author underlines women's subjectivity.

Most of the women characters throughout the novel are superior in understanding and adapting to the worst situations they face. As it is understood society has set out certain rules and roles to different genders. Gender consciousness preserved throughout these centuries work here too. It is the women characters who suffer the most. From Sarah to Simon there is a wide story of struggle – to adapt and to survive. There is also the message that fleeing from adverse situations does not solve anything, rather it only makes things worse for them.

At the very outset of the novel, the author gives a visual montage of the devastation which resulted from the nuclear bomb blast and the narrative records the effect upon the people, especially on women. The very opening page of *Children of the Dust* throws light on the visual depiction of the trauma that the protagonist undergoes:

> Sarah ran through a town gone mad with panic. The traffic had stopped . . . cars and lorries parked all along the narrow high street. Men and women, crazy with fear, looted the shops for supplies. Police sirens sounded and on the housing estate they were tearing doors from their hinges to board up the windows. Sarah's school shoes pounded along the pavements, up the hill past the District Hospital, leaving the town behind. A stitch in her side and her lungs heaving for breath made her stop and look back. (1)

The visual imagery of the novel is tellingly powerful that it adds to the empathy of the readers and kindles their ethical consciousness. The reader

empathetically engages in being aware of the devastating consequences of war. Sarah tries to hold things together and helps her step mother to save her kids. The description of moving from a big room into a little one congested with smoke and dust symbolizes the trauma laden consciousness of the women characters in the work. Due to the continuous bombings, they are not able to go outside and they have only limited food. At one point the reader finds Sarah even trying to steal things from a house where no one is alive anymore. Here, in the conventional sense, Sarah's ethical sense may be questioned, but it is her larger sense of conscientious effort to feed her dear ones is what justifies her deed and the ethics that underline her traumatic subjectivity. This is something similar to what the father does in *The Road to* protect his son.

The different kinds of difficulties Sarah and her siblings have to undergo are well portrayed by the author. When Sarah realizes the intensity of the catastrophic phase that they are going through, she understands she has to cooperate with her step mother whom she despises. She realizes this is not the time to stay apart. Sarah shares with Veronica that she does not love her, but realizes the need to overcome such petty personal grudges and start over. The author is very successful in highlighting how Sarah's courage, hopefulness and positive approach as marking her traumatic subjectivity:

> Sarah's whole body was tense and listening. It was very dark in the room but a faint line of sunlight showed through the weave of the blanket at the top of the window. She heard a rumble in the distance, a great wave of sound that came sweeping towards her, engulfing

everything in its path, drowning Catherine's cries. Sarah blundered

towards the fragile edge of light as the blast struck the house. (9)

The faint light from the sunlight of hope is always associated with Sarah by the author wherever she is presented. She is a peace maker and she makes all understand that this is not the time for rivalry. Her wisdom drawn from the world and the circumstances that she has to live through, teach her the great lesson of unity and harmony in times of crisis. The woman she hated most becomes her most beloved friend. "She touched Veronica's leg, her hand, her shoulder. Put her arms around the older woman she had never loved" (23).

It is not just the war that underlines her trauma. Sarah has felt the emptiness and void in her life as an orphaned girl and also as a victim of world war. She feels desperate not only because of the nuclear war but also as a girl child who does not have anyone to fill the void of love. Her mental trauma has been presented through the depictions of physical trauma at many points in the novel. The anguished ending of the first part of the novel reiterates the traumatic consciousness of the novel that symbolically fuses the physical trauma with the mental trauma as an objective correlative throughout. The following lines deftly present this fusion:

Pains gripped her stomach and she vomited blood, and the hood

of her duffle coat rubbed raw the sores on her scalp. In a world that was

dark and ugly, where the wind whined through the silences, Sarah knew

that she was ugly too . . . her youth and prettiness, her love and life and

hope, laid waste by the holocaust of war. But some things could never be

destroyed . . . a child with her dreams . . . a man with his visions . . . and

a gorse flower that bloomed in the dust. Sarah touched it, damp yellow

petals, gold and fragile and strong. Alive and beautiful, it bloomed for the

future, radiated the glory of God. In the end people turned to Him, and

Sarah could not be sorry. (42)

These lines beautifully capture her essential consciousness, marked by both

trauma and hope. The sense of rejection that pervades the personal self of Sarah is

seen in the case of some other women characters as well and marks the women's

subjectivity in the backdrop of trauma. At the same time both Sarah and Veronica

stand as symbols of love and sacrifice in the face of the ugliness of war. Both these

women choose death for the sake of their beloved ones but the author has structured

the narrative in such a way that the readers reserve their sympathy more for Sarah.

She lives for others and dies for others. Her character is pitted against all the other

characters in contrast to their way of facing reality and society. Young Catherine

being the only one unaffected by radiation is ensured by Sarah that she is in safe

hands before she herself succumbs to death. She leaves Catherine in the care of

Johnson who too is unaffected by the radiation and has prepared himself to survive

the nuclear disaster.

It is in fact women's subjectivity that is highlighted in the novel just as in *A

Gift Upon the Shore* and the ethical resolve that they turn to in the face of trauma.

The novel mainly concentrates on how the woman characters are victimized more

and suffer more on account of their gender. At the same time their traumatic

subjectivity is defined by their various roles of being a mother, a sister, a daughter, a

wife, a girl friend and more importantly a fellow human being. The author adroitly

presents the emotional and physical suffering these women go through and the

courage with which they face them in the background of life threatening catastrophe

and chaos. They in fact become victims of a predominantly male initiated war that push them to a world devoid of love and hope. It is in such a space that they resort to their inner strength. The representation of their subjectivity is doubly complicated by the fact that language itself is a male centered tool of representation. Louise Lawrence being a woman is able to present the women's subjectivity more authentically.

Despite these adverse circumstances, Sarah along with some other characters in the novel stand the test of the hours and they assert their agency in times of trauma. With dust both inside and outside, the women characters are strong enough to face the mess and survive. It is also interesting to note that Sarah's brother William is unable to comprehend the reality while her sister Catherine is presented as understanding everything so early. Women in the novel take the role of managing things right from food gathering to greater chores:

> And then Sarah would be left alone to keep William and Catherine alive, foraging among the ruins of the village when their food supplies ran out. She tried not to think of it, but in the hot dark room there was nothing else to do but think. She could find in her thoughts no hope or consolation, but neither did she dread the time that was to come. Perhaps she was beyond fear. That moment when she had taken William in her arms had awakened something inside her . . . a calm and strength as she had never known before. She felt there was something in her own being which nothing could destroy, that whatever occurred, however terrible, Sarah knew she could bear it. (15)

Sarah's ethical resolve is beautifully delineated in this passage. Her indomitable will to protect her siblings and ensure their safety is a pointer at her ethical conscience. Many of the episodes in the opening section of the novel reiterate the active agency of women in times of crises and trauma. It is to be noted that the theme of survival in general is often critiqued by many as far as the studies on *Children of the Dust* are concerned.

As noted the novel is successful in presenting how the survivors of the gruesome disaster, both men and women, struggle to live and adapt themselves to their new surroundings and situations. As mentioned earlier the novel presents a family (Bill's) split up into two groups, a group of people inside the bunker and the group of people outside. The whole story spans over a period of around fifty years and it exhibits the way of life of the inhabitants inside and outside the bunker. Though both the insiders and outsiders mostly belong to a single family, they all keep entirely different views on how they should find means of survival. By stressing on the different opinions that emerge, the author problematizes the issue of social management in times of crisis and trauma. Three women survive literally, still struggling to live. Lilith is Catherine's only surviving daughter among the seven she gave birth to. Ophelia is intrigued by the baby born to Catherine in this wasteland. Lilith is portrayed as a strange girl who lacks many human qualities but she has many other qualities which normal humans do not. She is both a symbol of survival and resistance. She is the third generation of the Victoria family with whom a new world is yet to adapt. She is white; with white eyes and white hair. It is paradoxical to note here that white which stands for peace, love and compassion is a product of violence here. Lawrence does not fail in reiterating that it is no one but humans,

especially men who are responsible for this violence. The tragic irony of the human predicament is deftly presented by Lawrence's writing:

> Homo sapiens! The name itself was an irony. They had not been wise at all, but incredibly stupid. Lords of the Earth with their great gray brains, their thinking minds had placed them above all other forms of life. Yet it had not been thought that compelled them to act, but emotion. From the dawn of their evolution they had killed, and conquered, and subdued. They had committed atrocities on others of their kind, ravaged the land, polluted and destroyed, left millions to starve in Third World countries, and finished it all with a nuclear holocaust. The mutants were right. Intelligent creatures did not commit genocide, or murder the environment on which they were dependent. (95)

In the post nuclear attack era, Lawrence tries to present people from different communities and times resorting to different tactics for survival resulting in varying degrees of success. The opening part of the novel shows the episode of their survival inside the shelter of their home, but later they realize that the radioactive dust enters through the windows and chimney and they are no longer safe in the smugness of their own home. Their helplessness, as narrated by the author, becomes a source of trauma both to the characters and to the readers. They tragically come to realize that they are consuming contaminated provisions but they resist as much as they can. As mentioned earlier Sarah and Veronica are determined to look after Catherine who shows that she can survive as she makes it always sure that she would drink only bottled water and eat canned food to avoid the possibility of contamination. She spends almost all her time in her house under the table to avoid the possibility of

breathing the polluted air. The following passage from the book presents the trauma of the situation:

> Sarah poured water from the container into her beaker. Catherine was a strange child, she thought, unusually compliant, never complaining, yet cautious of everything. For hours on end she had sat in the dark of her house below the table, determined to stay there for as long as she had to. It was as if she sensed it was the surest way to stay alive. From a busy, bossy, organizing little girl, Catherine had changed into a child who was remote and self-sufficient, not questioning what anyone did unless it directly concerned her. In her odd adult voice she enquired if the water were safe, making sure, obeying an instinct. And suddenly Sarah realized. Whatever happened to herself and William and Veronica, Catherine intended to survive. (20)

Sarah becomes an agency in ensuring that Catherine survived. In her panic, Sarah resorts to conventionally unethical means to ensure her sister lived. Towards the end of the first section we find Victoria gathering things from the dusty outside where no one dares to go. Their situation in a single room with stinky latrines and other wastes upsets the conscience of the reader and the realistic narrative tone makes the reader empathize with the characters. Martha Nussbaum's statement in her *Love's Knowledge* is worth quoting here. She writes "The novel is itself a moral achievement and the well-lived life is a work of literary art" (67). Like most of the novels studied in the present project, *Children of the Dust* too problematizes the notion of ethics outside the normative patterns of the institutionalized notions of spirituality.

The instance of the burning of the Bible as a means of survival is a bold statement on the same. The author pushes religions out into secondary position when life is in danger. In a mystical mood, Sarah thinks everything as an outcome of the deeds of human beings. She gives her sister Catherine's hand to Johnson whose house is not affected by the attacks. He is presumed to keep non contaminated water and food. All these events show how determined Sarah is at the time of crisis. Sarah remains one of the most tragic as well as the most powerful characters in the novel and reflects on women as subjects in the face of nuclear trauma.

In the reordering of the patterns of the chaos, the role of Johnson and Catherine is also very crucial. They try very much to bring things back to normalcy. They start cultivation and share everything they have among the people. They try to repopulate the place with their offspring. Unfortunately six of them do not survive due to genetic mutation. It is again the woman, Catherine who has to face the trauma of unsuccessful pregnancy, child loss and poor health. However, both Catherine and Johnson learn the art of survival and how to live in a land of dust productively in every sense of the word. Catherine lives on to old age and is later nick-named Blind Kate. Continuous exposure to ultraviolet radiation has made her eyes weak and her body carries festering sores, marking another instance of physical trauma in her life.

Ophelia, Catherine's half sister too can be viewed from a critical angle in view of traumatic subjectivity. She becomes a symbol of confinement and conformism, and this reinstates the suffocation that most of the characters pass through, especially inside the bunker, which is a metaphor for patriarchy. But the female subjectivity is contrasted with the male subjectivity which is partly represented by the portrayal of Bill Hamden who survives the nuclear attack unlike

his wife Victoria and daughter Sarah. He moves into a bunker with Erica, where many others live as well. His decision to flee from situations, despite being a lecturer, needs to be viewed critically. Probably Louise Lawrence wanted the creative aspect of Bill to survive as he is the one who restores the will to dissent in his disciples, especially Dwight. But unlike Bill many of the males find their own comfort in the bunker which is situated in the underground. The bunker is situated underground to avoid contact with the polluted outer world and things are all under the control of male patriarchal authorities.

Except for Bill, Dwight and Johnson, most men are shown to be rigid. But almost all women are presented to be strong and resourceful just as in *A Gift Upon the Shore.* Unlike Victoria, Sarah, Catherine and Erika, Ophelia is slightly restrained in her approach to life. The bunker life had made her rigid. When Sarah and Catherine fought for life, Ophelia did not have much to struggle. But her trauma is defined by her confinement. She has everything in the bunker except freedom. She is not allowed to live a life she likes. She lacks agency. It is Dwight and Bill who help her to see the world outside.

Ophelia however reflects the author's dislike for her own regimented world that she grew up in. The following passage where we read about Lawrence's description of Ophelia's nature, there seems to strike a similarity between the author and the character:

> She was not unhappy in her little regimented world of rooms and passageways. She had been born and brought up there and knew nothing different. In the schoolrooms her father taught what life had been like before the holocaust, but to Ophelia it did not seem relevant. And

> although she loved the rich language of English literature . . . sceptred
>
> isles set in silver seas and seasons of mists and mellow fruit-fullness . . .
>
> it was all remote and unreal, as unreal as the images seen in dreams and
>
> instantly forgotten. (47)

Here the limitations of the symbolic order of language, in presenting the semiotics of

trauma are deftly elicited by Lawrence through Ophelia.

Moreover, Lawrence being a woman is successful in bringing to light the

resourcefulness of women and their will to stay and fight. Even when Dwight, the

dissenter escapes from the traumatic world of the bunker, only women characters are

left to set everything in order. The unity built in the midst of the debris becomes a

point of serious concern in the novel. The dust which disturbed them first starts to

mould them later. This alludes to the biblical line, "For dust *you are*; and *unto dust*

you shall return" indicating the cyclic nature of life and also the insignificance of

human beings.

As stated earlier Lilith, again a girl stands for hope. Towards the last part of

the novel one witnesses the third generation Simon, son of Ophelia and Dwight's

brother Wayllen, also moving out of the bunker. Laura, a mutant girl is the grand

child of Catherine and she too belongs to this generation and she is a *Homo superior*

who is now teaching the others about the world. She is strong and she is bold enough

to address things. When she finds Simon shooting a dog, she warns him of the evil

consequences of weapons. One would wonder why the third part is not named

'Laura' instead of 'Simon.' Towards the end of the novel, the people of the bunker

are dominated by the *Homo superiors.* And ironically it requires Laura to institute his

transformation. He realizes that the members of the bunker will fail to sustain

themselves in the context of an authoritarian rule which is not ready to adapt to change. Therefore it is Simon's traumatic subjectivity that is given more prominence in this part of the novel and this also points to the inclusive ethics of Lawrence.

Women characters in the novel at first are set in a chaotic situation from which they manage to survive. They do not flee from situations like Handmen did. Laura learns to adapt and she teaches others what it is to be a *Homo superior*. Simon at first finds mutants ugly with their hairy body and as such Laura is marginalized because she was different and did not subscribe to the conventional norms of beauty:

> Simon hated her for that. Perhaps it was automatic. Her appearance alone made her different from him, and human beings had always feared and hated anyone who was different. Two thousand years of history saw it being repeated over and over, the perpetual struggle of one race, or tribe, or creed, against another... each one thinking they were right, superior, morally justified, or chosen by God. Simon saw himself as normal, Laura as abnormal. (86)

This passage throws light on human beings' obsession with monolithic cultures and their reluctance to accept differences and pluralism. Violence is always seen to be present where claims to purity are the strongest. Laura however overcomes this kind of alienation and in the end Simon feels for her and begins to respect her. It can be said to be a new start for a world of acceptance. Though women in the novel are initially isolated by the others, they fight and succeed. The double alienation meted out to the women subject is critically highlighted by Lawrence. However, Laura is instrumental in changing the attitude of Simon in accepting a new world order rooted in selflessness.

When Simon is injured later, Laura nurses him and takes him to her community. Simon is enthralled by the community of Johnson to which Laura belongs and is amazed to see a well-ordered world where people are self-sufficient and are not marred by selfishness and violence. He despises his own people inside the bunker who resorted to pre-war standards of environmental negligence and violence. Donna Haraway's quote on cyborgs is relevant in this context:

> From one perspective, a cyborg world is about the final imposition of a grid of control on the planet ... From another perspective, a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters. (154)

Here Laura may not totally fit into the definition of a cyborg, but she is a different species and Simon's acceptance of her can be read in the light of the above quote. Through this new bonding between and Laura and Simon, Lawrence assures a new world of hope and acceptance.

With the help of Laura and the other mutants, Simon believes that together they can rectify the wrongs of his ancestors. With Laura's super human powers and the knowledge possessed by the inmates of the bunker, Simon envisions a newer and safer world for the future generations. As compared to the other novels, *The Children of the Dust* is more on the optimistic end. The cyclic power of nature is reinstated by

Lawrence, finally offering some hope that humankind would be able to survive the horrors of war in order to form a new world.

Apparently both the novels – *The Gift Upon the Shore* and *The Children of the Dust* deal intensely with the experiences of nuclear war and the traumatic experiences of especially the woman characters affected and how women as traumatic subjects map the journey of survival.

If fiction presents the traumatic experiences of the characters involved realistically, a realistic narrative like a reportage presents the traumatic experiences of a real life disaster in imaginative and compelling prose. *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich is a case in point. This is a docufiction kind of narrative which relates the catastrophic incident of the 1986 disaster at the Chernobyl nuclear reactor which is deemed as one of the worst industrial accidents of all time. The event was not reported sufficiently and it is here that the relevance of Svetlana Alexievich's attempt to bring out the tragic voices of Chernobyl becomes a milestone in the history of journalism and nonfictional prose.

Svetlana Alexievich, the journalist, interviewed about hundreds of people who got affected by the tragic event – ranging from the common people to officials. The report is a record of fear, anger, and uncertainty that define their traumatic subjectivity. These monologues are transcribed interviews between the author and witnesses whose lives were irrevocably changed by the Chernobyl disaster. These monologues together form a polyphonic narrative giving us a comprehensive idea of the first hand experience of the traumatic event. Unlike most journalistic works, this polyphonic record of tragedy and trauma disturbs the conscience of the readers when caught between figurative and factual narrations.

The readership of *Voices From Chernobyl* is immensely powerful as it operates on an emotive platform where a trans-generational sympathy is a dominant note of connectivity. Apart from being a unique and singular exploration of the traumatic effects of widespread disasters by radioactive contamination, the book provides a political view of the last years of the Soviet Union especially that of Byelorussia. The book has become a pressing text in any discussion platform regarding scientific progress and related consequences. This is also the precise reason why the book is included in the present study in spite of it being a work of nonfiction. Any study on nuclear disasters would be incomplete without the mention of *Voices from Chernobyl.* Moreover, the real life narratives only augment the definition of the traumatic subjects of the fictional works. The humanistic relevance of the book gets highlighted by the recent revival of interest in nuclear power projects.

The personal and subjective account of the suffering haunts the reader and the text serves a lyrical and imaginative purpose but these accounts touch upon the broader themes like human empathy, scientific progress and above all representation of traumatic subjectivity. Many of the narrative records that Alexievich draw are from historians and philosophers and the meditative note of the book is highly analysed in critical and academic discourses.

The book documents the subjective record of different survivors whose trauma is narrated with the possible patterns of a convincingly lyrical aesthetics. The harrowing testimonies are presented with utmost objectivity on the part of the writer, but the reader is surpassingly made to empathize with the traumatic subjects irrespective of space and time. The 'non-symbolizable wound' of these characters is

presented with a panoramic view drawing details from the members from different walks of life. The book which is divided into three parts – 'Land of the Dead,' 'Land of the Living,' and 'Amazed by Sadness,' is presented in a unique style marking eloquence and lucidity.

The touching report prepares a history for the reader of the calamity providing a space for trans-generational empathy. The hazardous effects of technology become the point of criticism which is objectively left to readers to evaluate. The first segment of the book, "Land of the Dead," illuminates the reader about the two million Russians and Belarusians who have faced the aftermath of the devastation and have experience trauma of various degrees. The traumatic subjectivity of these people is complicated by their tension between bygone days of irrevocable gloom and the anxiety ridden future ahead of them. The struggle between survival and death is presented through the fact of people growing crops in the toxic environment despite their awareness of the potential danger. This in between situation works as a dominant motif in the whole work.

Voices from Chernobyl is in fact a compilation of many different accounts of the victims and eyewitnesses of this dreadful event. This study has taken into its premises only a handful of prominent accounts. One of the most poignant narratives in this compilation is the story of Lyudmilla Ignatenko and her husband Vasily, a fire fighter. This trauma laden tale narrates how the unsuspecting Vasily becomes a fatal victim of the disaster because of the callous attitudes of the authorities of the time. More than that it also presents Lyudmilla's plight of caring for her irradiated husband and how she is caught between love and the menace of radiation. The conflict that Lyudmilla faces aggravates the trauma of the situation. Even though Vasily is the

direct victim of the mishap, it is Lyudmilla as a witness who is seen to be equally or more traumatized. The agency getting numb and inert is highlighted in many of the occasions in the text.

> I had no idea then how much I loved him! Him … just him. I was like a blind person! I couldn't even feel the little pounding underneath my heart. Even though I was six months in. I thought that my little one was inside me, that he was protected. None of the doctors knew I was staying with him at night in the bio-chamber. The nurses let me in. At first they pleaded with me, too: "You're young. Why are you doing this? That's not a person anymore, that's a nuclear reactor. You'll just burn together." I was like a dog, running after them. I'd stand for hours at their doors, begging and pleading. (Alexievich 17)

Though her trauma is not completely translatable, the passage does evoke sympathy and empathy on the part of the readers. Pathos becomes a footnote to the whole description here and the readers are terribly shocked by the passage where she describes the events that led to his death and her childbirth. She elaborates about how she stayed at Vasily's bedside for a couple of weeks on end, cleaning the radioactive debris from his body and mouth until his death. Two months later she gives birth to a baby girl who too passes away in less than four hours as a result of congenital heart and liver complications caused by the intensity of radiation. The mother in Lyudmilla poignantly narrates: "But she had cirrhosis of the liver. Her liver had twenty-eight roentgen. Congenital heart disease. Four hours later they told me she was dead. And again: we won't give her to you. What do you mean you won't give her to me? It's me who won't give her to you! You want to take her for science. I hate

your science! I hate it!" (33). The internal conflict in Lyudmilla, as a wife, mother

and a conscientious citizen marks her subjectivity. She even has to lie to the nurses

and doctors that she already had two children to enable her to meet and take care of

Vasily. She recalls how when someone had warned her that her proximity to

Vasily is suicidal, the only thing that reverberated in her mind was: "But I love him!

I love him!" (16). Walking in the hospital courtyard she had whispered "I love you,"

Carrying his sanitary tray, she had whispered "I love you." In the face of her selfless

and unconditional love for her husband, Lyudmilla also remembers how each day she

had to bear the trauma of the news of the death of one or the other affected member

in the chamber, shaking her hopes of Vasily's survival.

The act of witnessing Vasily's physical trauma is also narrated in a

heartrending manner: "The last two days in the hospital – Pieces of his lungs, of his

liver, were coming out of his mouth. He was choking on his internal organs. I'd wrap

my hand in a bandage and put it in his mouth, take out all that stuff. It's impossible

to talk about. It's impossible to write about. And even to live through" (19). These

lines not only underline the intensity of Lyudmilla's trauma and the gruesome impact

of nuclear radiation but also points to the intranslatability of trauma.

There is another instance in the book which describes the predicament of a

twelve year old. She talks about how the mailman brings two pension cheques, one

for her and one for her grandfather. She tragically narrates how she suffered from

blood cancer because her had father worked at Chernobyl and how her classmates

refused to sit next to her on account of this. Then there is the case of the father who

describes the plight of his wife and daughter affected by the radiation: He says,

> My daughter was six-years-old. I'm putting her to bed, and she

whispers in my ear: "Daddy, I want to live, I'm still little" And I had thought she didn't understand anything.

> Can you picture seven little girls shaved bald in one room? There were seven of them in the hospital room ... My wife couldn't take it. "It'd be better for her to die than to suffer like this. Or for me to die, so that I don't have to watch any more." (36)

Alexievich's polyphonic narrative begins and ends with the accounts of two widows. One is Lyudmilla and the other one is Valentina Panasevich, the wife of a liquidator. As in any war it is the women who suffer the most. The conditions of the two widows are often the most discussed testimonies in connection with the Chernobyl incident. Both these widows narrate the tragic tale of their husbands who were part of the official rescue measures. It focuses on how as secondary victims their lives took a disastrous turn forever. Though *Voices from Chernobyl* begins and ends with the testimonies of these two widows, there are eye witness accounts by a range of people from all walks of life – firefighters, liquidators, politicians, physicians, physicists, government officials, relatives and other ordinary citizens whom Alexievich interviewed over a period of ten years all of whom provide a multi-dimensional view of the tragedy and all the voices mostly point to the singular idea of the dangers of radiation. There is also a sense of oneness in their plurality. To quote Lyudmilla:

> There are many of us here. A whole street. That's what it's called Chernobylskaya. These people worked at the station their whole lives. A lot of them still go there to work on a provisional basis, that's how they work there now, no one lives there anymore. They have bad diseases,

they're invalids, but they don't leave their jobs, they're scared to even

think of the reactor closing down. Who needs them now anywhere else?

Often they die. In an instant … They die, but no one's really asked us.

No one's asked what we've been through. (35)

This particular passage also points to the kind of community trauma and

ethics that was explicated earlier in the context of the fictional works. Trauma here is

located within a dynamic process of feeling, remembering, assimilating, or

recovering from a tragic experience. In the ethical minefield, communities and

societies perpetuate the isolation felt by trauma survivors with a view to protecting

themselves from vulnerability and further trauma.

The second part of *Voices* deals more with the societal and collective aspects

of traumatized victimhood rather than the personal one. As the ironic section title

shows it is no more "The Land of the Living," but rather the land of a pained and

deprived lot left to bear their trauma. This section also deals with the corruption and

moral laxity that accompanied the destruction torn society, adding to the trauma of

the situation. It is the sense of dignity and the power of endurance that most of the

people hold on to is what defines their ethical consciousness. To stay strong in the

face of impending doom, this is what Zinaida Kovalenko, a re-settler had to say:

> People got scared. They got filled up with fear. At night people
>
> started packing up their things. I also got my clothes, folded them up. My
>
> red badges for my honest labor, and my lucky kopeika that I had. Such
>
> sadness! It filled my heart. Let me be struck down right here if I'm lying.
>
> And then I hear about how the soldiers were evacuating one village, and
>
> this old man and woman stayed. Until then, when people were roused up

and put on buses, they'd take their cow and go into the forest. They'd

wait there. Like during the war, when they were burning down the

villages. Why would our soldiers chase us? *[Starts crying.]* It's not

stable, our life. I don't want to cry. (29)

This passage shows the internal violence that takes place in the ethical and

moral fabric of the society at a time of crisis. Looting became rampant in the face of

a calamity, adding to the trauma. Safety measures were blatantly disorganized and

the sorry picture of food contaminated being circulated through the Soviet food

supply process was another instance of organizational slip-up. The callous and often

detached attitude of the government officials is put into grave attention by the author.

The lethargy and a deep-seated indifference towards the general population are

visible throughout the whole event as presented by the polyphonic voices. One

scientist reports that every time he called the state official to bring up the subject of

nuclear fallout, he would disconnect the phone despite his complete conviction of the

fact that procrastination would lead to further damage.

The political dimension of traumatic subjectivity is evident in the *Voices from

Chernobyl.* Svetlana collected these interviews in 1996 – a time when anti-

Communism still had some influence as a political ideology in the post-Soviet

regime. It is a certain fact that Chernobyl, while an accident in the sense that no one

intentionally planned and made it, it was also a deliberate product of a culture of

cronyism and lethargy. It is popularly agreed from the available literature on the

smatter that the Soviet system had taken a badly designed reactor and then peopled it

with a group of incompetent staff (Alexievich 9).

The author throws light into the manipulations that took place in the reports given by the interviewees. In the crucial first ten days of the accident, when the reactor was simmering and releasing a steady stream of highly radioactive material into the whole vicinity, the authorities repeatedly claimed that the situation was under complete control though they were unsure about it. The ambivalent and ambiguous situation of the whole experience is astonishing. On the one side there was complete incompetence, indifference, and lies and on the other side there was a genuinely frantic effort to deal with the consequences simultaneously. In the week that followed the accident the Soviets witnessed thousands of people succumbing to death and slipping into perpetual darkness, while they were refusing to admit to the world that anything really serious had gone wrong. This mismanagement of the whole situation adds to the tragedy of the event, and readers are put into the primary experience of empathizing with these traumatic subjects.

Svetlana Alexievich's work unlike the fictional narratives is a real life account of a specific disaster that affected a specific people. Irrespective of its alarming magnitude, it is not as large scale destruction as seen in the works of fiction where only a limited number of people survive. But this intensely graphic and moving picture of a tragedy offers a synecdoche of the greater tragedies forewarned in the fictional works. The literary genre adopted by Svetlana also can be placed at a juncture where fact and fiction meet, and thereby is successful in driving home her point like the writers of nuclear disaster novels. She states in an interview:

> I've been searching for a literary method that would allow the
> closest possible approximation to real life. Reality has always attracted
> me like a magnet, it tortured and hypnotized me, I wanted to capture it on

paper … So I immediately appropriated this genre of actual human

voices and confessions, witness evidences and documents. This is how I

hear and see the world – as a chorus of individual voices and a collage of

everyday details. This is how my eye and ear function. In this way all my

mental and emotional potential is realized to the full. In this way I can be

simultaneously a writer, reporter, sociologist, psychologist and preacher.

(qtd.in Kellog)

Being a daughter of Belarussia, Alexievich herself was affected by the trauma that

hit her place and she deems it her responsibility to speak against the misappropriation

and misrepresentation of the tragedy that hit them. In a way her *Voices from

Chernobyl* is her testimony to the whole tragedy. While presenting the realistic

accounts of the traumatic experiences, she too like M.K. Wren and Louise Lawrence

speaks about the dangers of nuclear radiation and nuclear wars in general. All these

writers understand and acknowledge that it is the unscrupulous human being who has

the potential for such suicidal destruction. This can be captured in the words of the

mother in Alexievich's work: "Is there anything more frightening than people?" (72).

Michel Foucault's statement in *The Order of Things* is strikingly true in the

light of all these works. He writes; "As the archaeology of our thought easily shows,

man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end" (Foucault 386).

He writes about how —man as a category would disappear from the face of the earth

as a result of the overwhelming progress of technology that has the capacity to

obliterate humankind on a massive scale within a span of just a few seconds. The

works taken for analysis in the present chapter definitely vindicate the above

reflection.

CHAPTER 5

Towards an Ethical Turn

Turn to ethics in literature is a much debated area in literary and academic

circles. Any narrative associated with nuclear disaster or a post apocalyptic situation

and the resultant trauma cannot be dissociated from the ethical implications arising

out of it. This chapter problematizes the ethical concerns of the narratives selected

for the present study. Art in its different forms has been accepted in general as a

therapeutic device. It is the ethical impulse of the writers or what they represent that

aids in this kind of a result. As regards the nuclear disaster narratives that are under

consideration in the present study, the previous chapters have shown how the

traumatic subjects turn to an ethical recourse in their attempts to overcome or accept

the reality of the devastation before them. However, before further elaborating on the

ethical dimensions of these works, it is necessary to have a brief discussion on the

relevance of an ethically oriented work of literature.

Ethical critics of the twentieth-century in general tend to negate the view of

envisaging on the development of literary analyses as self-sufficient and detached

object of disinterested investigation. On the other hand literary analyses have been

taken as a platform for seeing works of art as capable and definitely obligated to

pressure political and ethical force on the reality of history. The space of ethics

springs from a negotiation which is made between the reader and the text. This space

is designed and configured by the nature and intensity of trauma that the subjects in

the texts undergo. As it is presupposed in Levinassian formulations of ethics, the

fundamental operation of ethics resides in a dialectics – a dialectics of encounter with

the other. The encounter with otherness is generally considered to be a fundamental ethical moment in every reading experience. This chapter problematizes the operation of transgenerational empathy which works in a framework of a proximity that the readers keep with the traumatic subjects. It is the closeness of this proximity that designs the ethical flavour of a reading practice. As a central thesis to the present study, it is argued that when representation is complicated due to symbolic transactions as a result of the fluidity of language, and further by the re-presentation of the traumatic experience felt by somebody else, it turns towards a recourse to make up for the deficiency and this can be traced in the ethical centre of these narratives.

Systematic theorization of ethical theory was pioneered by critics like Wayne C Booth. His *The Company We Keep* (1988) is generally considered to be one of the seminal texts in the field. This text established ethical criticism as one of the dominant schools of modern critical deliberations. Among the major texts that institutionalised ethical theory some works like Martha Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge* (1990), Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989) and Colin McGinn's *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* (1997) demand special attention on the part of the academia and the critics with regard to fiction. These thinkers deserve special attention as they together promote the world of fictional narratives as sites for moral and ethical experiences. As Nussbaum states, "Our experience is, without fiction, too confined and too parochial. Literature extends it, making us reflect and feel about what might otherwise be too distant for feeling" (Nussbaum, 47). Wayne. C. Booth too accords the same view with regard to the ethical dimension of reading in his *The Company We Keep* (1988): "Ethical criticism will be any effort to show how the

virtues of narratives relate to the virtues of selves and societies, or how the ethos, the collection of virtues of any story affects or is affected by the ethos of any given reader" (77).

Similarly, Richard Rorty elaborates on the role of fiction in tuning the ethical aspect of the contemporary reading landscape. He writes:

>Fiction like that of Dickens, Olive Schreiner, or Richard Wright gives us the details about kinds of suffering being endured by people to whom we had previously not attended. Fiction like that of Choderlos de Laclos, Henry James, or Nabokov gives us the details about what sorts of cruelty we ourselves are capable of, and thereby lets us redescribe ourselves. That is why the novel, the movie and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress. (Rorty, xvi)

The above mentioned passages together agree upon the role of fiction in eliciting an ethical action and response in the contemporary reading experience and the novels taken in the present study carefully demand attention in the light of the above reflections. Chapter three and four have dealt at length on the traumatic subjectivity of the main characters and also highlight how their subjectivities get marked by an ethical turn towards the end. This chapter focuses on elaborating the ethical dimension of each novel selected for study.

Theoretical world presents an ambivalent attitude towards the ethical trajectory of reading. This realm of reading is both progressive and regressive in theoretical deliberations. It is progressive in the sense that ethical criticism does not advocate a philosophy of nihilism and anti-foundationalism like that of New

Criticism and Poststructuralism. Ethical criticism is regressive from a theoretical stance in the sense that it goes back to humanism entailing a reassertion of the moral and ethical concerns reiterating the view of literature as morally significant and potentially didactic. Critics in ethical theory aims as Wayne Booth openly admits at restoring "the full intellectual legitimacy of our commonsense inclination to talk about stories in ethical terms, treating the characters in them and their makers as more like people than labyrinths, enigmas, or textual puzzles to be deciphered" (Booth, 10). Booth in general like many of the Chicago critics believes in the didactic purpose of literature though it does not aim at imposing normative values and ethics upon the readers.

Ethical criticism posits that the novels we go through designate a crucial role in constituting the type of people we are and the normative values we share:

> (For) most of us our character - in the larger sense of the range of choices and habits of choice available to us - changes, grows, and diminishes largely as a result of our imaginative diet (…) (Encounters) with narrative otherness are in large part what we are made of (Booth, 257, 377)

It is perhaps right to say that ethical criticism is inseparable from the trajectories of the narrative world of novels in general. The exalted position that the novels assume in the ethical dimension of critical deliberations derives from their focus on characters and narrative conscience. The subjectivity of the characters is a pivotal point of discussion in the present study and such a work demands the ethical reading possibilities of these subjects. A work of fiction presents the world of individuals in various situations of action and choice, and the readers should be allowed to or rather

need to engage in a world of moral or ethical outlook unlike the modernist notions of theories which concentrate on the textual and formal aspects of the works.

The immediate predecessor which has been rejected by the practitioners of ethical theory is the poststructuralist schools of criticism. This textual school of criticism emphatically asserts on close reading of a text with a complete negation of the moral and ethical background of the text. Keenan writes for instance:
"By 'reading' I mean our exposure to the singularity of a text, something that cannot be organized in advance, whose complexities cannot be settled or decided by 'theories' or the application of more or less mechanical programmes. Reading, in this sense, is what happens when we cannot apply the rules" (Keenan, 1).

Ethical theory on the other hand goes back to the humanist turn of literature, especially the novel, which opens a world of reading possibilities, whereby our ethics is moved or formulated in the process of reading. The ethical role of a novel can be easily summed up in Wayne C. Booth's statement where he says that fiction invites "me to lead a richer and fuller life than I could manage on my own" (Booth, 223). Contemporary ethical criticism though diversified in practice shares some of the common assumptions like the rejection of formalist concerns in reading literature. Critics in ethical theory believe that criticism now has completely deviated from the humanist and moral dimension of literature. Literature is to be read in such a way as to expose the norms and values which help reflect our own. The values thus recovered and refined in our own way synchronize with those of the text and a framework of empathy prepares the way for the ethical conscience of the reading experience. Here the therapeutic value of fiction is at work and Booth, typical of a Neo-Aristotelian, reiterates the relevance of such values of literature.

Consequently trauma fiction demands graver attention in the ethical perspective of reading. The humanist and empathetic aspects of reading becomes intricately inseparable from the reading experience of trauma fiction. The novels that are analysed in the present thesis become important in this platform of critical analyses.

Critics who concern themselves with the ethical aspect of literary works are grouped together as either Aristotelians or neo-pragmatists or anti-relativists to prove the moral potential of literature. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, highlights the Aristotelian stance of the therapeutic effect of literature. I A Richards in defining the value of literature, assigns the role of literature as resolution, inter-animation and balancing of impulses. In his *Principles of Literary Criticism* Richards writes:

> Many experiences which, if examined by introspection for their actual content of sensation and imagery, differ very little, are totally diverse in the kind and degree of implicit activity present. This aspect of experiences as filled with incipient promptings, lightly stimulated tendencies to acts of one kind or another, faint preliminary preparations for doing this or that, has been constantly overlooked in criticism. Yet it is in terms of attitudes, the resolution, inter-animation, and balancing of impulses – Aristotle's definition of Tragedy is an instance – that all the most valuable effects of poetry must be described. (103)

These critics follow this cathartic aspect of literature and the role of trauma fiction in lending an ethical angle to the contemporary reality of an unscrupulous world order is inevitable. This complementary role of literature in human self is a point of critical deliberation in Martha Nussbaum as well. She writes in *Love's Knowledge:*

"And by showing the plausibility of the claim that we learn our emotional repertory, in part at least, from the stories we hear, it gives a reason why not only moral philosophy, but also philosophy of mind and philosophy of action, need to turn to literature to complete their own projects" (Nussbaum, 312).

In the poetics of any literary experience, especially trauma fiction, empathy should be the byproduct of its ethics and aesthetics. Right from Kant this notion of ethical fusion with aesthetics has been a point of discussion in the critical and philosophical world. For most of the eighteenth century literary theorists, literature was defined as a platform for the communication of truths and emotions especially truths and emotions of moral significance. The medium of literature is to provide proper materials that kindle and transmute our senses and imaginations. Consequently our appreciation of literature is fundamentally connected to our enjoyment of both the form and the content of such a literary mediated communication. Here the aesthetic appreciation is presented to be nothing but an ethical experience. McGinn's argument in this regard is worth quoting:

> Stories can sharpen and clarify moral questions, encouraging dialectic between the reader's own experience and the trials of the characters he or she is reading about. A tremendous amount of moral thinking and feeling is done when reading novels (or watching plays and films, or reading poetry and short stories). In fact, it is not an exaggeration to say that for most people this is the primary way in which they acquire ethical attitudes, especially in contemporary culture. Our ethical knowledge is aesthetically mediated. (McGinn, 174-5)

It is also to be noted that in ethical criticism the defining hermeneutic conflict between what the text provides and what the reader demands from it has certainly not been solved in favour of a definite attention to the text itself, as stated by Colin Davis in his book *Ethical Issues in Twentieth Century French Fiction: Killing the Other*. He further states that writings by Martha Nussbaum offer the most informative examples for this tension by quoting from her Introduction to *Love's Knowledge* where she presents a powerful case for the ethical interest of literature. According to him Nussbaum states that literary texts are concerned with 'the passionate love of particulars, with grief, pain and bewilderment,' and as such they are 'subversive of morality narrowly construed' (Davis 5). At the same time he also adds that this kind of subversion does not always extend to Nussbaum's own ethical stance of reading. In her Introduction to *Love's Knowledge* she further argues that some novels are "indispensable to a philosophical inquiry in the ethical sphere" (23), but only if that inquiry is Aristotelian in sense. Wayne C Booth too falls in line with this argument.

Both Nussbaum and Booth give special attention to the genre, novel in the ethical platform of reading. Trauma fiction taken in the present study definitely demands ethical deliberations of critical analyses for its need for generating empathy. Novels in general have been a point of serious concern with ethical theorists. Again to quote Nussbaum:

> For the novel as a genre is committed, in its very structure and in the structure of its relationship with its reader, to the pursuit of the uncertainties and vulnerabilities, the particularity and the emotional richness, of the human form of life. If … we wish to develop a human

ethical philosophy along Aristotelian lines, I suggest that we would do

well to study the narrative and the emotional structures of novels,

viewing them as forms of Aristotelian ethical thinking … [Social]

democracy and the art of the novel are allies. Their focus is the human

being, seen as both needy and resourceful; and their dominant passion is

love. (Nussbaum, 390-1)

In the framework of human love and empathy the traumatic subjects in the novels

selected for study are explored in order to elicit the ethical inclinations of the

novelists and the characters. This is done not only based on the textual cues and the

thematic subtleties, but also in the process of encountering the other in the text with

an ethical conscience. The relationship between the text and the reader is a crucial

aspect in ethical criticism especially in the case of novel. The subjectivity of the

characters synchronizes with that of the reader in an empathetic and ethical

paradigm.

Such a study emphasizes the ways in which texts constitute the moral

conscience of the reader drawn from the narrative conscience of the text which exerts

genuine influence upon a reader's sensibility. Martha Nussbaum defines the

relationship between text (or author) and reader as one of cordial dialectics from

which the actual effect of reading springs from. Wayne Booth too dwells largely on

the metaphor of friendship which is later extended by Nussbaum. He writes: "Judged

as friends, texts may be intimate, warm, generous or deceptive, their friendship is to

be welcomed but cast aside if it turns out to be harmful" (Booth, 169-224).

Though the metaphor of friendship in the one sense radically weakens the

conception of the text as other, it is the realm of dialectics that offers the space for

ethics in the novel. Dialectics can be easily defined as the way one operates in relation to the other. In general we tend to choose our friends who share with us values that we uphold. The metaphor of text being friend predisposes Booth and other ethical critics to select texts on the basis of their realistic flavour like the nineteenth-century realist novels rather than the modernist and postmodernist fiction.

Similarly the novels that are studied in the present thesis are noted for their gloomy realism and horrific ambience of tolerance, cruelty, forgiveness, fear and hope, all intricately knit together by trauma. Even though there are futuristic references in some of the novels, it is the reality of nuclear devastation that looms large. The selfhood of the characters studied here is analysed with special focus on their traumatic subjectivity. The possibilities of reading a trauma text revolve around the ethical dimension of a critical practice. The critics or readers within this ethical platform are supposed to be transmuted by the process of the reading of the texts, though the reading experience may not strictly formulate encounters with the other in a conflicting line. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas points out that the reading subject changes as it redefines itself to what happens to it: "The self is not a being which always remains the same, but the being whose existence consists in identifying itself, in finding its identity again through everything which happens to it. It is identity par excellence, the original work of identification" (89).

Thus it is seen that the humanist branch of ethical criticism encapsulates a reading landscape which tries to restore the ethical dimension of literature which was completely neglected during the theory wars of the 1970s and 1980s dominated by Deconstruction and other poststructuralist schools of anti-essentialist theories. With ethical theories what emerges into reading paradigm is the stark contrast of

incompatible premises that permeated the poststructuralist terrains of critical analysis. As against the anti-essentialist notions of poststructuralist theories, Keenan insists that "Ethics and politics - as well as literature - are evaded when we fall back on the conceptual priority of the subject, agency, or identity as the grounds of our action" (3). In this light of the humanist lens of thinking poststructuralism simply cannot be ethical and its claims are perhaps on the contrary.

A parallel stream of the ethical propensity of criticism can be seen in the works that concern themselves with traumatic reality. Works in trauma theory like Felman and Laub's *Testimony,* Johnson's *A World of Difference,* Newton's *Narrative Ethics,* Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* or Keenan's *Fables of Responsibility* take to an ethical turn in their critical conclusions. These studies formulate their conclusions based on the novels that are written in the present century and the last decade of the last century.

In the context of the above reflections, nuclear disaster writings do call for narratives rooted in an ethical framework. This chapter attempts to elicit in detail the ethical dimensions of the works selected for analyses in the present study. The works *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute, *A Gift Upon the Shore* by M.K. Wren , *Children of the Dust* by Louise Lawrence, *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank, and the nonfiction *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich – all share this ethical turn as a narrative resolve towards the end. The novels are self-conscious in the sense that the role of narrativizing runs as an undercurrent in the thematic progression of these works.

As seen the role of narrative in a work with ethical grounding is a common concern in academics and critical world. These texts are emotionally charged and

such narratives resort to deliberate cues to invite the attention of the readers to the narrative subtleties of the work. The authors take utmost care to depict the emotionally charged subjects in these trauma ridden works with concrete particulars, typical of a standard narrative and at the same time they design the whole fabric with the vicissitudes of the emotional content in such a way as to lead towards an ethical resolve. Works like *A Gift Upon the Shore* by M.K. Wren, *Children of the Dust* by Louise Lawrence, depend largely on concrete particulars to transfer the universal emotion of traumatic subjectivity that springs from individuals in necessary conditions. The solid components of the narrative are tuned in particular objects and individuals depicting the general component in a framework of ethics leading to trangenerational empathy. Most of the novels taken here in general address the particular of which the typical narrative is about, but the narrative's emotive content is designed in a way so as to address a generality where the ethical space of reading comes to play.

As mentioned above, ethical critics like Nussbaum and Booth draw their critical pronouncements from Aristotle who makes a contrast between poetry, history, and philosophy in terms of differences between what is, what is probable, and what is necessary. The novel is a typical narrative whereas history is an unadorned chronicle of a series of events and philosophy is a narrative of moral theory. The narratives with ethical concerns fuse poetry and philosophy and history with their leanings towards universal concerns in an emotive platform.

Thus, in ethical narratives history and memory get fused in the narrative subtleties of these texts. The previous chapters of this study has attempted to show how trauma works upon the subjectivity of the victims and how the writers mark

their role in an ethical discourse. We have seen that the narrative conscience of a trauma novel is perhaps infused with cultural, socio-political, historical and ethical issues and functions in a realistic narrative mode though the author may not be that inclined about the depiction of factual reality.

All the novels analysed in the previous chapters exhibit an interaction between the factual and the emotional, eliciting an empathetic response from the audience. The narrative conscience plays a mechanism of sensibility whereby the reader is given a situation to judge the evolution of thought quite automatically. As is theorized by reader response critics like Louise Rosenblatt and Norman Holland, the texts work as the stimuli for the reader to respond to and it is the reader's emotional plane that organizes and structures the received information as stimuli, and finally there is therapeutic effect of the narrative works upon the reader in an ethical plane.

These novels teem with emotions which are quick mechanisms for touching the ethical core of human sensibility. At the same time the authors punctuate the emotional situations with thought provoking passages and mechanisms akin to alienation effects. It is with this unified sensibility that one experiences and evaluates the large number of episodes and the characters' plights, which make their content clear to the readers, complementary to the reading process. As a result of this ethical process the audience's emotions search for narrative potential to augment one's concerns with values. The emotions of the traumatic subjects put the one in touch with his or her ethical and moral values. These subjects equip the readers to discern a situation in terms of value. By presenting a fictional and factual situation in terms of an emotive terrain, the authors vitalize some of the most important automatic

mechanisms of the readers for eliciting values and then for personalizing and comprehending the situations under reference.

In the case of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 45*, the ethical turn of the novel is fundamentally found in the power of the written word resisting any attempt to destroy the world. Though the novel makes an emotional disassociation between the reader and the protagonists, the narrative remains vacillating between dystopian despair and utopian hope. Bradbury's ethical attack is apparently towards the unprincipled scientific world, intellectual decay of the times and the oppression of human elements in an epicurean culture. The materialistic culture born out of the technological advancements meant for improving the living conditions of the people, prepares the ground for the value judgments in both the author as well as the reader. The central ethical tension in *Fahrenheit 451* can be found in the Marxist and Neo-Marxist workings on the social and political climate in which a work of art is produced. The reversal of the role of the firemen to a destroyer of books, the storehouses of wisdom, showcases the extent to which a totalitarian state can go in making machines out of men. The novel is definitely an acerbic criticism of the dread of the American government at the rise of Communism, and the consequent measures to baulk intellectual life by censoring the views of the people who criticize and question the normative values of the dominant ethos.

Bradbury's optimism for a future of the modern society even in the midst of debilitating catastrophe points to his affirmative values and his hope in human goodness. He promotes the view that the stagnation of critical thinking resulting from mindless entertainment and the suppressive powers of the state apparatus can be prevented by preserving the treasure of knowledge of the past, and making the

people aware of its importance. In *Fahrenheit 451*, one finds the people in the jungle making perpetual efforts to preserve the value systems and the knowledge of the past.

When Montag escapes from the Mechanical Hound, he goes to the jungle and sees Granger who introduces him to Fred Clement. Clement was the former member of the Thomas Hardy chair at Cambridge University before it gets transformed into an Atomic Engineering School. There Montag also meets Dr. Simmons, the Professor who taught ethics which is now deemed to be an ancient discipline. Granger also has authored a book titled '*The Fingers in the Glove; the Proper Relationship between the Individual and Society*' and it was the composition of this book that leads to the loss of his job at the university.

The fact that Montag feels ashamed of not being a member of this scholarly group points to the fact the fireman is not totally without conscience. These scholars are enraged by the government's policies which deprive the people of the wisdom of the past. The episode where Granger strikes a fireman when the latter comes to burn his library is just an instance of the ethical gesture in the novel and works as sign of resistance against conformism. Rather than hanging on to a violent mode of protest, the members focus their attention on the need for carrying the knowledge of the yesteryears to posterity.

Each member in the scholarly group has preserved a book in memory which they can reproduce at any requisite moment. These scholars with their photographic memories use their life span with a desire to preserve these pearls of wisdom. The references to Aristophanes, Mahatma Gandhi, Gautama Buddha, Confucius, Thomas Love Peacock, Thomas Jefferson, Mr. Lincoln and many other great thinkers and

writers mentioned in the third chapter of this thesis is a case in point. Their statement "We are also Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John" also point to the fact that Bradbury's ethics is rooted in any book that upholds human goodness and tolerance. Religious scriptures are not excluded in this regard. The scholars have worked on this kind of conservation for twenty years, and now they are in a position to recall anything that has been stored in their minds at any point of time. Montag states that he has kept parts of the '*Book of Ecclesiastes*' but has not been able to recall the whole of it unlike Granger, who as a scholar, is endowed with a gift of memory to reminisce everything he has come across once in his life.

But to keep the memories of the books alive, these members also need to ensure that they themselves remain alive. They are well aware of the fact that the state punishes all those in possession of books and thus this traumatic act in the book gets transmuted to an ethical act in the later stage of the evolution of thought in the novel. These scholars burn the books that they have read as an act of preserving them as they would be caught and killed if they are found reading them. These people assume to be ordinary human beings despite their miraculous scholarship and meticulous memory.

As we find in *The Road*, a Marxist materialist conscience lurks behind the narrative landscape of *Fahrenheit 451* too. The Marxian notion of reification can be brought into critical debate here. Reification designates transformation of a person or concept, into an object as a result of the ills of the society without human consideration. When human subjects turn into the inanimate object of books, the Marxist concept of reification comes to play. Granger as well as his friends in the

jungle transforms themselves into the esoteric image of books to build up a new society rooted in ethical values. Granger remarks:

> Then, over a period of twenty years or so, we met each other, travelling, and got the loose network together and set out a plan. The most important single thing we had to pound into ourselves was that we were not important, we mustn't be pedants; we were not to feel superior to anyone else in the world. We're nothing more than dust-jackets for books, of no significance otherwise. Some of us live in small towns. Chapter One of Thoreau's Walden in Green River, Chapter Two in Willow Farm, Maine. Why, there's one town in Maryland, only twenty-seven people, no bomb'll ever touch that town, is the complete essays of a man named Bertrand Russell. Pick up that town, almost, and flip the pages, so many pages to a person. And when the war's over, some day, some year, the books can be written again, the people will be called in, one by one, to recite what they know and we'll set it up in type until another Dark Age, when we might have to do the whole damn thing over again. But that's the wonderful thing about man; he never gets so discouraged or disgusted that he gives up doing it all over again, because he knows very well it is important and worth the doing. (F 451)

These lines eloquently underline the ethical dimension of the novel. At another point Granger states that the scholars would never bereave the death of a person, but would rather weep over their good deeds that shaped a culture of beautiful values. For instance when his grandfather died what he missed was his actions more than the person:

When I was a boy my grandfather died, and he was a sculptor. He was also a very kind man who had a lot of love to give the world, and he helped clean up the slum in our town; and he made toys for us and he did a million things in his lifetime; he was always busy with his hands. And when he died, I suddenly realized I wasn't crying for him at all, but for the things he did. I cried because he would never do them again, he would never carve another piece of wood or help us raise doves and pigeons in the back yard or play the violin the way he did, or tell us jokes the way he did. He was part of us and when he died, all the actions stopped dead and there was no one to do them just the way he did. He was individual. He was an important man. I've never gotten over his death. Often I think, what wonderful carvings never came to birth because he died. How many jokes are missing from the world, and how many homing pigeons untouched by his hands. He shaped the world. He did things to the world. The world was bankrupted of ten million fine actions the night he passed on (77)

In the above passage, on finds the ethical overtone of the novel being maintained even in the verbal nuances of the narrative. Instead of "passed away" the author uses "passed on" to reiterate the sense of continuity of his life.

Granger's grandfather continues to exist in the memory of the living by his actions. This quality of the relic in memory is conspicuously missing in the contemporary world order and Bradbury's conscious attempt to translate it into language is noteworthy. In the present world, the author states, that people do not

take it seriously that they have to leave something for posterity to make this world a better space to live in. His views are clear in these lines:

> Everyone must leave something behind when he dies … A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you're there. It doesn't matter what you do … so long as you change something from the way it was before you touched it into something that's like you after you take your hands away. The difference between the man who just cuts lawns and a real gardener is in the touching … The lawn cutter might just as well not have been there at all; the gardener will be there a lifetime. (156-157)

And there is nothing more enriching than books. Books can touch readers in different ways. A book can gift one a singular experience like a single fragrant rose or provide a whole range of learning experiences like a multihued garden. The ethical dimension of the novel is accentuated in the immense power of the mystical aspect of the self-enriching potential of a book. The nourishing potential of books enables the readers to probe introspectively and also love the world with all its internal contradictions. This fact has been consciously reiterated in the narrative of the novel. Again the two main women characters are important in this regard. Clarisse and Mildred as traumatic subjects are presented as polar opposites. While Mildred holds on to a claustrophobic life of narrow mindedness and hopelessness, Clarisse is the one who articulates the writer's vision of openness and mutual enrichment. It is her love of books and nature that influences Montag to explore the world of words.

Bradbury's criticism of the consumerist culture of America itself is a telling instance of the ethical concern of the novel. The author's concern over the lack of creative interaction amongst the people due to the rapid and unchecked progress of technology in the society at the end of the twentieth century is an underlying theme. In *Fahrenheit 451* the author shows how a citizen is incited by the government to involve in frivolous activities like driving cars at a reckless speed for a meaningless thrill with complete disregard for nature. Ray Bradbury's eco-concern is another important ethical element in the novel. The materialist culture is despised by the author due to his extreme love of nature.

The scuffle between individual interest and the state becomes another major concern where the values systems come into play. This theme is interlaced with the theme of eco-concern in the novel. A beautiful instance where these two themes coincide is when Clarisse's uncle gets imprisoned for driving his car slowly to enjoy the beauty of nature. This man is arrested because he resorts to his individual liberty of driving his car slow in order to enjoy the calm of nature, as against the speed imposed by the government. The government does not like people's love of nature which is considered to be a social vice. No personal feelings of love and camaraderie among individuals are fostered; instead people are encouraged to spend their time in togetherness only with a view to promote the common interests of consumerism. But no real friendship is promoted among these people. This kind of an impersonal and impassionate attitude towards life among the people is created deliberately by those in power, so that they can exploit the people easily if they are drained of their ethical contents. It is also to be noted that the dominant group is inseparable from an

exploitative consumerist culture. Bradbury's anger at the consumerist society becomes the most profound expression of his ethical consciousness.

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* on the other hand highlights a metaphoric journey where the value systems of the writer gets unleashed in the progression of the thought systems of the father-son duo. The novel is generally considered to be one of the most powerful fictional expressions in contemporary literature in terms of human catastrophe. The narrative intensity of *The Road* is marked by the unambiguous display of ethical inclinations of the main characters throughout the novel. McCarthy in one sense is trying to portray the idea that human endeavours are enmeshed in the mundane concerns of the world and the novel is a fictional correlative of this material deterioration of the world in post apocalyptic fashion. The ethical trait of the novel is not rooted in theology but rather in a reversal of such an institutionalized form of cosmos, and thereby almost all the characters in the novel participate in a world view of much broader materialist interpretation of the universe. As a result of this worldview rooted in anti-metaphysics, the readers are allowed to comprehend the philosophical, political , moral and ethical imaginaries of the novel. The problematics of memory that the novel deals with is an ample evidence for this concern.

In *The Road*, McCarthy tries to overcome the generational gap between the past and the present and there by a transgenerational reconciliation is made in the backdrop of human destruction. To achieve this reconciliation the author maintains the theme of survival in *The Road* as one finds in *Children of Dust.* McCarthy designs that the father must die for the son to attain the wisdom and faith within the materialist dimensions of survival. The ethics in the novel is not tuned in

teleological and theological aspects grounded in metaphysics and eternity, but the materialist concerns around one, like looking for ways to help each other in the actual and realistic realms of life.

When life is torn gruesomely apart, an attempt to put it together, bringing in coherence, a sense of dependence and belonging, or emotional totality placed in material processes rooted in everyday life, is made unlike many of the ethical narratives where one resorts to philosophical and spiritual leanings to seek solace from the traumatic condition. The novel *The Road* presents a longing for the universal through concrete particulars typical of ethical narratives as mentioned above. These concrete particulars transcend the provincial belonging and community feelings and offer more resilience to human ethics and values placed in material reality surrounded by an ethos of nihilism.

This transcendence to the universal is powerfully maintained in the narrative conscience of the novel. Throughout *The Road* one finds McCarthy's attitude as anti-cartography presenting a mindscape and landscape breaking all borders and boundaries. Symbols and icons of location markers are minimal in the novel and the author takes utmost care to dissolve them wherever they appear even in the episode where the shipwreck is narrated. The way the author blurs the boundary between the land and sea is a telling example for this lack of faith in cartography. The following passage from *The Road* is striking statement on the same:

> From the end of the spit to the boat there was perhaps a hundred feet of open water. They stood looking at the boat. Some sixty feet long, stripped to the deck, keeled over in ten or twelve feet of water. It had been a twin-masted rig of some sort but the masts were broken off close

> to the deck and the only thing remaining topside were some brass cleats
> and a few of the rail stanchions along the edge of the deck. That and the
> steel hoop of the wheel sticking up out of the cockpit aft. He turned and
> studied the beach and the dunes beyond. Then he handed the boy the
> pistol and sat in the sand and began to unlace the cords of his shoes.
> (116)

The interlacing of the images of life and death too is ample statement to reiterate the irrelevance of geographical boundaries in the novel. The author uses such images with the twin purposes of   showing the disintegration of reality on the one side and the instability of the cartographic boundaries on the other. McCarthy's concern with this deterioration is visible from the following passage where one can note his descriptive ability of geography too:

> In the evening the murky shape of another coastal city, the cluster
> of tall buildings vaguely askew. He thought the iron armatures had
> softened in the heat and then reset again to leave the buildings standing
> out of true. The melted window glass hung frozen down the walls like
> icing on a cake. They went on. In the nights sometimes now he'd wake in
> the black and freezing waste out of softly colored worlds of human love,
> the songs of birds, the sun. (143)

The fragmented language of McCarthy has in its fold both the beautiful and the grotesque. His vision of life and the ethics he holds on to is evident in this. He wants the remnants of a beautiful life for his son. He is well aware that he will not survive. Even when he spits blood drool, he ensures that his son listened to the sound of his breathing. Again McCarthy writes in similar lines:

The road crossed a dried slough where pipes of ice stood out of the frozen mud like formations in a cave. The remains of an old fire by the side of the road. Beyond that a long concrete causeway. A dead swamp. Dead trees standing out of the gray water trailing gray and relic hagmoss. The silky spills of ash against the curbing. He stood leaning on the gritty concrete rail. Perhaps in the world's destruction it would be possible at last to see how it was made. Oceans, mountains. The ponderous counter spectacle of things ceasing to be. The sweeping waste, hydroptic and coldly secular. The silence. (143)

As mentioned above McCarthy seems to subvert the metaphysical dimensions of life around and of the questions related to nature and universe so as to make particular claims about the nature of ethics. So, McCarthy cannot be categorized as either a materialist or a spiritualist strictly and he is not either on the side of immanence nor transcendence. Moreover the fragmented sentences again point to the inherent disorderliness in the world and McCarthy attempts to sense out of this disorderliness.

As with *The Road,* the other novels by McCarthy too does not show his allegiance to any particular school of thought. His fiction works at the interface between materiality and spirituality resulting in the representation of materialist worldview with an ontological vision of human beings as ethical subjects.

The ethical leaning of the novel is evident in the way the father and son sustain a relationship of mutual trust and support despite the gruesome reality of their world. Their process of resistance to the institutionalized theological basis of the universe encapsulates all types of spiritualism including the esoteric ones. The novel addresses various ethical fields though the dominant one gets rooted in the

materialist concerns. One of the ethical domains that the father's thoughts rest in can be traced back to the domain of pantheism and that of the spiritual ideas of eternal genesis. Conventional beliefs like pantheism are of timeless origins and the novelist himself touches upon the fact. He writes "Look around you. Ever is a long time. But the boy knew what he knew. That ever is no time at all. He sat by a gray window in the gray light in an abandoned house in the late afternoon and read old newspapers while the boy slept" (28).

The boy too, at times is made to accept the gross reality of the world around him and acknowledge the ethical strain rooted in material reality. The instance where the man shoots the road agent to protect his son, prompts the boy to question his father. The father's ethical leaning is obviously evident, but McCarthy seems to have lent a different ethical sense to the boy who seems to be constantly rooted in higher values. It could be argued, perhaps, that it is because of the traumatic reality in the material plane of the universe that demands a need for an ethical turn, spiritual or otherwise. Throughout the novel we find the father struggling with his son's ethical awareness where he sees the boy's moral perceptiveness as a stumbling block to the instrumental realities of survival. Another instance on the road is when both of them meet a man who has been electrocuted by lightning. They are forced to leave the burnt man as they have no other choice. The practical sense and the survival instinct of the man force him to abandon the burnt man but the boy cries for him and is quite reluctant to leave him. More of such examples where such values define the father-son duo's traumatic subjectivities have been cited in the third chapter. The ethical dimension in the novel is again asserted by the conflicting responses of the father and son. The boy's precocity and superior moral vision spring from the tragic acceptance

of the traumatic reality around. After the catastrophe, the father and son meet all kinds of horror in the course of their journey. The disaster has turned the world into a living hell. Humans with cannibalistic tendencies roam the road in search of others to steal from. Raping and killing for food and other essentials have become the norm. Even the organized survivors have pens to keep humans imprisoned and they are careful to take one limb at a time to ensure that the meat does not go stale. Most of the survivors believe in surviving at any cost. But for the son it was different. He wants to keep some semblance of humanity and does not wish for others what he does not wish for himself.

It is apparent that the father is presented to be an agnostic. But however the father too believes that goodness should survive. It is evident in the way he cares and sacrifices for his son. He also tells him stories of courage and justice just to ensure that his son keeps the 'fire' of life and goodness burning. One may often feel that the boy's steadfastness to faith is what makes him empathetic, but then nowhere does McCarthy explicitly talk of the boy's belief in divinity. Moreover McCarthy's vision seems to be rooted generally in human goodness, but at the same time linked to the practical and material wisdom of the father. The father and son duo strikes a perfect balance in projecting McCarthy's ethical stance.

In short, set in the post-apocalyptic world of devastation, the novel seems to ask how the survivors, if not socialized by the symbolic order of education or any other institutional agency, will opt for behaving when confronted with persistent deprivation. MacCarthy proposes the idea that the choice human beings make will decide human culture and its ethical principles. If humans beings decide to survive

with zero values then they would disappear without a trace, but if they opt for a life, say, like the father and son adhering to values, then there is definitely hope.

As mentioned earlier if *Fahrenheit 451* and *The Road* narrate the traumatic experience of individual life in the background of social chaos, *Alas, Babylon* presents the societal and cultural aspect of trauma and the effect upon the individuals consequently. Unlike some of the post-apocalyptic novels taken in the present project, *Alas, Babylon* does not present the story of individual subjectivity in the traumatic backdrop and his/her survival, but the novel presents the traumatic subjectivity of a social group and the consequent ethical resolve on their part.

The ethical aspect of this novel stems from its community concern. Like all other post-apocalyptic novels, Alas*, Babylon* too concentrates not just on the world-ending devastation leading to trauma and gloom, but also on the attempts of the survivors to rebuild a life of hope despite the traumatic reality. While the novel details the story of a small town in Central Florida where Randy Bragg, a former soldier, leads a community of his neighbourhood in the menacing background of nuclear holocaust, the ethical dimension of the novel is illustrated in the bonding among the members in the community and the mutual trust and love they have. The author Pat Frank is meticulous in highlighting the humane side of the community as against the dark and dismal picture of the trauma ridden physical ambience.

It is the note of optimism that works as the driving force of human spirit throughout the novel. Randy Bragg, the protagonist is optimism incarnate. When Randy is introduced in the novel, he is portrayed to be a man on the decline, having lost in his attempt to reach a position in political office. Due to this defeat, he struggles through life. As a result of the nuclear war, he undergoes drastic changes

and decides to take care of his family. This shift in his decision is symbolic of the ethical turn in the novel. His desire for order and civilization is an ethical desire around which the whole narrative of the novel is designed. With the assistance of Doctor Dan Gunn, Randy makes a safe and sustainable community for his family and neighbours on River Road. Using his position as an officer in the Army Reserve he becomes a champion of law and order. Randy assumes the role of a classic American hero.

It is in the aesthetics of transformation that the ethical aspect of the novel is beautifully placed. The novel transforms itself from a post-apocalyptic novel, at least in the peripheral level, to a motivational docufiction of personal transformation and moral values. Randy Bragg for instance changes from the life of a boozer to that of *Rambo*. Bill McGovern on the other hand goes from being bored to death in retirement to loving life like he has not in the previous decades. Dan Gunn is another character who shifts from his nightmares to his dreams rooted in an eventful life. All these transformations are part of their traumatic subjectivity.

In *Alas Babylon* we see ethics as a basic human domain which distinguishes human beings from other living beings. The human element is highlighted throughout the novel, holding on to foundations of love and empathy, values which are considered to be the core of the community's ethical consciousness. The characters in this novel initially rely on outer sources of moral institution for solace but later on they build a mechanism of their own where their moral landscape is supervised by their own ethics. It is interdependence and mutual trust and care that provide the platform for this inner strength.

Even the technological images in the novel are used metaphorically to assert their care for life in the events of the last hours. The care for each other too is visible in the ethically charged thought of the novel. The following passage is a case in point:

> Life was ebbing from its last set of batteries. He feared the day when it would no longer pick up even the strongest signal, or give any sound whatsoever, and the day could not be far distant. So, what strength was left in the batteries he carefully rationed. Sam Hazzard's all-wave receiver, operating on recharged automobile batteries, was really their only reliable source of information. He clicked on the radio, was relieved to hear static, and tried the Conelrad frequencies. (127)

Baumann's statement is highly relevant in this context. He writes "there is no force stronger than human will and more powerful than human resistance, capable of coercing human selves to be moral "and" relying on the rules has become a habit and without the fatigues we feel naked and helpless" (Baumann, 20). In the novel under question, one finds the traumatic subjects being separated from social community and by being without the support of the authorities outside that would monitor their conducts, these surviving people wandering through the devastated land undergo an inner conflict of ethics between the rational and the emotional. The narrative subtlety is scrupulously designed in a way so as to assert the emotional content of the choice but at the same time rely on their rational thoughts in framing a community of their own.

These characters in trying to fulfill their responsibility exhibit virtues like mutual respect, perseverance, love and self-sacrifice. They keep themselves alive

with this mutual trust and responsibility unmindful of their own safety in moments of peril. Surviving a wasteland demands more than food and shelter and provisions and this mutual help and care that they render highlight the ethical dimension of the novel. When they were suffering from starvation, cold and violence, a sense of hopelessness reigns in them but their ethical selves offer each other a reassurance of a shared value system.

As one finds in *The Road* , the metaphor of the journey works so powerfully here too and each travel they undertake ensures warmth, and keeps them away from death and dismay. Journeys function as tropes to a better future. Some of the passages that describe their short and long travels reiterate the central concerns of the novel like caring for others and gaining self-assurance in the context of the traumatic events that they face. A passage from the novel support this idea:

> There were a number of ways by which Randy could have traveled the three miles to Marines Park, and then the two additional miles to the Hernandez house on the outer fringe of Pistolville. The Admiral had offered to take him as far as the town dock in his outboard cruiser, now converted to sail. But Sam Hazzard had not as yet added additional keel to the boat, so it would sideslip badly on a tack. Sam could get him to Marines Park all right, but on the return trip might be unable to make headway against current and wind and be left stranded. Randy could have borrowed Alice Cooksey's bicycle, but decided that this might make him conspicuous in Pistolville. He could have ridden Balaam, the mule, but if he succeeded in persuading Rita to let him have the truck and gasoline, how would Balaam get home? Balaam didn't fit

in a panel truck. Besides, he was not sure that Balaam should ever be risked away from Henry's fields and barn. The only mule in Timucuan County was beyond price. In the end, he decided to walk. (151)

The passage shows how the protagonist goes for choices in life at precarious situations and each choice is based on mutual respect and love. The following passage from the book again reflects how they weave their life around nature and its objects despite the traumatic surroundings they live in:

> Florence awoke at six-thirty, as always, on a Friday in early December. Heavy, stiff and graceless, she pushed herself out of bed and padded through the living room into the kitchen. She stumbled onto the back porch, opened the screen door a crack, and fumbled for the milk carton on the stoop. Not until she straightened did her china-blue eyes begin to discern movement in the hushed gray world around her. A jerky-tailed squirrel darted out on the longest limb of her grapefruit tree. Sir Percy, her enormous yellow cat, rose from his burlap couch behind the hot water heater, arched his back, stretched, and rubbed his shoulders on her flannel robe. The African lovebirds rhythmically swayed, heads pressed together, on the swing in their cage. She addressed the lovebirds: "Good morning, Anthony. Good morning, Cleo." (2)

At the very outset of the novel, the author Pat Frank presents the passionate flavour of the life of these survivors despite the fact that they are facing a life of trauma caused by nuclear devastation. As in the other novels, Nature offers a great source of inner strength and comfort to the members. Thus it can be summed up that the ethical trajectory of *Alas, Babylon* is dotted by the little incidents of love, care and mutual

respect amongst the members of the surviving community. It is again hope that they all hold on to as a community

In slight contrast, Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* examines the complex relationships between the characters and technology in the framework of nuclear devastation. This novel presents a traumatic world that has turned fatal and from which escape is impossible. Nevil Shute may sound fatalistic but the way he presents the horrors of the nuclear attack with such objective accuracy that it prompts the readers to rethink and reorient their notions of such futile State security measures masking greater disasters. The novelist here observes human actions with conscious and contrived objectivity without criticizing them, and thereby leaves complete freedom of choice to the readers to draw their own moral and ethical conclusions.

Characterized by terror and pathos, *On the Beach* is a convincingly remarkable picture of how ordinary people face the unimaginably horrendous nightmare of their lives. Though the novel is set after a terrible nuclear holocaust, the book is presented not as a document of violence and survival angst, but rather as a heart wrenching experience marked by the gentleness and goodness of people in the technologically mediated world. It is the stoic acceptance of their fate that is highlighted and the grace with which they face calamity till they meet their ends that underlines the ethical conscience of the characters.

The reader's ethics too comes into play when he/she is made to wonder how he/she would live if one is left with just a few months to live. This kind of a thought is an echo of what Bradbury notes in *Fahrenheit 45*. It is one's actions that remain as relics in the aftermath of devastation and death, except that in Shute's novel hopes of survival are almost shut. In fact the novel functions as a memento

mori in the context of a nuclear catastrophe, in the way the events are narrated. The readers are given empathetic spaces to ponder upon the inevitable consequence of amassing nuclear weapons, or for that matter any weapons of mass destruction, and also contemplate on the futility of wars and the vanity of indulgence in material life.

The readers are also made to question the nature of relationship that people should have with technological gadgets in the contemporary cultural order. The proper knowledge on how and why to use machines lays ground for the ethical dimension of this novel. Knowledge as a concept of salvation has been presented to be inevitable to the proper survival of the human race. The undercurrent of the need to educate people about the perils of nuclear war to avoid the catastrophe has been maintained throughout the novel. Peter once mentions that if the articles in the newspapers had actually educated people, they could have prevented the war and peace would have been achieved in the world. The ethical role of journalism leading people to proper understanding of the real issues instead of distracting them with sensationalist headlines is highlighted by Shute in *On the Beach*. He writes:

> You could have done something with newspapers. We didn't do it. No nation did, because we were all too silly. We liked our newspapers with pictures of beach girls and headlines about cases of indecent assault, and no government was wise enough to stop us having them that way. But something might have been done with newspapers, if we'd been wise enough. (Shute 281)

The reference to the role of media and journalism and the ethics associated with these vocations is incisively pointed out by Shute. The passage is highly relevant in the contemporary world of post-truths and corrupt media activism. The occupations

of the various characters in the novel are resorted to as a means to resolve to their traumatic conflicts in the face of imminent destruction. Rather than seeking solace in religious rituals for salvation, the main characters in Shute's novel is seen to seek consolation by focusing on their careers and vocations. The details of how these traumatic subjects stoically face their ends are elaborately cited in the third chapter of this study. Despite the fact that their jobs have little relevance in the face of imminent death, these characters equate their engagements in their works to spiritual experiences and find self-fulfillment in the same till the last day of their lives on the earth.

The ethical dimension in *A Gift Upon the Shore* by M.K. Wren and Children *of the Dust* by Louise Lawrence is significant in terms of women subjectivity as a point of critical deliberation. These novels show the ethical concern of the female characters in times of trauma. Both the novels are insightful in their presentation of the woman characters. It has also to be noted that these novels are written by woman writers. The novels highlight the traumatic subjectivity of the women in contrast to the earlier novels. A study of these two novels impels one to examine the extent to which these works serve as precautionary narratives about the difficulties of rebuilding a society after a tragic event like nuclear disaster. The procreative powers of women in these novels stand synonymous to a productive world as opposed to the destructive world predominantly designed by men.

Many parallels can be drawn in terms of the ethical conscience of the women in these two novels. For any narrative fiction to encompass the notion of a remodelled society, it needs to attain the background of a cultural myth. This cultural myth is provided by features like assembling common beliefs of the culture which

are rooted in historical experiences, giving primary focus to a historically representative form of the community. The utopian or dystopian narratives of survival and reconstruction, as seen in *A Gift upon the Shore* and *Children of the Dust* show the cultural myth of progress and the powerful eschatological vision of human self. Both the novels present the implosion of a society and the reconstitution of a new civilization on the ruins of the old. This reconstitution adds the novels to the cluster of ethical narratives.

This reconfiguration of the culture is made after a total annihilation of the existing system and the traumatic female subjects act out quite instrumentally in this process of reconfiguration. A complete separation from a Metropolitan pulse of civilization and the resistance of physical hardship among the wilderness constitute the elementary feature of the narratives highlighting a cultural myth. These novels are stories of physical separation, regression and isolation and it is from this tone that they build their launching pad of survival.

As we find in many of the novels that are analyzed here, these novels too use similar narrative patterns and strategies implementing cultural constructions resulting in the necessary renewal of a devastated social structure. The following conversation between Stephen and Mary Hope from *A Gift Upon the Shore* illustrates the survival spirit of the main woman characters in the novel:

> "Isolation? What do you mean?"
>
> "Just that we made ourselves entirely self-sufficient so we wouldn't have to go out among other people for any reason. We were already *nearly* self-sufficient. We had land and water and livestock. We pooled our money to buy everything we'd need to keep going for- I don't know. A

year or so. We never committed ourselves on the length of our retreat."

(101)

In *A Gift upon the Shore,* the heroine Mary Hope is sequestered from civilization after massive attacks as delineated in the fourth chapter and the whole story is framed in a narrative aesthetics of survival. At the very outset of the novel one finds goodness arrive in the form of Rachel Morrow who comes to the rescue of Mary Hope. Both together manage to escape and tart living on a farm bordering the Pacific shoreline. The cultural implosion described at the very outset of the novel which motivated the heroines' journey from the Metropolis, ends in nuclear holocaust that the women witness from a distance.

The support mechanisms devised by these women set the tone for the ethics of survival in the narrative. In times of extreme variations in climatic conditions following the nuclear winter, they struggle hard to survive. They face different levels of hardships in the farm in complete isolation. Mary being younger than Rachel is obsessed with her apparent potential to reproduce in a world without men. And the tragic futility of being is asserted here. The following passage from the novel is one of the most poignant passages in contemporary fiction that asserts the need for society free of gender bias. The futility and danger of a monoculture is beautifully voiced by Mary Hope:

> And I remember how I sympathized with her. I thought a great
> deal that year about being a female without a male. For all I knew, our
> species was near extinction, and I could do nothing to save it. I had no
> doubt I was capable of it; my menstrual cycles continued with frustrating

regularity. Sometimes I saw Rachel and me as two Eves in a precarious

Eden born of Armageddon. (155)

One of the fundamental ethical conflicts takes place in the novel when these two women meet Luke who miraculously appears on the beach when they are on the lookout for survivors. Luke too is in search of fertile females to join his community called The Ark. Mary's ethical conflict is evident here when she is torn between her desire to remain with Rachel on the one hand, and to accompany Luke to face the changes that life has store in The Ark, on the other. Remaining with Rachel means to die without any descendants. Being enlightened liberals, these two women enquire Luke about the dangers of Mary's choice. The Ark is a fundamentalist space under the control of a patriarchal visionary called The Doctor. Mary's later encounters with him results in her expulsion from The Ark. This expulsion is the result of Mary's choice. She leaves the place when their leader, The Doctor denies medical attention to a seriously wounded Rachel, claiming that she was a witch.

Mary's survival instinct is reiterated by the author in many places to highlight the ethical facet of the novel. The geographical lay-out of The Ark is elaborately described in the novel and the heroine's love of nature too is notable in the narrative beauty of the novel. Beauty of love and its appreciation becomes a common concern in ethical narratives. A panoramic description of The Ark in the eyes of Mary is strikingly crucial in the ethical undertones of the novel that detail traumatic subjectivity. Mary's account of the community is also remarkably presented in the novel:

They stood at the top of a steep slope shorn of trees in an old

clear-cut. Caught somewhere between fear and hope, Mary looked

southeast into a valley cradled between two low, forested ridges. The valley had an east-west alignment, with the river Luke called the Jordan trailing along the south boundary, the sun flashing on its dark waters between the barred shadows of the trees on the far bank. At the center of the valley, arranged in a circle perhaps four hundred feet in diameter, stood the twelve households Luke had described, all built of peeled logs, roofed with hand-split shakes. Each household had three small, shuttered windows on its long back wall and a brick chimney against one of the shorter end walls. The air was veiled with their smoke. Rock-lined paths led from the households to the center of the circle like twelve spokes toward the hub of a wheel. At the hub stood the church. It was also built of logs and shakes, the entrance facing west beneath a steeple that thrust high above everything around it and pointed a long shadow toward Mary and Luke. (266)

This idyllic picture of the microcosmic world is true to the Utopian tradition of narration. The harmony of this closed community centered on an authority gets shattered in the traumatic situation. The village is turned into a fort protecting itself from the world outside, keeping aloof from all strangers. The focus of this description rests in its multi-layered symbolism. This part of the novel is rich in its spiritual imagery and it is the religious and moral connotations that add to ethical dimension of the text. An inevitable turn to nature is symbolized by the church steeple which acts as the hand of a solar clock showing the passage of time directed by nature alone. This device is unlike the mechanical clock placed in Rachel's farmhouse which needs to be regularly wound by Mary to keep it ticking. In The Ark

the world is secluded from historical time but it is planned by the inmates to continue to mark the time until Christ's second coming as predicted by the Doctor's ecclesiastical vision. The church which stands for the faith of the people in the community is preserved well and this too adds to the ethical aspect of the novel. Trauma gives way to the ethos of the people. The following passage is an example:

> Mary released her pent breath in a sigh of satisfaction. The orderly arrangement of fields and fences and buildings seemed inevitable and right. She found Luke's hand in hers, and knew the future hung suspended for them on a golden thread, and there was beauty in it. And there were people. At first she didn't recognize the tiny, dark objects moving about in the gardens and fields, and she wasn't prepared for the exhilaration galvanized by that recognition. (267)

Unlike *The Road* and *Alas, Babylon* this novel shows its affinity towards ethics rooted in religion. Christian denotations and connotations run through the novel. Even the selection of names of the protagonists is highly relevant. The first names Mary and Rachel are obvious biblical allusions and their second names – 'Hope' and 'Morrow' together point to an optimistic tomorrow. Apart from the apparent religious dimensions attributed to names and places throughout the novel, the central features of this commune connect directly to the Puritan experience of configuring civilization amidst the wilderness.

This community survives in the light of their hard work, self-denial and self-sacrifice. Most of these people lay their trust completely upon religious faith and divine ethics to constitute a new world order. It could be said that The Ark encapsulates the conscious desire to reconstitute a cultural order informed by the

Puritan ideals. The ideals present the renunciation of individual freedom as individualism is considered to be detrimental to the well-being of the self-sacrificing pulse of social ethics. This is one of the cultural and social dimensions of *A Gift upon the Shore* which also explores the presumably paradoxical powers of religious beliefs. Mary does not participate in all the religious services of this community. But she is the children's teacher there and just as in *Fahrenheit 451* she understands the relevance of books. She has a tough time protecting the books from the orthodox members of the church who are not ready acknowledge any written word other than the bible. But Mary ensures that the children's ethics are not entrenched by mere orthodox religious values but by a greater morality rooted in all goodness, be it nature or books.

Apparently religious overtones run explicitly through the novel. Mary Hope opens the story of her life to Stephen, her apprentice in the second phase with the open address: "I will call it the Chronicle of Rachel. It will be written simply, simplistically, with the cadence of the King James Version. The story of Rachel Morrow as told by her acolyte and apostle Mary Hope" (1). The very opening itself is rich in religious connotations. All this rhetoric elevates this simple story to the level of a sacrosanct document to be handed over to another generation, but Mary does not subscribe to all the principles of religion, especially the dogmatic ones. Though she is not a strict believer in mere religious ethics she does communicate the narrative of her experience in a religious language. Moreover, Rachel was an artist who believed in free-thinking and loved books. Thus using a biblical language to describe her seems paradoxical.

By juxtaposing these contrastive paradigms of two world views representing two different cultural projects of survival presented progressively through Mary's encounter with Rachel and with Luke, the author Wren dwells on the potential dangers of the Christian fundamentalist model in its most extreme design. Still it is quite visible that in the indomitable will for survival this community model works more in effect than the individualized forms of social build up. Towards the end of the novel one comes to realize that Mary Hope survives as a result of some members in The Ark who decide to allow her to live in the farm. This act was in exchange and gratitude for being instrumental in the reconstruction of a new society. Mary turns to accept the fundamentalist communitarian structure in the configuration of a survival pattern and this realization adds much to her ethical conscience. In addition, Mary is a writer and Rachel an artist. It is humanities and art that is juxtaposed in the background of religion. The attempt of these women to protect all books from the fundamentalist Christian commune till printing is back is a kind of an echo of Montag's struggle in *Fahrenheit 451.* By not completely dismissing religion, these women find this the only way to preserve the legacy of their culture. Wren makes her moral vision clear in this kind of an ethical configuration.

The main characters in *The Children of Dust* too are shown to resort to an ethical resolve in their attempts to survive and rebuild their disaster torn lives. The author presents the whole atmosphere of the post traumatic life in a space of panic, with frantic efforts on the part of the survivors to continue to live life rooted in social and cultural ethics. The ethical leaning of this novel is more socially tuned than the individually oriented. The following passage is a hint upon the nature of the

ethical dimension in the novel. The episode between Sarah and Johnson presents the subtle nuances of ethics rooted in social conscience and mutual help:

'I'll look after her,' he said. 'I'll teach her to grow. We'll build a world from the dust, she and I. It won't be easy, but we'll do it. A moral society, based on human decency, free people, co-operating without violence, better than the old. There's a nuclear winter coming on, cold like we have never known. But the glasshouses are centrally heated. There's plenty of wood. The well water's good. If I can get diesel enough to keep the generator going - if I can scavenge enough hay and concentrates to keep the animals alive . . . if I can keep the green plants growing . . . we'll make it. We'll make it anyway, your sister and me.'(41)

The determination in the voice of these characters sets the tone for conscientious attempts at survival. Here it is Johnson who marries the young Catherine and has children. This idea of community living is also reiterated in the words of Catherine: "We're hoping to build a communal living house,' said Catherine. 'Johnson said it will be easier to run than individual homes. The old nuclear family system didn't work so we're going to live and work together. Before the war each family was isolated, which destroyed the spirit of the community. At least, that's how Johnson sees it" (68).

The resolve of the women in the novel to get married and procreate is similar to that of Mary Hope in *Gift upon the Shore*. As discussed earlier Erica too deems it her ethical responsibility to resuscitate life through procreation and continue the process of social life:

Bill never really knew why she sought him out. It had nothing to

do with love and little to do with affection. She admitted, quite freely,

that she had never wanted marriage or children, that she found the idea

abhorrent. But now she saw it as a necessary duty and she was not the

kind of woman to turn her back. Bill understood. She was not offering to

be a wife to him in the way Veronica had been. She had simply chosen

him to father her child. And one year later, after a long and difficult

labour, Erica gave birth to a baby girl… . She was a woman devoid of all

maternal instincts and maybe that was why she had chosen Bill for a

mate. She had sensed perhaps that he would make up for her inadequacy,

that he had fathered before and would love the child enough for both of

them. (47)

A total rejection of ontotheology has been asserted throughout the survival phase of

the characters and they turn to ethics rooted in social commitment and mutual help.

The following lines from the novel reiterates how the author presents a world view

where the characters look beyond an ethics rooted in religious and institutionalized

version of moral codes: "Sarah looked up at the blue heavenly sky. In the end people

turned to God. But the death that would come was nothing to do with Him. He, and

the world, and the whole of creation were about to be destroyed" (8). Sarah's words

here brushes aside all institutionalized notions of religion and adheres to a value

system based in social conscience. This romantically inclined vision of life is again

an indication of the way the author attempts to make the adolescent characters very

assertive in the novel. Later in the novel too reminiscence of the pantheistic view of

classical Romanticism has been apparent in some of the major statements in the

novel. In Laura's attitude to the reality of the time and the acceptance of the truth, one sees how she tries to establish oneness with nature: "Through her he could see forward into the future . . . evolution, mutation, mind over matter, space and stars. She maintained the continuity of creation. For her blind Kate had survived and Simon had come here, each of them part of an unbroken perfect pattern that bestowed a meaning upon everything, little fragments of the mind of God which nothing could destroy" (114).

The posthuman dimension of a disaster too is asserted in the survival ethics in the novel. Technologically mediated identity of bodily existence is powerfully transferred in the struggles that the characters undergo in the traumatic life of survival. The children of the dust here are presented as the victims of the violence of bureaucracy, war mongers and patriarchal world order. These victims continue to survive with the assistance of technology in the same coin though quite ironically they are victims of technological progress. Cyborgs are welcome in the newly designed world order. Even the differences that are seen in the cyborgs are taken as the virtue of diversity of existence here. The ethics of relationship and acceptance of one another in the post-humanist reality is powerfully presented in the novel. The following passage neatly sums up the same:

> Simon held out his hand, inviting her, a mutant girl with white eyes and albino fur. It no longer mattered what she was, or how different. In the past the inability of people to reconcile themselves to each other's differences had led to confrontation, tyranny, subjugation and war. Not any more did Simon see the need for that. Diversity was necessary and natural . . . (112)

The importance of the novel lies in its fine balancing of a technology mediated life and an agrarian life. The lesson is to learn from past mistakes, the idea being voiced by Bill in his discourses. The indomitable will of humans is painstakingly presented by the author. That is one reason why she envisions a mutant generation. The social life in a posthuman era too is powerfully depicted with a view to building a society out of the dust and debris. However, all the three sections of the novel necessitate the need for community living rooted in trust and camaraderie. Like *The Gift upon the Shore*, it is the women who stand in the forefront in 'destroying destruction.'

If the analyses of fictional works taken in the present thesis deal mostly with the ethical impulse of the characters and the authors involved, *Voices from Chernobyl* call for a different angle of ethical interpretation where the reader takes the front seat in the generation of ethical meaning of the text. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the ethical dimension of reading is largely reflected in *Voices from Chernobyl.* At this juncture the notion of "transgenarational empathy" and "empathetic settlement" as conceptualised by the trauma theorist Dominic LaCapra are to be brought into focus.

The trauma and the effects through which the readers go while reading the text thus needs to be problematized. In Voices *from Chernobyl,* the lives of the victims and the survivors evoke an inescapable mental shock inside the psyche of every reader. The incidence where Lyudmilla talks about the tragic condition of Vasenka who gets choked on his own internal organs for instance is something the readers cannot reckon with. Lyudmilla elaborates on his physical and physiological condition: "He was producing stool twenty-five to thirty times a day. With blood and

mucus. His skin started cracking on his arms and legs. He became covered with boils. When he turned his head, there'd be a clump of hair left on the pillow" (27).

The reading community of a generation that comes after the traumatic event in question is supposed to endeavour to perceive and interiorize the effect of the event. This reading community joins in the narrativizing or symbolizing the process of the traumatic event and thereby tries to understand and resolve the challenges issued by the event. This phenomenon is designated as "transgenerational empathy" as we read in LaCapra's *Representing the Holoc*aust (78). In his *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra conceptualises the notion of 'empathetic unsettlement' to refer to the ideal response of a reading collective to a trauma narrative like *Voices from Chernobyl*. The response of the audience with complete empathy has an ethical dimension in the domains of reading. In the case of this book the audience's awareness of the historical background and the knowledge of the responses of the immediate respondents adds to the ethical involvement. The very delay in the recognition of the disaster itself sets the ethical disturbance in the audience of the *Voice*. The Chernobyl catastrophe was recognized as a horrendous international disaster only two days after the event of the explosion. The narrative describes the unimaginable impacts of the scientific disaster in history through polyphonic voices. An old lady recollects the evacuation days:

> I'll remember everything for you. The planes are flying and
> flying. Every day. They fly real-real low right over our heads. They're
> flying to the reactor. To the station. One after the other. While here we
> have the evacuation. They're moving us out. Storming the houses. People
> have covered up, they're hiding. The livestock is moaning, the kids are

crying. It's war! And the sun's out ... I sat down and didn't come out of

the hut, though it's true I didnlt lock up either. (42)

It is difficult to define where the ethics of reading lies, but it is the whole

trauma conveyed that redefines the ethical consciousness invoked by each reading.

The empathy created for a past generation which survived the catastrophe is the best

outcome of the process of reading. As Wayne Booth writes, " a fully responsible

ethical criticism will make explicit those appraisals that are implicit whenever a

reader or listener reports on stories about human beings in action" (Booth, 9).

The novels taken in the present study in general and the non-fiction, *Voices

from Chernobyl* in particular elicit a sort of identification with the trauma victims in

the process of reading. However, the problem of how the reader can be empathetic

to the trauma victims without appropriating or interiorizing their experiences is

addressed by Dominic LaCapra's formulations of "empathetic settlement" in this

regard. In such a reading process, psychoanalytic concepts like transference and

identification become crucial in critical deliberations. He elaborates on the process of

identifying with the subject in a trauma narrative in terms of transference between

the text and audience. In his *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra elaborates

on the issues of "empathetic unsettlement" in the virtual process of reading. He

argues:

It is dubious to identify with the victim to the point of making

oneself a surrogate victim who has a right to the victim's voice or subject

position. The role of empathy and empathetic unsettlement in the

attentive secondary witness does not entail this identity; it involves a kind

of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's

position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not

taking the other's place. (43)

The psychological aspect of reading is much important in the discussion of ethical reading as it is theorised by critics like Hillis Miller and Louise M. Rosenblatt. The latter's work The *Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work* is a seminal work that provides much to the arena of ethical criticism with an interpretational matrix for explaining the motives hidden in the text. The readers' responses to these textual stimuli become points of critical analyses in such a reading. She writes "Each reader brings to the transaction not only a specific past life and literary history, not only a repertory of internalized 'codes,' but also a very active present, with all its preoccupations, anxieties, questions, and aspirations" (144). In ethical reading, the survivor testimony makes a radical shift from singular and temporal experience to a multiple and universal experiences.

The traumatic event takes its significance from local to universal resulting in a global ethical response mediated by the process of reading. To put in other words, it is a conceptual pilgrimage from considering trauma as springing from a singular, initial happening that, when disclosed, could be contained or isolated, enabling us to heal in the form of the successful mourning of wound on a universal level. Instead of the State's motif for one community analytic result and memory and articulation of the Chernobyl disaster as history, the incident is to be reckoned as a universal psychic event.

This realization of the intricacies of the process of reading transaction emphasizes the profound interconnections between the present readers and the

human communities which they try to interiorize in the process so as to seek personal fulfillment. The personalized ethical response has a political inclination too. The ethical turn is towards the recognition of many subjective recollections, which exhibit a huge range of protest and antagonistic responses to the authoritative, official methods and results bringing about the disaster.

This statement thus sheds light upon the universal interiorization of a traumatic event and the nonsymbolizable aspect of trauma which gets virtually identified through the process of reading in a "transgenerational" framework. The violence in the reader is a result of the identification process where the lost other gets diluted to the personalized recollections of the reader- mourner's relationship with the traumatic subjects. This has been made by the reminiscence made in the mourning process, which strictly estranges the other from their own, actual, once-living identity.

In transgenerational empathy, the disaster's outcomes are not limited to the local Chernobyl region alone but it transcends geographical and temporal boundaries. In the materialistic sense the event got spread in the subsequent weeks. Immense radioactive clouds spread to Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Sweden bringing about long-term afflictions like cancer, leukaemia, eye diseases, cardiovascular disease and psychological abnormality, and social discord and distress. This spreading process in statistical terms has been appropriated metaphorically too by Svetlana Alexievich, to refer to the virtual spreading of the trauma into the reading public across time and space. She writes:

As a result of the accident, 50 million Ci of radionuclides were released into the atmosphere. Seventy percent of these descended on

Belarus; fully 23% of its territory is contaminated by cesium-137

radionuclides with a density of over 1 Ci/km^2. Ukraine on the other hand

has 4.8% of its territory contaminated, and Russia, 0.5%. The area of

arable land with a density of more than 1 Ci/km^2 is over 18 million

hectares; 2.4 thousand hectares have been taken out of the agricultural

economy. Belarus is a land of forests. But 26% of all forests and a large

part of all marshes near the rivers Pripyat, Dniepr, and Sozh are

considered part of the radio-active zone. As a result of the perpetual

presence of small doses of radiation, the number of people with cancer,

mental retardation, neurological disorders, and genetic mutations

increases with each year. (2)

As a result of this meltdown a sense of confusion and paranoia spread

throughout the world about the concerns of afflictions. And the reading process of

such a narrative answers the queries related to the physical damage inflicted upon a

generation in the past. The trauma of the event is visible more in this response of the

audience than in the experience of the primary victims. The sudden and alarming

occurrence of the Chernobyl catastrophe and the resultant liquidator deaths is

regarded to be the first trauma and then the slow, gradual, global empathetic

awareness of the vast radioactive explosion and emission, the incapacity to fully

make out its effects following these later global infections leading to an important

number of protracted deaths in the countries mentioned above bring about the bigger

second trauma of Chernobyl. The second trauma revolves in a framework of ethics

and it is here that the traumatic empathy of the readers comes to play. In reading

these traumas of Chernobyl, one comes to observe that different theoretical perspectives were discussed.

As such, in the ethical reading process, a text or event generates, in the signifying process, a copy or supplement to the original, or 'the first comer. This process of reading introduces differences between itself and the original, which will never be reconciled by further supplementation. A text is not a text unless it hides from the first comer, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game. A text remains, moreover, forever imperceptible. Its law and its rules are not, however, harbored in the inaccessibility of a secret (Derrida, "*Plato's Pharmacy*"). An ethical solution is the only surrogate in the traumatic aspect of reading experience. Here, the event of the disaster takes a turn from history to memory, where the memory nullifies both history and itself. On the one side, memory does expose history's loaded censorship and incomplete "closure" of the event, and on the other side it undermines the problematic results of its own recollection: the multifaceted ways in which it memorialises the event leaving it unfinished and as a process. Each reading experience brings about an inaccessibly excessive core of grief and in this space, psychoanalysis comes back. In Julia Kristeva's analysis, one finds a neat fusion of psychoanalysis and deconstruction. She argues that "interiorisation [of the survivor and their traumatic experience] is never completed and (...) remains in the end impossible'" (53).

The inhabitants in the tragic scene, therefore, represent a violent rupture in the symbolic world and thereby continually avoid integration into our normal understanding of the actual reality of Chernobyl. Still the narratives provide the

readers with an unavoidable and horrific sign of the event's radioactive effects upon the human world and universal psyche.

To make a reading of the Chernobyl disaster is to construct a double of the event theoretically. That is to propagate a subsequent and textual alternative of the same. In reading, the readers come after or go in search of the ultimate meaning of a work's text. A similar "pursuit of the evasive signifying structures" is to take place in the narrative of Chernobyl disaster too. Reading an event as a text incorporates this process of searching for the signified. Reading for Jonathan Culler "is the pursuit of signs in that critics, whatever their persuasion, are incited by the prospect of grasping, comprehending, capturing in their prose, evasive signifying structures" (Culler 56). Ethical reading persuades readers to listen to and comprehend the vibrations of the trauma of the event and by virtue of it an acknowledgement of natural human sentiment is made.

The official and authoritative explanations of the event being the origin of the text, the memories in reading act are carried off and propagated like Deleuzian rhizomes by the reading public in a transgenerational empathetic framework. It is analogous to botanical rhizomes, each of which can be singled out from the underground stem and dispersed to grow everywhere anew as new plant. Each testimonial strand in the narratives can be cut off from the official and authoritative origin resulting in multifaceted signifieds and ethical conclusions.

So the reading public takes an alternative stance on the history of trauma and the tragic meltdown. This singled out rhizomatic testimony of trauma is mediated by factors like linguistic polyphony of scientific discourses, bureaucratic justifications, doctors' reports, views of helicopter pilots, spouses, parents and a whole range of

others on the one side and is further complicated by fictional and poetic aspects of these discourses and here in this space of complexity, there arises the need for ethical resolve. Another voice, Nikolai Fomich Kalugin in Alexievich's work leaves a very traumatic footprint inside every reader. It says:

> It happened ten years ago, and it happens to me again every day.
>
> We lived in the town of Pripyat. In that town.
>
> I'm not a writer. I won't be able to describe it. My mind is not capable of understanding it. And neither is my university degree. There you are: a normal person. A little person. You're just like everyone else you go to work, you return from work. You get an average salary. Once a year you go on vacation. You're a normal person! And then one day you're suddenly turned into a Chernobyl person. Into an animal, something that everyone's interested in, and that no one knows anything about. You want to be like everyone else, and now you can't. People look at you differently. They ask you: was it scary? How did the station burn? What did you see? And, you know, can you have children? Did your wife leave you? At first we were all turned into animals. The very word "Chernobyl" is like a signal. Everyone turns their head to look at you. He's from there! That's how it was in the beginning. We didn't just lose a town, we lost our whole lives. We left on the third day. (34)

In interviews, Alexievich talks about the split between the official and authoritative culture of the explanation of the event which tries to produce a monolithic history or grand narrative of the nuclear disaster to expose the peoples' recovery on the one side as opposed to the unauthoritative, spontaneous, and poetic

signification of the event in the reading process. It is in the latter space that the role of ethical dimension of the text comes into critical relevance. The ethical dimensions of trauma studies come as a solution to the dubious philosophy of poststructuralism in representing trauma and it is only in the ethical frame that the proper identification with the subject takes place.

All the texts analysed in this chapter assume an ethical position in the academic world in one sense or the other. Ethical dimensions of the works manifest themselves in textual cues, thematic progression, characterizations, symbols and even in the narrative tone in these works under reference. The role of the reader cannot be omitted in ethical platforms of critical deliberations and the last work examined here, though a nonfictional reportage highlights specifically the readers' role in the ethical aspect of reading. It is also imperative to note that all the texts examined, whether fiction or nonfiction, point to the reality of complete devastation in the wake of a nuclear war. The very basic ethical lesson one derives from all these works is to keep under check the proliferation of these nefarious weapons of mass destruction in the name of national security. In fact the idea is that, technology without any ethical mooring can be disastrous. As Alexievich writes; "These people had already seen what for everyone else is still unknown. I felt like I was recording the future" (*Zinky Boys* 9).

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

The narratives taken up for the present study have been analysed with due critical attention given to the concept of trauma and its interrelationship with the notion of ethics emerging from both the texts and the reading process. Contemporary fiction in general is preoccupied with the notion of trauma and sights/sites of violence. The literary characters presented in this complexity are caught in acute anguish and irreparable losses. Their lives have been delineated in a cultural landscape fully wrecked by traumatic reality and experiences requiring desperate remedies. The authors in this phase of writing, as seen, pay meticulous attention to both individual and collective aspects of trauma in the background of history and memory of the witnesses and victims with special focus on their subjectivity. The works of fiction selected in the present study as examined, share apocalyptic anxieties as a prominent concern in their narrative conscience.

The gamut of the present study which includes the novels *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury, *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank, *On the Beach* by Nevil Shute, *A Gift Upon the Shore* by M.K. Wren and *Children of the Dust* by Louise Lawrence have been subjected to detailed analyses in the light of the traumatic subjectivity of its characters. These novels in general seem to share the view that fiction in the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty first century is a form of cultural expression that powerfully represents the sensibility of the traumatic reality arising out of the strange combination of historical unrest and temperamental shifts in the light of technological advancements. The

nonfictional narrative *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich augments the fictional world of the above narratives with its presentation of reality.

The problems involved in the representation of traumatic subjectivity and the theoretical impasse involved in the process has constituted the crucial part of this study. Issues right from the mimetic dimension of representation to the poststructuralist complexities of representation are explicated in the second chapter of the present thesis. It showcases the above mentioned works of fiction as sites of narrative expressions of the cultural ethos of a disoriented life. The notion of traumatic subjectivity has been studied in detail and it has been concluded that the unrepresentability of an extreme experience has become a narrative impasse in contemporary fiction and it is at this juncture the notion of ethics emerges as a surrogate in the narrative space.

To differentiate between individual trauma and collective trauma, a detailed deliberation on the concept of trauma has been attempted in the second chapter of this study which includes serious deliberations on the theoretical formulations and historical evolution of the concept of trauma.

The evolution of its epistemological progression in the theoretical discussion platforms and the different paradigm shifts in its conceptualization over centuries has been discussed in detail in this study. The study has inferred that the victims of nuclear disasters as presented in fiction and nonfiction bear a traumatic consciousness and this exerts indelible influence on their subjectivity. It is seen that the effect of trauma upon the self is varied in accordance with the culture, class and gender. The effect is hugely different when it is experienced personally and collectively.

Taking theoretical insights from thinkers like Cathy Caruth, detailed analyses has been made on the complex relationship between the individual and collective dimensions of trauma and it is understood that novels and writings with a collective sense of trauma cater to political and ethical dimensions of reading and interpretations. It is seen that trauma is an immensely emphasized thematic concern in the literature of post war scenario and nuclear meltdown. This aspect of literature is concretely visible in the works taken here. Time and space are seen to be points of thematic interest in the works. Trauma is marked by spatio-temporal fixations in most of the novels but the study on it gets complicated the moment we problematize its representation into a universal fabric. It is in this complex matrix that the need of an ethical turn is shown to be adopted by writers in their narrative subtlety.

The complexity in the subjectivity is textually translated and the writers arrive at the singular conclusion of taking the narrative thread to an ethical solution. Paradigm shifts in the theoretical formulation of the concept of subjectivity is scrutinized in the study with appropriate reference to theoretical vantage points from various philosophers and thinkers of each period. Each character analysed during the study passes through psychically upset situations in one way or the other and so a progression of studies on the mind in relation to extreme experiences are traced here. Freudian psychoanalysis has been brought in for discussion as the realm of unconscious and constitutes the integral element of selfhood. Lacan's theory is presented as envisioning subjectivity as linguistically and discursively mediated. The formation of the subjectivity in the realm of Symbolic order is pivotally taken in the study as traumatic subjectivity is largely supposed to be designed by the external panic.

The theoretical formulation on the notion of subjectivity has been studied and explained in this work and it has been found out that the last decades of the twentieth century and the early years of the present century seem to offer serious attention to the problematisation of subjectivity. Interest in the studies on the mind has increased in the recent years and it is concluded that the enigmatic aspect of the unrepresentability of trauma brought about increased interest in the human mind. Using a *genealogical* method of analysis, to use Michel Foucault's phrase, this study has looked into the historicity of the theories on subjectivity and its applications in studies around humanities and cultural studies.

The novels taken for study in the third chapter of this thesis establish their turn to ethics through an assertion of the value of self expression in a cultural background of traumatic realism. Hedonism and thoughtless merrymaking seem to be the highlight of such a culture and the inhabitants of such a life style always tend to get involved in entertainments like car racing and other similar sports. They are made to fit into the self-indulgent order of the day where individual assertion is reduced to the minimum. The ethical dimension of the novel stems from the urge of the individuals to question the meaninglessness of such a frivolous life. The people start questioning all the cultural elements that are designed to distract them from their ethical roles in life. It is at this juncture that characters like Clarisse McClellan stand for free thoughts and individual assertions. She is least interested in pleasure seeking and she rejects social conformism altogether when it goes against individual assertion. Ray Bradbury has maintained quite meticulously his sympathy with characters like her to reiterate the ethical turn of the novel.

The ethical turn in *The Road* rests within the framework of love. Filial love has been highlighted to be one of the major ethical anchors in the novel. MacCarthy throughout the novel insists upon the idea of "each other's world entire," where the frame of relationship between the son and the father is seen to be the ethical nucleus of the novel. Each narrative moment in the novel is contrasted between traumatic realism and ethical resolve. The episode where the father offers the son Coca-cola presents the pulse of the time where a materialistic society surrounded by ravage urges for a value based life. For the boy too, his father has become the ethical centre of his life, promising reassurance and safety. His love of the father is the only solace in the chaotic world marked with destruction and fading ethos. In this novel too, the terrain of ethics is individually designed and defined.

In the case of *Alas, Babylon* personal redemption becomes one of the major ethical points in the novel. This too operates in the individual realm of existence. Throughout the novel, we see the thematic fusion of survival and redemption as the ethical point of the novel and traumatic subjectivity marks the whole narrative. Self search and self discovery too constitute the ethical aspect of the novel and the author develops his characters with special attention given to the inner working of each character. The evolution of Randy from a mere playboy to a precocious leader, and the transformation of Dr. Gunn to a man with a mission are telling examples for the author's concern with the value of self discovery in the novel. Importance given to knowledge of any sort is another major ethical aspect in the novel. The portrayal of Alice is executed by the author to highlight the concern with knowledge. In fact most novels assert the importance of knowledge that does not compromise on values. Like *Fahrenheit 451,* this novel too professes the idea that no one wins in a nuclear war.

Every individual in society is caught in the act of survival and it is from this point a new world is built around. In Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451,* Granger presents the idea that man is a cousin of the phoenix. Man dies in a fire of his own making but he will rise again from his own ashes. This readiness to begin again becomes a common point in all these three novels. In *Alas, Babylon,* we watch the American culture consumed by its own fire yet trying to rise again from the ashes. Both these novels present the ethical turn brought about by the characters survival instincts. *On the Beach*, on the contrary lends a different ethical angle. Despite the nihilistic reality, the characters chose to face their doom with dignity by finding solace in their jobs. They choose death before death chooses them and ensure that they live the moment till 'the moment'.

The fourth chapter too has dealt at length with the collective aspect of ethical resolve in the traumatic background focusing on the novels *A Gift upon the Shore* and *Children of the Dust*. *Voices from Chernobyl* by Svetlana Alexievich is analysed for its ethical dimension that take place in the process of reading. This chapter has also explored the intricacies involved in the presentation of traumatic subjectivity in the non fictional writing as against the fictional writings where the author is given more freedom. The problematics of representation of trauma and the resultant ethical turn in the reading process is made in *Voices from Chernobyl.* This gripping narrative with its haunting presentation provides a reading experience to the reader whose ethical conscience is likely to be disturbed in the act. Like the fictional works analysed in this chapter, this work too presents the frightening ambience of meeting a couple of people in a murky era of post-apocalyptic ethos. The socio cultural effects of trauma has been specifically examined in this chapter and it is inferred that the

shared wounds lead to ethical solutions and the writers resort to an aesthetics rooted in ethical conscience in fiction in the backdrop of shared trauma.

As is mentioned above the community dimension of traumatic subjectivity and the concerns of ethics outside the generally accepted patterns of social fabric is comprehensively scrutinized in this chapter. It deeply investigates into the household atmosphere of life in the backdrop of the meltdown and the traumatic subjectivity of the characters in a war struck social order which culminates in a value oriented life. Here we see the narrative thread of the novels revolving around gender concerns and as a result women's conscience in the traumatic background is analysed. The women's subjectivity in the traumatic ambience, their potential as well as their limitations, their interrelationships with others and their power to sustain life in adverse situations have all been critically analysed. Moreover, all the narratives studied in the chapter are written by women authors. The traumatic subjectivities of the protagonists here are seen to be entangled in the maze of memory of the past, anxieties over the present and the desperate hope for the future. The concept of recovered memories has been problematized in many of the trauma related discourses both in theory and in creative writings. This chapter has looked into this matter with a critical lens.

Traumatic subjectivity in relation to gender is analysed with reference to the novels *A Gift Upon the Shore* and *Children of the Dust*. Set against the bleak background of a nuclear meltdown, the former work is a powerful narration of two women whose gender conscience has been incorporated to the narrative texture of the novel. In their desperate journey of life to survive the catastrophe, gender roles are emphasized by the author. *Children of the Dust* too accentuates the role of gender

sensibility in a work of art that concerns itself with the collective sense of trauma. This novel beautifully fuses concerns of women subjectivity and Marxist ideological conceptualization of subjectivity in a traumatic background.

This study has also attempted to emphasize on the adverse effects of the techno scientific ambience upon the human subjectivity in the light of the novels, especially *On the Beach*, *A Gift Upon the Shore* and *Children of the Dust* and the non-fiction *Voices from Chernobyl*. Analyses of all the novels reiterate the fact that ethical solution rooted in community living is a commonly seen aspect in trauma novels with collective sufferings.

Each novel analysed in the study is in fact, shown to present various nuances of the experience of trauma. This era of posthumanism presents a threat of irreversible dehumanization and as a result the agency of the characters become subject to technological preponderance. The trauma in these works is in one way or the other brought about by technology. It is concluded that the void subjects thus created are always in search of a centre of being and this centre has been located in the ethical aspect of narration. The evolution of plot in these novels takes place in an ambivalent structure framed between technological progress and human predicament and therefore this dichotomous structure calls for the need of an ethical centre to regulate the narrative undecidability, as inferred in these works. These novels pose an atmosphere of ambivalence in the sense that the dangerous as well as the constructive aspect of technological progress regulate the central thematic concern.

The ecology of cultural relations and social values become instrumental in defining the traumatic experience as noted in many of the characters in the novels taken here. The silenced survivors like Mildred, Montag's wife, too are to be analysed in the backdrop of psychoanalysis. Subjectivity thus also turns to be general

and shared one. Almost all the writers covered in this study present the sacrifices carried out by both the survivors and victims. However, the subjects or circumstances within these ecologies can be triggers for memory or encouragement because not everyone is silenced or traumatized by similar circumstances. The need for an ethical footing is deemed fit under such circumstances. And as such empathy becomes a major concern in the study as most of the writers here provide their protagonists with insights by way of fellow characters similarly victimized and who maintain their memories, and remain not persuaded by the interests of those who create or refuse to acknowledge traumatic events. This empathy later is carried over to the readers and transgenerational empathy is seen to operate.

The cardinal argument in the thesis is the point of ethics and its role in trauma narratives. In a nutshell the key argument can be presented in terms of the emergence of ethical conscience both in writing and in reading as necessitated by the narrative enigma and untranslatability.

When one is faced with the frantic need for finding meaning in a singular and monolithic dimension of the articulation of traumatic subjectivity through symbolized meaning, it is imperative in academic platforms that a correlative surrogate is found in narrative aesthetics. At this juncture, an ethical turn as a theory is deemed appropriate to resolve the limitations of representation and a realm to which every narrative can turn to and to which every reading process can ultimately reach.

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