



Social Support and Resilience: Exploring the Consequences of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Silas House's *Eli the Good*

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Abstract

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is the result of a traumatic incident that triggers the normal psyche of an individual. This happens most often with the war veterans who have witnessed the adverse effects of wars. It is considered to be one of the aftermaths of war. The war veterans who suffer from PTSD have to fight forever with their disturbed mind. Appalachian literature is a reservoir of novels, poetry, short stories and journals, that emerges to investigate the American Appalachian's sufferings due to multiple problems in their life. The paper accounts the impact of war, on war veterans, as most of the Appalachians spend better part of their life, fighting for their country. Silas House, being an Appalachian and a famous Appalachian novelist, records the struggles they have endured. The study analyses *Eli the Good* of Silas House, that depicts the after effects of Vietnam war on soldiers. The objective of the study is to throw light on the problems related to PTSD, and the impact that PTSD creates on the people associated with the victim, the study moves on providing the remedies to help the victim to come out of the same. The societal relevance of the study is to evidently record the pessimistic side of war. By substantiating the means to overcome, the research shows the importance of being resilient through observing the ecosystem. The paper has used descriptive research to substantiate the findings.

Keywords: PTSD, Vietnam war, Appalachian, remedy, ecosystem

Trauma theory is one of the prominent branches of psychoanalytical theory. It navigates by exploring the psychological and emotional turmoil that the humans endure and the study provides insights into the consequences that they face. The major conflicts in the world lead to traumatization of events which become one of the reasons for the emergence of trauma theory. The post traumatic incidents have great impact in the life of an individual. It causes several psychoanalytical problems like hysteria, delusions, schizophrenia, PTSD and other related effects. Being closely related to psychoanalytical

theory, trauma theory attempts to unfurl the hidden memories of the past and comes up further by analysing their conscious events. By deconstructing the preconceived notions of the society about an individual, the theory explores the unconscious mind and cite reasons for his/her conscious actions.

The Vietnam war takes place from 1955 to 1975 and it involves countries like United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and other countries. The Vietnam war is a war that happens between United States supporting South Vietnam and the Soviet Union supporting North Vietnam. The government



of United States provide financial and military support for the same. Initially, United States has not directly intervened to support the South Vietnam, but gradually it intervenes and gives an emotional, physical, monetary and military support to South Vietnam. The entry of US has not brought in any positive turn to the war. As no such changes happen, US withdraws from the war in 1973.

Appalachian region has been destroyed severely during the outbreak of the American Civil War. Major portion of the mountains, crops and buildings are dismantled. This results in heavy economic crisis. Many Appalachians have moved to join US military to fight for their government but they have not gained any attention once they try to return back to their normal state. The only thing that comes with them are instable lifestyle, physical injuries, psychological conflicts and economic crisis in their family. People who are associated with them also have to meet the challenges. (Asis)

In *Eli the Good*, Silas House portrays the life of a Vietnam war veteran Stanton, and the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that he has been undergoing. The study further reflects on the way Stanton's wife Loretta manages to cope up with the struggles of Stanton with her children Eli and Josie. Stanton's fight with the psyche is unfurled through the eyes of Eli. For, Stanton some mornings are painful with troubled state of psyche. One such morning is described in the novel, when Eli has woken up with the screams of Stanton. He has seen Loretta finding all the means to pacify his soul. It is one of the first instances, when Loretta comes to know about the trauma that her husband has been enduring. Eli reflects the change in his father's temper, for he is fine with Eli showering more love, care and affection. But "there were times when his temper flared for no known reason so that we always felt like we were walking through a minefield, waiting for an explosion." (5)

In one of the articles published in Clinical Case Studies, "Improving Social Support for a Veteran with PTSD Using a Manualized Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Approach", the importance of providing positive Social Support to PTSD victims are recorded. Social Support is mandatory for the victims to manage their activities and also to be Self-

Reliant enough to tackle the problems. After that, person has a very bitter experience on exhibiting his/her anger on someone, the person may feel guilt and shame about his/her own unconscious behaviour. Low Social Support may enhance the aggressiveness of the victim. Kelly and her colleagues on their study on the Social Support in PTSD has recorded that the veterans who suffers from the same, consider the world to be dangerous and they place a detachment from all. The pain in losing their loved ones have created a fear within them. The challenging moments at the war field have ravaged their normal psyche. Thus, significant Social Support is mandatory and "low levels of social support are also associated with increased PTSD severity and poor social functioning in veterans. However, few treatments exist to improve social functioning in veterans with PTSD." (Kelly et al.)

Stanton has placed huge trust and love for his country. It is with a patriotic attitude that he has fought and has joined American military. During the Centenary celebrations, all the war veterans and survivors are honoured except Vietnam war veterans. This makes him to cut a sorry figure off, before his family members. At that night, he lost the control of his psyche and showers it upon Loretta. Eli describes it as,

Daddy was straddling my mother's stomach, his knees pressed into the mattress on either side of her. He leaned over, strangling her with such force that both his arms were stretched out firm and straight, pushing her down so that it appeared the mattress was swallowing her up headfirst. I could see the muscles in his back, taut and speckled by tiny beads of cold sweat. I could not see his face, which seems like a blessing to me now. He made no sound except for his heavy breathing, an animal panting after a long run. My mother brought one hand up, like someone drowning and reaching for the surface. She curled her hand into a claw and raked it down his arm, leaving thin red lines behind. This didn't faze him. In fact, he seemed to be more intent on killing her. (202)

Kelly and her colleagues on their survey on PTSD victims, have documented factors that are associated with "Acceptance and Commitment Therapy



(ACT)". ACT assists the victim through acceptance for it concludes that repression of such impulses may have long term effect upon the individual. Thus, Strong Social Support is prominent and they should understand, accept and struggle with that person. The factors related to ACT include exercises to face the situation without any judgements, giving prominence to the personal likes and choices and making the individual's psyche flexible enough to accept and move on. (Kelly et al.) In Stanton's state, Loretta offers a Strong Social Support that helps him to manage his troubled state well. After Loretta's friend notices bruises on her neck, she asks her to leave Stanton. Loretta's reply has shown the Strong Social Support that helps Stanton to come up in life. She says, "It was just the war, Stella... just the old war... When her voice came back to normal, it occasionally went out on her, like a deeply scratched record album that causes the needle to jump ahead on the grooves." (211) Loretta has accepted the state of Stanton and tries her best to bring him back to life.

The society and the people associated with that individual should help him/her to become self-reliant enough by understanding and accepting the changes that occurs within their unconscious state of mind. Nature helps the individuals to heal themselves. By exploring, observing and recollecting more on nature, one can understand the reason for their current state of mind, that may help them to find means to tackle the challenges. On a study conducted in the Trent University in Canada, the researchers have proved that, "you can boost your mood just by walking in nature, even in urban nature. And the sense of connection you have with the natural world seems to contribute to happiness even when you're not physically immersed in nature." (Kirsten Weir)

Stanton has seen so many people dying before him. One of his closest companions has died of lightning attack. He has also killed a soldier in the war. All the other bitter instances add fuel to his already burning fire. Eli has come to know more about Stanton through the letters that he has written to Loretta. In most of the letters he has mentioned that he has recovered from his state, by exposing himself to natural environment. Through Eli's voice, his state of healing is recorded as;

He told of riding for miles up and down Highway 1 in the back of army trucks while the land sped by. And always the trees; he was obsessed with them. Especially their leaves. Their bigness, slickness, the way some of the leaves would hold rain like cups and leaves that were slender as green beans and smelled musky and sweet at the same time. Each letter was different in some way except that he always talked about the trees and he always said how much he missed my mother and Josie.... The thing that struck me the most about all these letters was his love for the trees. (87)

Loretta has planted a snowball bush as a gratitude to nature for the arrival of her husband from the war. The only thing that pacifies her soul is her garden and her snowball bush.

Making himself more exposed to nature, has helped Stanton to be more self-reliant. He has a habit of spending more time under the shade of the beech tree. This therapy that he has received from nature, helps him to understand and accept the conflicts that occur often within his psyche. He touches the barks of the trees and listens to the mystery it overpours on him. Thus, the study has proven that both Strong Social Support, and calm and soothing natural environment, makes the process of understanding easier, that does not encourage repression, rather helps the individual to accept and express each strong impulses.

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