TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Traumatic Experience in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English

in a partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

By

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September 2009

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Letter of Approval

This thesis submitted to Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Sitaram Chamalagain entitled "**Traumatic Experience in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl***" has been approved by undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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Acknowledgements

My sincere gratitude and heartfelt indebtedness goes to lecturer Mr. Shankar Subedi at Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University who made the otherwise impossible task an easy one by providing me valuable materials and suggestions and thus built stairs of hope and confidence by which I was able to complete this task.

I am, indeed, indebted to Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma who encouraged me both directly and indirectly and anticipated the completion of this work. My heartfelt gratitude is also extended to Dr. Beerendra Pandey, who energized me with enthusiasm in order to ease my otherwise impossible task.

Finally, I am very much obliged to Ram Nath Shah and my very cooperative friend Prakash Poudel whose enthusiastic cooperation and helpful suggestions made this task easier to complete more quickly and effectively. My family, Mr. Krishna Khatiwadas and Mr. Jayaram Khanal are heartily thanked due to their moral, intellectual and social support in the completion of this work. I cannot help expressing sincere thanks to Mr. Anil Kumar Yadav of REHDON Computer Service, Samakhusi, Kathmandu, for helping me in the typing work. My sincere gratitude must go to those who wish my success in my educational career.

December 2009 Sitaram

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Abstract

The present research work explores the tormented state of the protagonist Linda Brent in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl.* Linda Brent undergoes series of physical, mental and emotional torture from her master in the form of sexual harassment, violence and distorted family relationship which are the setbacks of slavery. She composes her own songs and hymns which represent her innermost emotions towards slavery. It expresses traumatic experiences of the slave girl Linda Brent who undergoes trauma throughout her life because of her direct personal experience of the corrupting influence and the psychological abuses of slavery.

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Sitaram Chamalagain has completed his thesis entitled "Traumatic Experience in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" under my supervision. He carried out his research from 1st January, 2009. He consulted me time and again. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for Viva Voce.

Shankar Subedi

Thesis Supervisor

I. Life and Works of Harriet Jacobs: An Introduction

The present research work focuses on Harriet Jacobs's widely discussed novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in order to study traumatic experiences of the slave girl Linda Brent who undergoes trauma throughout her life because of her direct personal experience of the corrupting influence and the psychological abuses of slavery. She was forced to physical brutality and deprivation that slaves had to endure.

The study examines how history and culture traumatize the protagonist, Linda Brent, who becomes the saddest woman due to her mental and spiritual anguish. The historical memories of slavery's mental cruelty and physical abuses in the aftermath of reconstruction lead her to the disturbed life in California. The novel moves from the relatively happy family life to the threatening psychological breakdown.

The central intent of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is the examination of the psycho-social catastrophe of the life of Linda Brent in slavery. The novel unwinds along stretches between the distorted emotional instincts of slavery due to aggressive and unrelenting sexual harassment and the oppressive whites. Here is the story of a woman born into slavery, fighting that condition to save her children from the sexual torment she experienced as a girl. She speaks plainly of that which the 19th century woman traditionally did not, and in doing so galvanizes a population by the raw horror of her experience as a chattel slave.

The story of Harriet Jacobs is compelling. She was a fugitive in the North and in the South. Her autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,* was published prior to Emancipation. Harriet Jacobs, daughter of Delilah, the slave of Margaret Horniblow, and Daniel Jacobs, the slave of Andrew Knox, was born in Edenton, North Carolina, in the fall of 1813. Until she was six years old Harriet was unaware that she was the property of Margaret Horniblow. Before her death in 1825, Harriet's relatively kind mistress taught her slave to read and sew. In her will, Margaret Horniblow bequeathed eleven-year-old Harriet to a niece, Mary Matilda Norcom. Since Mary Norcom was only three years old when Harriet Jacobs became her slave, Mary's father, Dr. James Norcom, an Edenton physician, became Jacobs's de facto master. Under the regime of James and Maria Norcom, Jacobs was introduced to the harsh realities of slavery. Though barely a teenager, Jacobs soon realized that her master was a sexual threat. She says:

> My master met at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day of unwearied toil, his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother’s grave, his dark shadow fell on me even there. (17)

She could feel the probable danger of being raped by her master at any time. She was highly hunted by the male image which could exploit her sexually at any time.

From 1825, when she entered the Norcom household, until 1842, the year she escaped from slavery, Harriet Jacobs struggled to avoid the sexual victimization that Dr. Norcom intended to be her fate. He pressurizes and threatens her, and she defies and outwits him. Knowing that Mr. Flint will eventually get his way, Linda consents to a love affair with a white neighbor, Mr. Sands, saying that she is ashamed of this illicit relationship but finds it preferable to being raped by the loathsome Dr. Flint. With Mr. Sands, she has two children, Benny and Ellen. She hopes that when Mr. Flint finds out about it, he will sell her to Mr. Sands in disgust. Instead, the vengeful Flint sends Linda to his Plantation to be broken in as a field hand.

The subject matter of the book -- sexual abuse of slave women -- was taboo in the mid-19th century, and Harriet had struggled over whether or not to expose herself so publicly. But she realized the significance of her story and so decided to go ahead, although she wrote under the pseudonym, Linda Brent, and assigned fictitious names to everyone mentioned in the book.

Praised by the antislavery press in the United States and Great Britain, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was quickly overshadowed by the gathering clouds of civil war in America. Never reprinted in Jacobs's lifetime, it remained in obscurity until the Civil Rights and Women's Movements of the 1960s and 1970s spurred a reprint of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in 1973. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* begins to take its place as a major African American slave narrative. Published in Yellin's admirable edition *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Harvard University Press, 1987), helped to resist long-standing charge against *Incidents* that it is at worst a fiction.

Slave Narratives are always guided by some spoken and some silenced experiences. Harriet Jacobs tries to expose even her very personal expression to defy slavery. Toni Morrison says, “they were forced to quiet down certain aspects of their experience, aspects they were too kind or too political or too savvy to reveal"(245). Until recently Harriet Jacobs was the lonely black female representative of that era and genre to express personal feelings.

Harriet Jacobs was the first woman to author a fugitive slave narrative in the United States. Yet she was never as celebrated as Ellen Craft, a runaway from Georgia, who had become internationally famous for the daring escape from slavery. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* (1860), the thrilling narrative of the Craft flight from Savannah to Philadelphia, became a great slave narrative in the field.

Harriet Jacobs's autobiography, by contrast, was "written by herself," proudly states even more astonishing than the Crafts' story, *Incidents* represents no less profoundly an African American woman's resourcefulness, courage, and dauntless quest for freedom.

Jacobs's primary motive in writing *Incidents* was to address white women of the North on behalf of thousands of "Slave mothers that are still in bondage" in the South. The mother of two slave children fathered by a white man, Jacobs faced a task considerably more complicated than that of any African American woman author before her. She wanted to indict the southern patriarchy for its sexual tyranny over black women like herself. But she could not do so without confessing with "sorrow and shame" her willing participation in a liaison that produced two illegitimate children. Resolved, she informs her female reader, "to tell you the truth. . . let it cost me what it may,"(248). Jacobs fully acknowledges her transgressions against conventional sexual morality when she was a "slave girl." At the same time, however, Jacobs articulates a bolder truth - which the morality of free white women has little ethical relevance or authority when applied to the situation of enslaved black women in the South.

White abolitionist propaganda in the antebellum era only rarely discussed how slave women resisted sexual exploitation. Jacobs, however, was determined to portray herself as an agent rather than a victim, a woman motivated by a desire for freedom much stronger than a fear of sexual retribution. "I knew what I did," Jacobs admits in an extraordinarily candid explanation of her decision to accept Sawyer as her lover, "and I did it with deliberate calculation" (44). But "there is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, (45)" Jacobs informs her reader. It was a desire for freedom, rather than a white lover, Jacobs argues, that ultimately impelled her affair with Sawyer. "I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that I favored another. . . . I thought he would revenge himself by selling me, and I was sure my friend, Mr. Sands, would buy me" (45). Such a "calculated" use of sexuality as both an instrument of "revenge" against Norcom and as a means to freedom via Sands may have unsettled Jacobs's northern readers as much as her confessions of sexual transgressions. But in the end, Jacobs claims, in looking back, calmly, on the events of her life, she feels that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others." Whatever her moral failings, Jacobs claims in recounting her sexual affairs as a slave woman, the traditional ideals of the nineteenth-century "cult of true womanhood" could not adequately address them.

Writing an unprecedented mixture of confession, self-justification, and societal expose, Harriet Jacobs turned her autobiography into a unique analysis of the myths and the realities that defined the situation of the African American woman and her relationship to nineteenth-century standards of womanhood. As a result, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* occupies a crucial place in the history of American women's literature in general and African American women's literature in particular. Published in the North, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* proved that until slavery was overthrown, only expatriate southern women writers, such as Jacobs and her contemporary, Angelina Grimke Weld, who left South Carolina to speak out against slavery in the South, could write freely about social problems in the South.

From 1862 to 1866 Jacobs devoted herself to relief efforts in and around Washington, D.C., among former slaves who had become refugees of the war. With her daughter Jacobs founded a school in Alexandria, Virginia, which lasted from 1863 to 1865, when both mother and daughter returned south to Savannah, Georgia, to engage in further relief work among the freedmen and freedwomen. The spring of

1867 found Jacobs back in Edenton, actively promoting the welfare of the ex-slaves and reflecting in her correspondence on "those I loved" and "their unfaltering love and devotion toward myself and [my] children" (118). This sense of dedication and solidarity with those who had been enslaved kept Jacobs at work in the South until racist violence ultimately drove her and Louisa back to the Cambridge, Massachusetts, where in 1870 she opened a boarding house. By the mid-1880s Jacobs had settled with Louisa in Washington, D.C. Little is known about the last decade of her life. Harriet Jacobs died in Washington, D.C. on March 7, 1897.

To this day, Harriet Jacobs is the only African-American woman held in slavery whose papers are known to exist. In these papers, a snapshot of the breadth of Jacobs' writings begins to emerge and spans an entire range of issues American society is still confronting in the 21st century.

In Harriet Jacobs's Novel *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* Linda Brent lives her remaining life with heavy burden of the past. She is a fugitive, escaped from slavery. Her memory of sexual victimization and exposure to violence of the slavery is the major cause of her bruised condition. She is a traumatic character mainly due to the overwhelming events, accompanied by emotional numbing. Sexual violence constitutes an important basis for feminist struggles against patriarchy. Parental anxiety over the loss of adult daughters and the past culture of slavery has left her as a traumatic survivor.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents a brief introductory outline of the work. In addition, it gives a bird's eye view of the entire work.

The second chapter tries to explain and verify the theoretical modality that is applied in this research work. It discusses trauma theory, its types, and Freud's concept of traumatic survivals. It also discusses the feminist approaches to sexual abuse and psychic trauma.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes the activities of the major character, Linda Brent. It sorts out some of the extracts from the text as evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study– sexual victimization, exposure to violence of slavery and fractured family relationships traumatizes Linda Brent.

The fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research work.

II. An Introduction to Trauma Theory

Trauma Theory

Trauma theory is a privileged category which includes diverse fields, with its specific focus on psychological, ethical and aesthetic questions about the nature and representation of traumatic events. These concerns of trauma theory range from the public and historical to the private and memorial. Freudian psychoanalysis provided a model of traumatic subjectivity and various accounts about the effect of trauma and memory. Feminism generated not only the crucial political context but also a model of community for speaking out about forms of physical and sexual abuse that has been borrowed by subsequent 'survivor' groups. New historicism, fascinated by repression of historical narrative has developed a mode of countervailing recovery of what has been silenced or lost in traditional literary histories. Finally, deconstruction, in its American Yale school version has redirected its concern with reference, representation and the limits of knowledge to the problem of trauma.

Trauma refers to person's emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual's sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society. The term "trauma" refers to a theory that conveys profound loss or intense fear on individual or collective levels. A defining feature of trauma is the transformation of the self ignited by an external, often terrifying experience, which illuminates the process of coming to terms with the dynamics of memory that inform the new perceptions of the self and world. The external event that elicits an extreme response from the protagonist is not necessarily bound to a collective human or natural disaster such as war or tsunamis. The event may include, for example, the intimately personal experience of female sexual violence, war experience, domestic violence, cultural legacy of slavery, etc.

The popular trauma theory employed today depends upon the abreactive model of trauma, which is used to assert the position that traumatic experience produces a "temporal gap" and dissolution of the self. For example, in Worlds of Hurt Kali Tal writes: "Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of normal' conception" (15). This concept of trauma and memory emphasizes the necessity to recreate or abreact through narrative recall of the experience. Yet, at the same time, this model claims, as Tal makes clear, that the remembrance of trauma is always an approximate account of the past, since traumatic experience precludes knowledge, and, hence, representation. The literary trauma theory articulated by Kali Tal, and critics such as Cathy Caruth, considers the responses to traumatic experience, including cognitive chaos and the possible division of consciousness, as an inherent characteristic of traumatic experience and memory. The idea that traumatic experience pathologically divides identity is employed by the literary scholar as a metaphor to describe the degree of damage done to the individual's coherent sense of self and the change of consciousness caused by the experience. For this reason, I refer to the employment of the abreactive model in literary criticism as the shattering trope.

Kali Tal defines trauma as a life threatening event that displaces one’s preconceived notions about the world; Tal stresses that the event must me experienced first – hand, and not vicariously perceived as mediated through any textual conduct. In other words trauma is known as a threat to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death.

Cathy Caruth signaled that trauma as the limit of knowledge is a constitution of the Yale project. In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of “sudden or catastrophic events, in which the responses to the events occurs in the after delayed and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 181). When traumatic experience takes place, the mind and body are found in numbed state. In such situation post traumatic disorders comes.

The prevalent view of literary studies states that "trauma stands outside representation altogether" imagines an intrinsic epistemological fissure between traumatic experience and representation (Caruth 17). This notion of trauma leads to the basic framework of the dominant literary trauma theory best articulated by Cathy Caruth in Unclaimed Experience when she says:

> Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way it's much unassimilated nature--the way it was precisely not known in the first instance--returns to haunt the survivor later on. Traumatic experience becomes unrepresentable due to the inability of the brain, understood as the carrier of coherent cognitive schemata, to properly encode and process the event." (Caruth 4)

The effects of trauma are profound. Trauma brings changes to the individual and s/he recognizes the experience for the integration. Kelly sites Root as saying:

> Trauma permanently changes a person. It contrasts to its stressful experience which challenges an individual capacity to cope, trauma destroys multiple dimensions of security and exceeds the limits of human capacity to process and integrate horrible experiences into a coherent perception of self and self in relation to other and the world. The disorganization created by this upheaval motivates the individual to attempt to find meaning in the experience so that s/he can reorganize

> the experience and integrate it into his or her perception of self, and self in relation to others and the world. (3)

The central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity. This serves as the basis for a larger argument that suggests identity is formed by the intergenerational transmission of trauma. However, a discursive dependence upon a single psychological theory of trauma produces a homogenous interpretation of the diverse representations in the trauma novel and the interplay that occurs between language, experience, memory, and place. Considering the multiple models of trauma and memory presented in the trauma novel draws attention to the role of place, which functions to portray trauma's effects through metaphoric and material means. Descriptions of the geographic place of traumatic experience and remembrance situate the individual in relation to a larger cultural context that contains social values that influence the recollection of the event and the reconfiguration of the self.

The origin of traumatic response is forever unknown and disintegrated; yet, the ambiguous, literal event is ever-present and intrusive. This theory argues that trauma is only known through repetitive flashbacks that literally re-enact the event because the mind cannot represent it otherwise: "The historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all" (17). Traumatic experience is understood as a fixed and timeless photographic negative stored in an unlocatable place of the brain, but it maintains the ability to interrupt consciousness and maintains the ability to be transferred to non-traumatized individuals and groups. Moreover, this concept of trauma perceives responses as fundamentally pathologic and privileges the act of speaking or narration as the primary avenue to recovery. In other words, presenting trauma as inherently pathologic perpetuates the notion that all responses to any kind of traumatic experience produce a dissolute consciousness.

In the field of literary studies, trauma theory has come not as a surprise. As Cathy Caruth points out in her introduction to *Trauma Exploration in Memory*, the issue of trauma has emerged from an originally fragmented (psychiatric, psychoanalytical and sociological) discourse on reactions to catastrophe in the wake of the Vietnam war in 1980 as PTSD (post – Traumatic Stress Disorder) by the American Psychiatric Association. Yet this recognition does not seem to have produced a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. On the contrary, the category of trauma has triggered a "fundamental disruption in our received modes of understanding disruption in our received modes of understanding and of cure, and a challenge a rigorous scientific discourse and clear-cut pathology" (335). Instead of generating a rigorous scientific discourse and clear – cut pathology, the recognition of PTSD and the subsequent pathological practice have led to a veritable epistemological crisis, challenging the boundaries between academic disciplines by radically questioning the very limits of our understanding. Actually, the more we locate and classify the system of PTSD, the more we seem to have dislocated the boundaries of our modes of understanding-so that psychoanalysis and medically oriented psychiatry, sociology, history and even literature all seem to be called upon to explain, to cure, or to show why it is that we can no longer simply explain or simply cure. Now, the phenomenon of trauma has seemed all-inclusive. Trauma can be defined from two approaches: First, Psychoanalytic-formalistic approach, second, cultural approach.

According to the first approach, a victimized subject does not disclose the real traumatic experience; s/he rather exposes and expresses the testimony, in a very distorted and deceptive manner due to the fear of social death. Regarding psychoanalytical approach, Freud's ideas are very much significant. In *Studies on Hysteria* Breur and Freud are committed to the view that the "reminiscences that cause hysterical suffering are historical in the sense that they are linked to actual traumas in the patient's life" (186). The effect associated with the past trauma can't be acknowledged and the amnesia that results means that the force of the affect becomes dammed up. The injured person's reaction to the trauma "only exercises a completely cathartic effect if it is an adequate reaction", they wrote, the past that continues to wound is the "past originally found no out let" (187). Denied an appropriate response, the ghost of past experience continues to haunt the hysteric. Freud was committed to the idea that the traumatic memory referred to a real passive experience that was later sexualized. He believed that the memory that remained charged with effect contained indications of reality. His fundamental interest in the ways the past can cause pain in the present was a stable component of his psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalysis believes that crucial to recovering from an experience of trauma is the capacity and willingness to incorporate that traumatic event inside one's self as an indispensable piece of personal history and identity. The research on psychic trauma which has been historically entwined with psychoanalytic theory has increased in the past decade. Trauma may cause psychological damage and such victims can be reached by psychoanalyst.

Mind – body research has opened up many new vistas in the study of trauma – among which are psycho-neuro-immunology (PNI) and concept of cellular memory. Related to trauma research, PNI and cellular memory help to explain the somatization of trauma. C.B. Pert writes:

> Memories are stored not only in the brain, but also in a psychosomatic network extending into the body, particularly in the ubiquitous

> receptors between nerves and bundles of cell bodies called ganglia, which are distributed not just in and near the spinal cord but all the way out along pathways to internal organs and the very surface of out skin. (143)

This shows that memories whether they are sweet or traumatic not only stay in the brain but also in other parts of the body which causes somatic disorders.

Katherine J. Conger asserts that traumatic events are recorded in "contracted in musculature and energetically withdraw tissue" (xvi). Eckberg describes traumatic events as being "laid down as perceptual, somatosensory experience or as implicit memory" (23). Through somatic therapy, the traumatic experience can be reorganized emotionally, neurophysiologically and cognitively. Aldwin writes: "stress refers to that quality of experience, produced through a person – environment transaction that through either over arousal or under arousal, results in psychological or physiological distress" (22). Root expresses the qualitative difference between stress and trauma:

> Negative stressors by which we come to know self, others, and the environment, trauma leaves an individual feelings 'put out', inconvenienced, and distressed. These experiences are eventually relieved with the resolution of the stressors. In contrast trauma represents destruction of basic organizing principles by which we come to know self, others, and the environment; trauma wound deeply in a way that challenges the meaning of life. Healing from the wounds of such an experience requires a restitution of order and meaning in one's life. (229)

Thus, trauma leaves a catastrophic effect in the victim, and recovery from this requires a holistic and meaningful, emotional and physical development of the person.

Freud's earliest idea, in *Studies in Hysteria*, concerned the dynamics of trauma, repression, and symptoms formation. Freud held that an overpowering event, unacceptable to consciousness, can be forgotten and yet returns in the form of somatic symptoms or compulsive, repetitive behaviors. This initial theory of trauma and symptoms became problematic for Freud when he concluded that neurotic symptoms were more often the result of repressed drives and desires than of traumatic events. Freud returned to the theory of trauma in beyond the pleasure principle, a work which originated in his treatment of World War I combat veterans who suffered from repeated nightmares and other symptoms of their wartime experiences. Here the traumatic events and its aftermath again became central to psychoanalysis but again Freud shifted his emphasis from the event to what he considered a more comprehension frame, in this case a biological urge toward equilibrium which he then theorized as the 'death drive'. Freud attempted a theory of trauma that would account for the historical development of entire cultures.

All Freud's thinking on trauma manifests this ambivalence regarding the significance of the historical event. Regarding Freud, we are tempted to ask whether it is as childhood seduction, infantile abuse, and shell shock, or war violence, or as a preoccupation with the place of neoteny and the trails of human birth, trauma is continually posited as the hypothetical origin of the psychic states. However, although trauma is a crucial to psychoanalytical theory, trauma in itself is not really the focus of its analysis. Freud proposed biological bedrock on which psychic states were formed, but this bedrock was not the object of psychoanalytic inquiry.

The integrate relation between trauma and survival indeed arises not, as one might expect because of a seemingly direct and unmediated relation between consciousness and life threatening events, but rather through the paradoxical structure of the indirectness in physical trauma. Indeed, Freud begins his discussion of trauma by noting the bewildering fact that psychological trauma occurs not in strict correspondence to the body's experience of life – threat through the wounding of the body. Freud notes that the bodily injury "works as a role against the development of neurosis" (18). Indeed, survival for consciousness does not seem to be a matter of known experience at all. The returns of the traumatizing events appear in many respects like a waking memory, it can nonetheless only occur in the mode of symptoms or a dream. Thus, if a life threat to the body is experienced as a direct infliction and the healing of the wound; trauma is suffered in the psyche precisely because it is not directly available to experience.

Freud's speculations on the causes of repetitive compulsion in relation to the origin of consciousness can indeed be understood as attempting to grasp the paradoxical relation between survivals and consciousness. Freud suggests that the development of the mind seems, at first to be very much like the development of the body consciousness that arises out of the need to protect "the title fragmented of substance suspended in the middle of an external world," which "would be killed by the stimulation emanating from these if it were not provided with a protective shield against stimuli" (27). Unlike the body, however, which protects the organism by means of a spatial boundary between inside and outside, the barrier of the consciousness is a barrier of sensation and knowledge that protects by placing stimulation within an ordered experience of time. What causes trauma, then, is a shock that appears to work very much like a threat to the body's spatial integrity, but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time:

> We may, I think, tentatively venture to regard the common traumatic neurosis as an extensive breach being made in the protective shield

> against stimuli. This would seem to reinstate the old native theory of shock […] it regards the essence of the molecular structure […] of the nervous system where as what we seek to understand are the effects produced on the organ of the mind. It is caused by lack of any preparedness for anxiety. (31)

The breach in the mind – the awareness of the threat to life – is not caused by pure quantitative amount of stimulus breaking through the body, Freud suggest, but precisely by "fright," the lack of preparedness to take in a stimulus that comes too quickly. It is not, simply the literal threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind one moment too late. The shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is thus not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not yet been fully known. And it is this lack or direct experience in time, which has not yet been fully known. And it is this lack or direct experience that, paradoxically, becomes the basis of the repetition of the nightmare: "These dreams are endeavoring to master the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis" (18, 32).

From this perspective, the survival of trauma is more than the fortunate passage past a violent event, a passage that is accidentally interrupted by reminders of it, but the endless inherent necessity of repetition which ultimately may lead to destruction. The postulation of a drive to death, which Freud ultimately introduces in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* would seem only to realize the reality of the destructive force that the violence of history imposes on the human psyche, the formation of history as the endless repetition of previous violence.

Unlike the psychoanalytic – formalistic approach, cultural approach examines the undercurrents of the distorted testimonies by contextualizing it in the network cultural-politics. It is that sense trauma brings home the limitations of our understanding and at the same time it dislocates the so-called traditional disciplinary boundaries leading us "to rethink our notions of experience and communication" (334).

The trauma theory has aroused vivid interest among the cultural and literal theorist. The reason behind why trauma theory has begun to drag the attention of theorist pushes us to look at a popular culture and mass media obsessed by repetitions of violent disasters. Burger says in this regard:

> At the succession of Die Hards, Terminators, and Robocops, as well as Nightmares on Elm Streets, disease and epidemic films, and now the return of the classic disaster films of twisters and turbulence and the repeated sequence of mini-apocalypses within each films; at "real life" cop shows; and at the news itself, that never exhausted source of pure horror.(571)

By the same token of why trauma theory has become popular and inevitable makes us look at the preoccupation with family dysfunctions, child abuse, incest, spousal abuse in the media, most strikingly on the talk show circuit. There appears to be the sense both family is only hope for curing all social ills and that the family is "damaged beyond hope" (517). Along with the interest in the family breakdown and violence comes the interest of enigmatic figures of the survivors, the one who has faced the catastrophe and can tell us what it is like. The survivor is a kind of living "black box", a source of final knowledge of authority.

The word “trauma” cannot be an analogous word for another word disaster. The idea of catastrophe as trauma, “provides a method of interpretation, for it posits that the effects of an event may be dispersed and manifested in many forms not obviously associated with the events” (572). Moreover, this dispersal occurs across the time, so that the impact of the experienced event is produced only years later. This representational and temporal hermeneutics of the symptom has “powerful implications for contemporary theory” (572).

Trauma theory, which focuses on acting out or working through trauma has its own issue and it cannot be explained with in its limited territory for it is interconnected “with specific ethical and socio-cultural tension” (Hartman 257). This arises from an awareness of persistence of violence in a culture that no longer condones the marital virtue of war. After Nazism, and totalitarianism, yearning for the arts of peace has never been greater. But, continuous ethnic conflict, genocidal episodes, and irrational and bloody events reported as the main staples of the news, set up an intolerable contrast between that yearning and intractable. As a matter of fact, the trans - historical awareness of the incidence of trauma – personal or collective – should make us realize the extent of human suffering.

The “trauma” in question is slavery, not as institution or even experience, but as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity formation of the people. There is the difference between trauma as it affects individual and as a cultural process. As a cultural process, trauma is mediated through various forms of representation and linked to the reformation of collective identity and reworking of collective memory. In this sense, slavery was traumatic in retrospect. Slavery formed the root of an emergent collective identity through an equally emergent collective memory, one that signified and distinguished a race or a community depending on the level of abstraction and point of view being put forward.

Slavery is traumatic may seem obvious, and, for those who experience it directly, certainly it must have been. In a recent attempt to trace the effects of slavery, Orlando Patterson writes:

> Another feature of slave childhood is the added psychological trauma of witnessing the daily degradation of their parents at the hand of slave holders […] to the trauma of observing their parents' humiliation was later added that of being sexually exploited by Euro – Americans on and off the estate, as the children grow older. (2)

The notion of an African – American identity is articulated in the later decades of the nineteenth century by a generation of black intellectuals for whom slavery becomes a thing of the past, not the present.

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of the great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some events as the significant "cause", its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as mediation and representation. Neil Smelser offers a more formal definition of cultural trauma that is worth repeating:

> A memory accepted and publicly given credence by a relevant membership group and evoking an event or situation which is laden with negative affect, represented as indelible and regarded as

> threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions.(112)

It is the collective memory of slavery that defines an individual as a "race member", as Maya Angelou puts it.

In Cathy Caruth's psychoanalytic theory of trauma, it is not the experience itself that produces traumatic effect, but rather the remembrance of it. In her account there is always a time lapse, a period of "latency" in which forgetting is the characteristic, between an event and the experience of trauma. As reflective process, trauma links past to present through representation and imagination. In psychological accounts, this can lead to a distorted identity formation, where "certain subject – position may become especially prominent or even overwhelming, for example, those of victim or perpetrator […] wherein one is possessed by the past and tends to repeat it compulsively as if it were fully present"(LaCapra 1994:12).

Trauma refers necessarily to something experienced in psychoanalytic accounts, calling this experience traumatic requires interpretation. National or cultural trauma is also rooted in an event or series of events, but not directly in their direct experience. Such experience is usually mediated through newspaper, radio, or television, for example, which involves a spatial as well as temporal distance between the events and its experience. Mass mediated experience always involves selective construction and representation, since what is seen is the result of the actions and decisions of professionals as to what is significant and how it should be presented. Thus, national or cultural trauma always engages a meaning struggle, a grappling with an event that involves identifying the nature of the pain, the nature of the victim and the attribution of responsibility. This is the trauma process when the collective experience of massive disruption, and social crisis, becomes a crisis of meaning and identity. In this trauma process carrier groups are central in articulating the claims, and representing the interests and desires, of the affected to a wider public.

In the same line of the discussion of ‘working through’ the memories of the loss of identity, the next leading figure of traumas theory, Dominick LaCapra focuses on three psychoanalytical topics: the return of the repressed, acting out versus working through; and the dynamics of transference. Among the topics, his discussion focuses on distinguishing between acting out and working through. He distinguishes them in non-binary terms treating them as two additional interacting processes. What he seems to posit is that whereas working through is aimed at achieving to a closure of the trauma, acting out means that trauma can be only managed through a constant playing out the traumatic event – a recurrent playing out which relieves the burden of the trauma:

Mourning works as a homeopathic socialization or ritualizing of the repetition compulsion that attempts to return it against the death drive and to counteract compulsiveness – especially the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes of violence by re – petitioning in ways that allow for a measure of critical distance, change, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility; and renewal.(713)

At the same time by taking into consideration the memory – work, especially the socially engaged memory – work involved in working - through one is able to “distinguish between past and present and to recognize something as having happened to one back then is related to but not identical with, here and now”(713). It is only through mourning, one attempts to assist in restoring to victims the dignity denied by their victimizers.

Like physical or psychic trauma, the articulating discourse surrounding cultural trauma is a process of mediation involving alternative strategies and alternative voices. It is a process that aims to reconstitute or reconfigure a collective identity through collective representation, as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric. A traumatic tear evokes the need to narrate the foundations which includes reinterpreting the past as a means towards recollecting present/future needs. There may be several or many possible responses or paths to resolving cultural trauma that emerges in a specific historical context, but all of them in some way or the other involve identity and memory. To anticipate, the appellation “African American”, which may seem more or less obvious today, is one of several paths or reactions to failure of reconstruction to fully integrate former slaves and their offspring as American citizens and to the new consensus concerning the past in the dominant culture in which slavery is depicted as benign and civilizing.

Deepika Bharati, a feminist critic, also talks about the traumas of female victims during slavery. She says that in the case of the female victims of slavery and sexual abuse who may have lived to tell their trauma but did not who are in fact, “forbidden from speaking of it, their bodies have been covered, the memories stored always, the stories stifled” (85). She explores how the narrator of the slave narrative is able to successfully understand and represent the experiences of abducted women without any first – hand knowledge of these things herself.

Bharati further says that there is always a placing of the veil between the reality of these women’s experience and the historian. She further argues that in the absence of direct “testimony, fictionalized and second – hand accounts have attempted to capture the elusive experiences of women during this turbulent time” (447). There is a perception that women have memories of these events that they are forced to suppress, strife or store away. Bharati seems to be acknowledging the fact that the sexually contaminated women during the sectarian violence and slavery are unlikely to testify about their experience and are time and again haunted through her memory.

Herman focuses on sexual abuse as a tendency on the retrieval of trauma memory. Memories of sadistic invasion may result from a range of experiences, including those directly attributable to childhood sexual abuse. Other developmental factors can underlie abuse memories, including dynamics associated with emotional deprivation, which can be elaborated intra – psychically as sadomasochistic fancy. Emotional neglect and abandonment themes are even more difficult to construct through the narrative of memory than are abuse experiences. It is easier to struggle against a demonic presence than a perniciously absent one.

Sexual harassment and sexual violence on the slave women is more deplorable when one considers the social doctrine that defined the standards by which all nineteenth century American women are to comply. These victims have two stories: either they give up their bodies to desires of white males or refuse submission and face certain physical abuse. These memories of the slave women keep them haunting throughout her life. Though slave's world is confined to the dreams and fantasy, the history of their bodily abuse and sexual harassment does not free them from historical obligations.

Hence the following chapters will analyze the trauma from the perspective of the survivors' traumatic experience of the history of the slavery, bodily abuse, cultural politics, memory, violence and sexual harassment. So, it is a cultural and psychic trauma inflicted upon a woman victim by the long history of violence and sexual harassment the present research work seeks to explore in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.*

III. Traumatic Experience in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

This chapter deals with trauma of slavery which describes an overwhelming re-experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the events occur in the often delayed and uncontrolled, repetitive occurrences of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. Linda Brent, the victim of slavery faced with sexual harassment, physical torture, violence, distorted family relations and emotional blackmail which ultimately lead her to numbness, repeated nightmares and recurring images of trauma.

Harriet Jacobs in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* rips veil off slavery's madness. She exposes the pathological nature of slavery as a peculiar rather than benign institution. Her slave status in Edenton, North Carolina, where she was born in 1813, enabled her to record for her generation and posterity the sexualization of slavery as a severe form of its neuroses and trauma. Jean Fagan Yellin cites *Incidents* as "the only slave narrative that takes as its subject the sexual exploitation of female slaves – thus centering on sexual operation as well as on operation of race and condition"(262 - 263). In *Harriet Jacobs, A Life,* Yellin repeats her call for an assessment of Jacobs as the "representative" woman of the nineteenth century because she "shaped her past from a private tale of shame of a 'slave girl' into a public testimony against a tyrannical system" (157).

Traumatic experiences leave long lasting effects on the victim. People who go through traumatic experiences often have certain symptoms and problems afterwards. How severe these symptoms depend on the person, the type of trauma involved, and the emotional support they receive from other. Reaction to and symptoms of trauma can be wide and varied, and differ in severity from person to person. Age factor also determines it. Linda Brent, the victim of slavery is matured and intellectual women.

So, it requires a subtle approach to explore the effect of trauma in her because she doesn't seem abnormal; neither does she turned to alcohol or drugs to escape the feelings as some other victims do. Though the experience of slavery continually torments her, she displays the development of ego identity formation, based primarily on her proud family heritage. Her grandmother is a well – respected property owner and community baker, and her parents, though slaves, are legally married moreover, her father is skilled carpenter, hired to work on difficult projects outside the slave community.

The locus of *Incidents* is indeed on Jacobs's enslaved, sexed body as legally defined property as, for example, Dr. Flint reminds and threatens her, "Do you know that I have a right to do as I like with you, that I can kill you, if I please?" (Jacobs 41). Propertied bodies of slave girls often became sexed bodies after puberty, as Jacobs relates in describing her fifteenth year as "a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl" (26). Like other black enslaved Americans struggling for self – definition, Jacobs experiences the constricted space of race an identity on a southern plantation played a fundamental role in her life as a vulnerable female slave, destined for early motherhood, but without its rights and privileges. Owned and claimed by *Incidents'* Dr. Flint, Jacobs sexed body emerges as a trope for the ascribed identity of female slaves and the institutionalization of slavery's erotic as well as neurotic character.

Jacobs necessarily transfers her recollected bodily pain and anguish, still apparently fresh and poignant as she frequently interrupts her discourse on the slave girl's experiences and speaks of her current emotions. In her narrative description of her real and symbolic neurosis, Jacobs places the convenient protagonist, Linda Brent. It is she, Brent, who emerges as a quasi – autobiographical creation that allows the unyoked Jacobs a critical distance as Yellin implies, but the adoption of the wise maternal voice as she outlines on Brent's sketched body her (Jacobs') past agonizing experiences.

"I am still pained", Jacobs writes around 1858, "by the retrospect" of slavery's wrongs, a confession indicating the passage of time and her growth and maturity in her own voice. The agony of the slavery can be observed when Jacobs's retrospection is disclosed further in other such statements as with her description of the slave mother who lost all her seven of her children to a slave trader and whose "wild, haggard face lives today in my mind" (13).

Retrospectively, too, Jacobs recalls her daughter Louisa Matilda (*Incidents'* Ellen) being advised wisely not to reveal Jacobs' concealment in the garret. Jacobs writes, "and she never did" (158), in a distinctly historicizing voice, one distancing the painful past from a calmer present and separating the maternal Harriet Jacobs from the anxiety – prone slave, Linda Brent.

In separating the narrative past from the narrative present and isolating a myriad of slave experiences, hers and others, from her present thoughts and emotions, Jacobs, as narrator, distances herself from Linda Brent. In distancing herself from the slave girl and the youthful slave mother, and, by association, from the psychoses of plantation slavery, Jacobs, as the real narrator, emerges as a saner than the experiences of slavery she narrates. Inside the slave community, for example the slave girl's mad mothering performance of hiding in a garret, incredibly, for seven years, waiting for the time she and her children could escape to freedom, reflects a traumatic experience.

In a Victorian era that defined a true womanhood by its purity, submissiveness, and gentleness, Jacobs, the real narrator, assumes, retrospectively again, a more cultivated and composed maternal voice. This voice is transcendent of the squeamish Linda Brent, who, as Jacobs' young double, frequently trembles, screams, faints, and worries, hysterically, in her contact with Dr. Flint and Mr. Sands. Although scholars might relate her individual hysterics to the genre of the sentimental novel with its feted heroine popular in nineteenth century, her symptoms and the narrative emphases on obsessive human sexuality suggest the malfunction of the wider environment, inseparable from the heroine. Jacobs' alter ego reacts to this sick social milieu, but only in her recollective memory and controlling voice. Jacobs *Incidents* subsumes and transcends women sentimental narratives, implying that white women's middle – class Victorian fiction couldn't possibly captures the harsh reality of slavery and slave women's life.

Jacobs delineates the large society's personal and collective madness. She portrays slavery as a curse. The curse of slavery's degradation was written more painfully on the black body in crisis, as seen in their acute physical and psychological torture.

> It has been painful to me, in many ways, to recall the dreary years I passed in bondage. I would gladly forget them if I could. Yet the retrospection is not altogether without solace; for with those gloomy recollections come tender memories of my good old grandmother, like light, fleecy clouds floating over a dark and troubled sea. (201).

Trauma induces a plethora of pathological symptoms and problems, which are clearly illustrative in the narrative. In turning to Freud's ideas of anxieties and neuroses caused by human sexuality and the set backs of slavery we find several illustrations of traumatic catastrophe afflicting mainly the narrator and slave community.

Manifestation of plantation trauma are presented graphically in Jacobs' relationship with Dr. Flint, especially in his non aggressive, obsessive neurotic thoughts of a sexual nature and his aggressive, neurotic – compulsive actions to satisfy his sexual desires and make her his sex – slave. We have already witnessed at least one example of his neurotic thoughts about his ownership of his slave girl and his right to murder her with impunity, but his compulsive actions begin when he literally strikes her. In conjunction with real threat that he focuses in losing her as his presumed sex slave, i.e., when she begins to form relationship with Mr. Sand, Dr. Flint's actions increase in neurotic severity, for example when he furiously cuts her hair.

Traumatic experience in Linda Brent can be observed when Dr. Flint starts speaking impulsively to her, blurting out and writing notes of obscenities, harming and inflicting bodily pain on her and her son, Benjamin, and wishing danger or even death upon her and her children. In the beginning, Jacobs writes that Dr. Flint began "to whisper foul words in my ears" (26), then swore that "he would kill me, if I was not as silent as the grave" (28). Another element of the traumatic experience is demonstrated in this last quotation. Besides, when Linda cultivates her romantic relationships, first with the free black carpenter and then with the white attorney, Mr. Sands, Dr. Flint starts torturing her. About the carpenter, Dr. Flint asks her, "Do you love this nigger? Then sprang upon me like a tiger, and gave me a stunning blow. It was the first time he had ever struck me." (40)

As narrator, Jacobs offers descriptions of a collective trauma, related to yet apart from her relations with Dr. Flint and Mr. Sands, moving the narrative from the private and personal to the public and open in the Edenton social body. In her description of the various groups of slaves and white slave mistresses living with slavery, Jacobs presents slavery as a constant form of trauma and as an example of post-traumatic stress, especially for fugitives, including herself.

In *Incidents*, the black slave community lives in a constant state of fear and agitation, due to a variety of occurrences. These includes the following: slave insurrections, aborted or successful; slave escapes and fear of discovery; the passage of the Fugitive Slave Acts; the dismantling of the home life, both the master's and the slave's; slave insolence and punishment; marital discord and sexual promiscuity; and slave auction day when families were sold and separated. In many instances, Jacobs describes plantation slavery as a fiery war – scene. There are "men, women and children" being "whipped till the blood stood in puddles at their feet. Some received five hundred lashes; others were tied hands and feet and tortured with a bucking paddle." (68-70).

Jacobs contents that "slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, they have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own" (105). Jacobs's perspective is acutely gendered: when her uncle Benjamin is sold, "we thanked God that he was not a girl" (157). Jacobs later relates that, "when they told me my new – born babe was a girl my heart was heavier than it had ever been before" (98). Jacobs emphasizes:

> The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The lash and the foul talk of her master and his sons are her teachers. When she is fourteen or fifteen, her owner, or his sons, or the overseers, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved in to submission to their will. But resistance is hopeless. (82)

Jacobs use of third person universalizes the plight of slave girls at the same time that it distances her from this very personalized accounts: every example she offers above reflects her own experiences. The slave owners' methodology describes psychological

– more even than physical – intimidation, much like strategies used against prisoners of war – such as sleep and food deprivation and repetition of desired learning – to break the young female slave. The plight of the slave girl is particularized to Jacobs herself, and the disease metaphor that she has used previously used to characterize the institution of slavery is now applied specifically to Dr. Flint: “he is the plague, the vile monster” (61).

Flint’s predatory nature reflects an unbridled lust for mastery that he advances through aggression and sadism. Dr. Flint’s “restless, craving, vicious nature roved about day and night, seeking whom to devour” (352) his intended victim holds chilling psychological implications. Her fear that Flint will eat her alive clearly represent her sexual anxiety.

Jacobs’s desperation is fueled by her crushing inability to locate any refuge or protection from sexual jeopardy. Even if her parents were alive or if she were married her parents or husband of a slave have no power to protect her. While her grandmother’s presence in the neighborhood offers her some protection, by qualifying the level of that protection Brent acknowledges that her grandmother is not physically, socially, or psychologically equipped her to safeguard her. Moreover Brent’s second young mistress is still a child and Brent could look for no protection from her. In fact Brent’s relationship with Mrs. Flint is inevitably adversarial: “I was an object of her jealousy, and, consequently, of her hatred […] I gained nothing by seeking the protection of my mistress” (35). In fact, Brent's fear into words, vowing after she sends Brent away is that "she would kill me if I came back"(44).

With all avenues of help apparently closed, Brent is nonetheless determined to avoid Flint. Jacobs writes "I shuddered to think of being the mother of children that should be owned by my old tyrant"(85). When she learns that he is building her a cottage in which to consummate their liaison, she dematerializes, figuratively speaking, in order to waft between the rock and the hard place and, incredibly, locates a mediating space among her grandmother's impossible moral code, the loss of her chosen first love, Mrs. Flint's life-threatening jealousy, and Flint's utter depravity. Brent is

> determined that the master, whom I so hated and loathed, who had blighted the prospects of my youth, and made my life a desert, should not, after my long struggle with him, succeed at last in trampling his victim under his feet…what could I do? I thought and thought, till I became desperate, and made a plunge in abyss. (34)

Brent's "plunge in the abyss" takes the form of accepting the advances of a prominent white man whose unimpeachable reputation and respectability prevent Flint from challenging him. Consenting to a relationship with Sands is clearly a preemptive move on her part, painfully borne, not of a lack of moral values, but of a fierce resolve to spare herself from the dreaded Dr. Flint's sexual advances at any cost. While her decision is far from ideal, it does qualify as the lesser of two evils, under her severely compromised circumstances. The vulgar Flint and the distinctly less disagreeable Sands are not entirely distinguishable from one another. Both men are civilized members of the community; both perceive Brent as an object of sexual desire; and both first proposition her when she is yet a child. But it is not only that Sands is the lesser evil; he also represents for Brent the critical difference between passive resignation and proactive rebellion. Choosing him allows her to make a choice:

> It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion. There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you… There may be sophistry in all this; but the

> condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible. (85)

Instead of the mediating influence between her grandmother and Flint, and in the absence of a mother to guide her, she becomes her own mother. Brent craves her space by calling upon a terrible energy borne of alienation, injury, hopelessness, and anger surrendering all prospect of a virtuous life as her grandmother defines it. For Brent, there is at least some virtue in self-determination in choosing for oneself.

> I would do anything, every thing, for the sake of defeating him…I knew nothing would enrage Dr. Flint so much as to know that I favored another; and it was something to triumph over my tyrant even in that small way. (52)

A defensive tension between anger and shame, and personal guilt and innocence, runs through this section of the document, as though the author herself is still battling the burdensome weight of her grandmother's moral code. Brent's announcement to Flint that "in a few months I shall be a mother" is again subordinated to the exigencies of her battle of wits with Flint. As for Dr. Flint, she says, " I had a feeling of satisfaction and triumph in the thought of telling him".

The reaction of Brent's grandmother to the girls first pregnancy precipitates a trauma the magnitude of which is perceived only later. Adding to Brent's multiple losses, the grandmother temporarily rejects her, initially refusing to accept the awful coming of age that has enfolded her granddaughter:

> O Linda! Has it come to this? I had rather see you dead than to see you as you are now are. You are a disgrace to your dead mother". She tore from my fingers my mother's wedding ring and her silver thimble. "Go away!" she exclaimed, "and never come to my house, again." …She

> had always been so kind to me! …With what feelings did I now close that little gate, which I used to open with such an eager hand in my childhood! It closed upon me with a sound I never heard before. (87)

The grandmother's refusal to understand her granddaughter's plight is a classic response to untenable circumstances and loathsome memories. It would not be irrelevant to note here that Brent's mother, like her father, was a mulatto. This information, which Brent relates on the opening page of the narrative, indicates that that grandmother had conceived a child through sexual relations with a white man. The grandmother's vehemence on the subject of Brent's pregnancy contributes powerfully to the probability that she had suffered the usual fate of slave girls.

While the grandmother's banishment remains in effect for only a few days, it represents a psychological watershed in Brent's life. The closed door represents the end of her childhood, of innocence, and of maternal nurturing and protection. In repossessing important familial artifacts, the grandmother does incalculable damage to the young girl's sense of self. The reclamation of the mother's ring symbolically tears mother from daughter once again, underlining Brent's motherless ness. The dispossession of this particular emblem-a wedding ring-also marks the pregnant girl as unmarried, and therefore immoral. The grandmother severs her granddaughter from the threads of female kinship and the security of domestic asylum. While Brent's grandmother is indeed a remarkable woman in a number of ways, her response to Brent's loss of chastity aligns her with a crippling ideology of impossible virtue for slave women at this crucial moment in her granddaughter's life.

Jacobs's move from first person "I" to representative woman in this letter is indicative of a manner in which she evades personal revelations and shields, indeed veils herself, in the move from private to public. For example, early in the narrative, as Dr. Flint her master is in the process of attempting to seduce Linda, Jacobs switches from a shallow description of his harassment to a more revealing direct address to the reader-" O, what days and nights of fear and sorrow that man caused me…" She goes on:" It is not to awaken sympathy for myself that I am telling you…but for my sisters who are still in bondage"(28). Jacobs then extends her sorrows and writes:

> My master met me at every turn reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day of unwearied toil, his footsteps dogged me. If I knelt by my mother's grave, his dark shadow fell on me even there. (17)

Such memories of Dr. Flint's determination to make her his concubine filled her with horror and fury. She defies his pursuits by taking risks that most slave girls would not have attempted. On more than one occasion she lashes out at her master verbally. She later admits that although she has been struck for her retaliation, she is fortunate to have not been killed. Although Linda claims that Dr. Flint never succeeded in his advances, she knows that he will eventually win the battle for her body. Her only recourse is to flee, a decision which she fears will likely backfire and seal her fate in a lifetime of captivity. The victims of slavery in dealing with sexual harassment have two choices: they can either give up their bodies to the desires of the white man or refuse submission and face certain physical abuse. Neither well-intentioned slaveholding women nor determined slave men can withstand the power of the master. Sexual exploitation and abuse simply characterized the daily reality of many females in bondage.

The sexual violation of slave women is even more deplorable when one considers the social doctrine that defines the standards by which all nineteenth century American white women were to comply. When referring to the ladies in the South, this doctrine manifested itself among women with even greater extremes than their northern counterparts by emphasizing the virtues of piety, purity, domesticity, and chastity, with chastity being the most highly honored. Jacobs understood this doctrine and was forever haunted by the loss of her chastity as a child:

> But, O, Ye happy women, whose purity has been sheltered from childhood, who have been free to choose the objects of your affection, whose homes are protected by law, do not judge the poor desolate slave girl too severely! If slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice; I could have had a home shielded by the laws…I wanted to keep myself pure; and, under the most adverse circumstances, I tried hard to preserve my self-respect; but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery; and the monster proved too strong for me. (23)

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Dr. Flint, sometimes, seems reluctant to force Linda to submit sexually; harassed her, pleaded with her, and tried to bribe her into capitulation in the manner of an importunate suitor. The means of this harassment seems veiled-it is this which Smith perceives. Flint whispers foul language, he writes obscene notes and has her read them, both to herself and out loud-yet nowhere is there physical foul play. Linda describes an incident where

> My master, whose restless, craving, vicious nature roved about day and night, seeking whom to devour, had just left me, with stinging, scorching words; words that scathed ear and brain like fire. O, how I despised him! I thought how glad I should be, if some day when he walked the earth, it would open and swallow him up and disencumber the world of a plague. (135)

Jacobs persists in contending that it is the force of Flint's language which drives her to Mr. Sands' and indeed it is Sands's language which provides the bridge from the discursive to the physical. Of her relations with Sands she writes:

> I felt grateful for his sympathy, and encouraged by his kind words…By degrees, a more tender feeling crept into my heart. He was an educated and eloquent gentleman; too eloquent, alas, for the poor slave girl who trusted in him. (55)

Later, fearing that Sands has betrayed her trust and has not emancipated their children, Linda laments, "How protecting and persuasively he once talked to the poor, helpless slave girl!" (145). Dr. Flint tortures Linda in such a way that she can not escape the bitter plight, sometimes when she is able to shun him but his malevolence still haunts her.

> When I succeeded in avoiding opportunities for him to talk to me at home, I was ordered to come to his office, to do some errand. When there, I was obliged to stand and listen to such language as he saw fit to address to me. (120)

In this way, the slavery’s memories trouble Linda’s life, making her alienated from her family and society. She lives in a constant fear and agitation. Jacob’s desperation is fueled by her crushing inability to locate any refuge or protect from sexual jeopardy. The memories of Dr. Flint’s determination to make her his concubine filled her with horror and fury. These experiences leave an adverse effect on her later life causing her serious trauma.

Conclusion

Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girls* deals with the slavery's traumatic experience of the protagonist, Linda Brent, who goes through a severe sense of trauma and alienation because of her personal experience of the Slavery's atrocities during the nineteenth century. The memories of the atrocities and torture inflicted by the slavery frequently recur and haunt her as the scenes of sexual harassment and promiscuity constantly come to her mind through out her life. It makes her both physically and mentally troubled in family and society.

Linda possesses memories of the slavery as she has literally gone through it. She goes through the bitter experience of the slavery's atrocities perpetrated by the slave holder. She lives her remaining life with heavy burden of the past. She is a fugitive, escaped from slavery. Her memories of sexual victimization and exposure to violence of the slavery are the major causes of her bruised condition. She is a traumatic character mainly due to the overwhelming events, accompanied by emotional numbing, sexual violence that constitutes an important basis for feminist struggle against patriarchy. Parental anxiety over the loss of adult daughter and the past culture of slavery has left her as a traumatic survivor.

Jacobs in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl rips veil off slavery's madness. She exposes the pathological nature of slavery as a peculiar rather than benign institution. Her slave status in Edenton, North Carolina, where she was born in 1813, enabled her to record for her generation and posterity the sexualization of slavery as a severe form of its neuroses and trauma. It takes its subject the sexual exploitation of female slaves and centers on sexual operation as well as on operation of race and condition.

Jacobs necessarily transfers her recollected bodily pain and anguish, still apparently fresh and poignant as she frequently interrupts her discourse on the slave girl's experiences and speaks of her current emotions. Jacobs describes plantation slavery as a fiery war- scene. Linda lives in a constant state of fear and agitation, due to the variety of occurrences. This includes her successful escapes but fear of discovery, the passage of the Fugitive Slave Acts, the dismantling of her home life, marital discord and sexual promiscuity.

In her narrative description of her real and symbolic neurosis, Jacobs places the convenient protagonist, Linda Brent who allows the unyoked Jacobs a critical distance but the adoption of the wise maternal voice sketched her (Jacobs') past agonizing experiences. Jacobs's retrospection is disclosed further in other such statements as with her description of the slave mother who lost all her seven of her children to a slave trader and whose wild, haggard face lives today in her mind. Retrospectively, too, Jacobs recalls her daughter Louisa Matilda (*Incidents'* Ellen) being advised wisely not to reveal Jacobs' concealment in the garret. Jacobs writes in a distinctly historicizing voice, one distancing the painful past from a calmer present and separating the maternal Harriet Jacobs from the anxiety – prone slave, Linda Brent.

Traumatic experience in Linda Brent can be observed when Dr. Flint starts speaking impulsively to her, blurting out and writing notes of obscenities, harming and inflicting bodily pain on her and her son, Benjamin, and wishing danger or even death upon her and her children. In the beginning, Jacobs writes that Dr. Flint begins to whisper foul words in her ears then swore that he will kill her, if she is not as silent as the grave. Besides, when Linda cultivates her romantic relationships, first with the free black carpenter and then with the white attorney, Mr. Sands, Dr. Flint starts torturing her. About the carpenter, Dr. Flint asks her if she loves that nigger. Then he springs upon her like a tiger, and gives her a stunning blow.

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