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Exploration of Individual Psychological Trauma in Kurt Vonnegut's *Jailbird*

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Kaladhar Chapagai has completed his thesis entitled “Exploration of Individual Psychological Trauma in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Jailbird*” under my supervision. I hereby recommend his thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Exploration of Individual Psychological Trauma in Kurt Vonnegut’s *Jailbird*”, submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Kaladhar Chapagai, has been approved by the undersigned member of Research Committee.

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Abstract

The present research is an exploration of individual psychological trauma in Kurt Vonnegut's *Jailbird*. Vonnegut presents the psychological disorder and hallucination of the characters due to the involvement in Watergate Scandal, loss of nearest and dearest one and holocaust incident before 1945. In addition to this, it excavates the social conflict between capitalism and communism. Due to mental restlessness, the protagonist is unable to choose anyone. In this regard the novel explores how the innocent people get victimized in the war and become scapegoat. The worse condition makes them traumatic who pass through present to past or to present. Therefore, revealing out the issue of traumatic condition through the medium of working through is the main significance of the study in order to analyze the text. The traumatic concept of Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Jeffrey Alexandra, Van Der Kolk, Van der Hart, and other related theorists are used as theoretical tools in the research. The major contention of this research is that traumatic situation can't be totally overcome but can be minimize through sharing to others or by writing literary pieces.

Exploration of Individual Psychological Trauma in Kurt Vonnegut's *Jailbird*

The research work entitled "Exploration of Individual Psychological Trauma in Kurt Vonnegut's *Jailbird*" analyzes the traumatic issues faced by Walter Starbuck, young American immigrant protagonist in particular and other characters in general. The research claims that the protagonist of the novel is traumatized, psychologically suffered, and victimized with his unforgettable past memories that keep on hunting him through nightmares, daydreams and hallucinations. The more he tries to forget his past, the more his pain gets intensified. The research explores the individual psychological trauma by finding causes and sources of the traumatic suffering of the characters in the text. The researcher particularly draws the theoretical insights from Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Van Der Kolk, Van der Hart, and other related theorists.

In *Jailbird* Vonnegut presents the main character and the narrator goes through the long period of traumatic suffering. He is put into the jail accusing him of the incident of Watergate scandal, hiding illegal one million dollars and gives him psychological torture. Along with this the death of his wife Ruth breakup with his girlfriend, hatred of his son because of changing his cultural root makes him traumatized. In the novel when he is released from jail he recalls several incidents of the past life what becomes the psychological wound at the present. He always remembers the insulted behaviors of the so called great people and torture of the jail. His loving relationship with his wife comes in his mind again and again which he also sees in dreams too. He cannot forget his wife after her death. Memory of his wife and incident of Watergate scandal rooms in his mind which shows his mental restlessness. He laments his past deeds sometime involving in democratic and sometimes involving in republic activities makes his mind vacant and orders less.

In the novel, Vonnegut brought another character Ruth who was the holocaust survivor and her parent were killed in concentration camp and gives her unforgettable torture. She suffers lots from those inhuman activities and cruel behaviors of Nazis. This becomes psychological wound to her and becomes unable to forget these incidents of the past. Later she comes to America and dies from heart failure. Other characters of the *Jailbird* are suffering from different past incidents and which makes them psychologically traumatized at the present. Both Sarah and Mary Kathleen O'looney belonged to poor background whose parents died because of the effects of radium. Loss of their parents also becomes the psychological wound to them. Overall the novel reflects the political and social unrest of America.

Vonnegut's writing is greatly influenced by his involvement in Second World War especially his entanglement with the bombing of Dresden which had a clear effect upon his psyche. The horrible experience aroused anti-war feelings on him which can be seen in his writing. The irrationality, insanity, absurdity and inhumanity of the bombing were the main impact on him. His writing focuses the consequences of the war to the individual psychologically. It does not mean that war destroys the physical aspects but for him the real witness cannot forget the scene of the war and they time and again suffer from the same traumatic situation. It means at that time due to wars people were suffered much more psychologically. Each individual are the sufferers of such horrific situation.

The project shows the traumatic situation of the protagonist either to choose the capitalism or socialism. His distress and psychological suffering brings different up-heavels in his life. Along with this the Watergate scandal by which he was put into the prison for two years also made him psychologically penalized. After the releasement from the prison he recalls his past and hunts his mind that why he was put

into the prison? The whole novel roams about the incident of Watergate scandal and his searching the answer why he was made a jail bird throughout his haunted and traumatized mind. Hence, this novel is to present the individual psychological trauma that is brought in the protagonist's life because of his involvement in Watergate scandal. This research is strictly confined in the analysis of Watergate scandal and World War Second and its traumatic effects in American society. The character Walter Starbuck is traumatized when he was sent to the jail by accusing false charge and his wife Ruth is sent to the concentration camp. Later Walter Starbuck involves in job and shares his feelings with his friend Clewes. He puts himself distance from the past and knows the false practice of so called great people of American society. He tries to forget his torture given to him in the jail but becomes unable to fully transcend from it. To cope with trauma Ruth also involves in painting and playing music which helps her to minimize her psychological pain. It will further explore how the innocent people were captured and taken to the concentration camp and given harsh punishment by which people were traumatized. The major thrust of this research is to examine how Walter Starbuck's traumatic distress is caused by the conflict between capitalism and socialism, World war II and various governmental and social practices of America. These social conflicts were the main causes of Watergate scandal where many people shot death and more than hundred people became injured. His inability to understand the duty and responsibility of Harvard man and Ruth's suffering cause traumatic distress.

Numerous critics have examined *Jailbird* from the perspective of life writing, experimental fiction, war novel, and satire on American values. However, traumatic reading of the novel is not found to be done in an appropriate way. The critic Peter Freese admits *Jailbird* from the perspective of realistic novel. He admits:

Kurt Vonnegut's most realistic novel *Jailbird* (1979) purports to be the life story of Walter F. Starbuck alias Stankiewicz, a poor Slavonic immigrant to the U.S. who develops his idea from idealistic communist into the witless collaborator of the right-wing zealots of the Watergate scandal. The story is presented as a resigned old man's garrulous autobiography, who arranges disparate fragments from his eventful life between his birth in 1913 and the year of his writing in 1979 around the miraculous events of two days in April 1977. (137)

Here the critic tries to analyze that the text is more realistic which focuses on the Watergate scandal incident. The main character Starbuck is in confusion either to follow communism or capitalism. This state of condition is found over all the people which is realistic in nature.

Another critic Lawrence R. Broer analyzes the novel from the perspective of historical novel. He opines:

Jailbird deals glibly with historical events on its literal level, but what link a Sacco and Vanzetti, World War II, the McCarthy era, and Watergate is more effectively explored in the quasi-allegorical personages, their relationships to each other, and the unrealistic situations where these figures come alive: warbler-filled anteroom to haven atop the Chrysler Building; the Dantesque toilet stall in a train station; in the weird executive network of RAMJAC corporation. (188)

Here the critic tries his best to analyze the text from the perspective of historical novel. He opines that *Jailbird* picks out the history of Second World War in which the world was divided into two poles they are capitalism and socialism. Along with this the text further describes the Watergate scandal incident.

Another critic Kathryn Hume has observed the novel from the feminist perspective in which the protagonist Walter Starbuck makes three girlfriends and marries with one. This shows the patriarchal notion of males towards female in the society. He admits:

Starbuck mentions that he has loved only four women. His mother he remembers most for her incredibly musical laugh-a positive and supportive memory. Mary Kathleen O'looney was his first lover and the woman who interested him in communism. Sarah Wyatt is an honest and engaging woman whose sense of humor fed his and made him feel relaxed and happy. Ruth, his wife, was an artist, spoke dozens of languages, and could play the piano. Starbuck feels inferior to all these women, but also feels transformed and improved by these ewige weibliche anima-figures. (184)

Here the critic tries to highlight the natures of male dominated society which shows inferiority of the females. The main protagonist has three girl friends and he is playing with them. It shows that the male in the patriarchal society takes females as the objects, tools and toys. He is changing different girl friend which presents the inferior position of the females in patriarchal society.

The critic Donald E. Morse examines the novel from the perspective of satirical novel in which the writer satires the American values and mores. He writes:

In *Jailbird*, Vonnegut excoriates both American capitalism and communism because both fail to serve either the citizens or the economy very well. Mary Kathleen O'Looney illustrates both the out-of-control quality of the American corporate world and the ineffectiveness of the naïf communist revolutionary. The writer uses

the satire by presenting the richest person in the world, who is, however, female rather than the male. He also uses O'Looney to satirize those who believe the world's ills will be cured by a revolution of the proletariat. (110)

It means *Jailbird* satirizes the capitalism as well as communism to show that both are the propaganda of them to lure or attract the people. He further tries to clarify that all the males in the world have their complete control in the economy not to the females. To criticize such tendency he has presented the female character to be the richest one.

In this regard it becomes clear that the text has been analyzed from different perspective by various critics, the theory of individual psychological trauma has not been applied, so there exists a strong need to carry out research on this novel from a new perspective. Therefore, this research explores how psychological trauma is an appropriate tool to show the traumatic condition of the individual during the time of Watergate scandal and Second World War.

The Greek word "trauma" means wound. It is psychological wound rather than the wound made by an object. The physical wound can be recovered after sometime but the wound in the mind and heart is almost difficult to cure. It refers to certain past events which have the power of disrupting identity in the present. Psychologists use it with reference to a condition called PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) by which they mean a kind of emotional or psychological blow landed on the victim by an injurious incident or a life-threatening event. The blow generates such a magnitude of shock which breaks through the protective shield of the mind to keep intruding into the consciousness even much after the occurrence of the event. Psychologists attribute the outbreak to such risk factors as assault, domestic abuse, prison stay, rape, riot, terrorism, conflict and war.

Trauma is not simply another word for disaster. Trauma as an idea of catastrophe provides a mode of interpretation. The trauma posits that the effect of the events may be dispersed and manifested in many form but not obviously associated with the events. Recalling of the past events, sleeplessness, disorder, irritation, frustrated situation and anxiety etc. are the general characters of trauma. These activities affect the daily activities of an individual. Moreover, trauma symptoms are not only nonlinguistic phenomena, they also occur in language. Traumatized people loss the normal paces of their life show abnormal activities which is not accepted by the standard and established norms and values of the society. In the novel also the main protagonist Starbuck shows his mental restlessness in which he is unable to choose capitalism or socialism. Similarly, another character Ruth shows abnormal behavior by sitting lonely and sketching the Holocaust paintings. Trauma is series of events or contexts that is emotionally overwhelming and depressing. In this case trauma refers to a psychological rather than physical wound. It results in mental and social disorder. Figures of Trauma theory are Cathy Caruth, Felman, Dominick Lacapra, Van Der Kolk, Van der Hart. Moreover, trauma is generalized as:

. . . trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century. (Caruth 181)

Trauma is resulted from the sudden and unexpected adversary events that threaten the psychic condition of people. The understanding of trauma has frequently been dominated by interpretations rooted in psychoanalytic tradition. The world 'trauma' is used to describe experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing and that overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless.

Traumatic people sometime tries to live in present life and tries to gain critical distance on a problem and able to distinguish between past life and present life.

Dominick La Capra opines:

In the working-through the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem, to be able to distinguish between past, present and future. For the victim, this means his ability to say to himself, yes, that happened to me back then. It was distressing, overwhelming, perhaps I can't entirely disengage myself from it, but I'm existing here and now, and this is different from back then". There may be other possibilities, but it's via the working-through that one acquires the possibility of being an ethical agent. (3)

Here, the theorist wants to say that the traumatic condition of any victim is difficult to cure totally. It can be lessen through the medium of critical inquiry, creative writing as well as narration of event to the others. Slowly the person can improve his situation either engaging in the creative task or by engaging in the society. He can differentiate the present, past and think about the future too.

In the novel, Walter Starbuck tries to make his best to fight against his trauma but he is not fully emancipated from it. His traumatic condition is lessening through his adaptation in the society. Walter Starbuck realizes that he must leave the past behind if he wants to have a better future: "There was still time for me to flee. What

made me hold my ground, I think was this: the need to prove myself a gentle man. During the bad old days, when I had testified against him” (57). After he has realized the reality of life and laments his past activities and wants to flee from this kind of psychological pain of the past. He tries to convert his traumatic experience in to strength for that purpose he himself involve in job but he can't leave traumatic experience fully but leave some content. He at last tries to cope himself with the present situation. He realizes that his mental restlessness is the root problem to make him psychologically weak. Through the medium of social contact and his self actualization he somehow improves his past situation. Here Walter Starbuck needs help from other in his life to manage his pain and to cope with her traumatic memories: “I haven't been able to do anything but survive. That's how alone I have been. I don't need much help but I do need some”(66). During the traumatic condition he doesn't care about his life but now he wants to survive. When he was highly suffered from the psychological pain in that time he likes to live alone but now he needs help from other that shows his struggle with psychological pain.

When emotional trauma leads to post-traumatic stress disorder, damage may involve physical changes inside the brain and to brain chemistry, which changes the person's response to future stress. Kali Tal's notion of trauma is also applicable in the text. The abnormal living condition and working style of Starbuck at present is determined by his suffering past memories, day dreams as well as the laments on his past wrong deeds. Defining psychological trauma as Kali Tal's opines:

Psychological trauma is direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death,

injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by family member or other close associate. The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness or horror. (87)

The factors such as assault, domestic abuse, sexual encounter, riot, terrorism, unprecedented happening and loss of loved one cause psychological problem and tension on each individual. Similarly in the novel, Ruth does not forget the torture given to her mother in concentration camp by Nazis. "They kill my mother in front of me rudely and inhumanly. I was unable to help her and obliged to listen her voice. Oh God ! how inhuman and brutal. It still roams in my mind" (7) proves that the physical torture given to her mother till her death makes Ruth psychologically victim.

Whatever she wants to do it blocks her. Time and again she remembers the same event. This event tortures her and hinders to do anything. In this sense psychological individual trauma is deadly dangerous than the poison. Poison attacks people directly but it attacks people time to time and does not let them live peacefully. The sudden occurrences and happenings in an individual's life shock him or her. Walter starbuck is the victimizer of the Watergate scandal and escape goat of the capitalistic notion of America. He also becomes the victim due to loss of his wife and separation from his son. Ruth psychologically suffers when her parents were killed in concentration camp and tortured to her. Mary Kathleen O'looney also mentally suffers from her past deeds. Similarly Sarah Wyatt, Clyde and Leland Clewes are also suffering from psychological injury, violent, death and serious harm. Such events implants stress agony and disorder which render psychology irreparably lost and damaged. It is very difficult to omit such psychological torture but people can lessen it either by sharing

to the people or by some creative writing. This kind of expression in literature is known as 'working through'.

Emotional trauma is also associated with psychological trauma, they correspond each other in many aspects. At this juncture, Billie J. Sahley, a medical psychotherapist and psycho diagnostician, in her book *Post Trauma and Chronic Emotional Fatigue* where he writes:

Emotional trauma occurs when a traumatic experience leaves indelible memories in the brain to which a person continually returns. The memories, nightmares, fears and flashbacks all remain the hallmark symptoms of emotional trauma. Individuals who have experienced emotional trauma will go to great lengths to avoid places, people or any activity that reminds them of the traumatic event. (27)

When a traumatic event occurs, the sympathetic nervous system is activated and memories are tagged or encoded. Those who experience post traumatic stress disorder develop short circuit in the information processing system. When incoming information is deemed unsafe or fearful, the short circuit causes repeated and intense stimulation of the fight-or-flight system. Behavior studies have shown that the logical part of the cortex shuts down when a person becomes hyper aroused leaving them feeling very vulnerable, fearful, anxious and almost out of control. Thus, emotional trauma and psychological trauma go side by side leading to serious long-term negative consequences.

Sigmund Freud in *Totem and Taboo* describes that trauma as the life threatening of victim with severe death and suffering. So, he states:

The double feeling tenderness and hostility against the deceased which we consider well founded, endeavor to assert itself at the time of

bereavement and mourning and satisfactionThe process usually adjusts itself through a special psychic mechanism, which is designated in psychoanalysis as the project. The unknown hostility, of which we are ignorant and of which we do not wish to know is projected from our inner perception. (42)

In this regard, Freud opines that the people who witness the torture given to their dearest and nearest one also suffer much more psychologically. In the novel when Starbuck was beaten he takes it easily but when he was given psychological torture accusing him to hide illegal one million dollar. It shows that how venomous is the psychological torture than physical. The lines, “I only told the truth. I bleated. I was nauseated with terror and shame”(38) shows that the psychological humiliation leads to shame and mental torture to the individual. It is not proved that either he hides one million illegal dollar or not but the accusation paves the path to the psychological disorder. His mental chaosness is no other than the product of the false accusation to him. Hence, psychology is such a factor if we praise people starts to think positively and if we blame others people start to move his mind negatively.

One of the leading scholars of trauma theory, Cathy Caruth, in her *Unclaimed Experience* further argues: “Trauma is not located in the simple violence or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that’s much unassimilated nature the way it was precisely not known in the first instance returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). As envisioned by Caruth, trauma does not necessarily mean the minor or petty violence; rather it does have disruptive effects in the long run period which is characterized by unrest, disorder and full of agony. Undoubtedly, trauma is associated with physical or psychological injury. These injuries are caused by different sorts of events. The victims of trauma of psychological or politico-cultural are miserably

haunted by depressive inclination, identity problem, guilt and shame and the felling of fear and the fear of being overwhelmed. "I had been cochairman of the Harvard chapter of the Young Communist League...After that I became a cautious believer in capitalistic democracy again" (17). In the *Jailbird Water Starbuck`*s identity and cultural root was changed cause of that sometimes he involved in capitalistic activities and sometimes involved in socialistic activities which shows his unrest disorder and full of agony. Being Harvard man, his attraction to both capitalism and socialism make him failure everywhere. Neither he becomes able to fulfill the wish of Mr. McCone nor becomes able to complete the will of Mary Kathleen O`looney . But finally he fails everywhere proves his mental restlessness and traumatic condition.

According to Dominick LaCapra, when victims are traumatized, its impacts cannot be healed completely. It can be found for a long period of time. The victim cannot be mentally fit because of his/her painful past memories, it always haunts the victim. La Capra further asserts:

Victims of trauma tend to relive occurrences or at least intrude on their present existences, for example nightmares or in flashbacks on in words that are compulsively repeated and that does not seem to have their ordinary meaning because they are taking on different connotations from another belief. I also believe that people who have been severely traumatized, it may be impossible to fully transcend acting out the past. (143)

Obviously, trauma does have long lasting effect where the victims experience it in their present condition after it is psychologically revisited in the form of nightmares, dreams and memories. Nonetheless, trauma cannot be overcome permanently but it can be managed to the great extent. Hence, psychological trauma can lead to serious

long-term negative consequences that are often overlooked by mental health, professional applying therapeutic method to lessen its intensity.

As stated in the theory of individual psychological trauma the novel hovers round the flash backs of the Walter Starbuck who remembers his several past activities and incidents: His involvement of Watergate scandal, his involvement in American army being observer of the activities of Nazis in concentration camp in Germany where he first met with his wife Ruth, loving relationship with his wife, relationship with two ex-girlfriend, his college days, his rootless formation Stankeiwicz to Starbuck, his parents love to him and his deep love to his son when his son was small boy and his attraction to both capitalism and socialism. Different past events comes in the mind of Starbuck as the form of flashbacks, nightmares, hallucinations, day dream, and memories. These events hunt the mind of him and he feels guilt and shame, fear, helplessness, powerless and shows the abnormal activities. To get rid from such problems he smokes more, claps three times, tries to become bold himself by saying, “ I never want to feel sad”, he involves in job, shares his feelings with friends. But he cannot put far from his past memories because when he sees anything which are related to his past activities, they soon come in the mind and start to hunt him.

In the novel, Starbuck sees the dream where he is going to become perfect man. Ruth is serving him, she is talking in sweet way with him and tries to come near to him and despairs. He tries to search her but falls down from the bed and finds him alone in his room. The lines prove this when Starbuck says:

My clothes were in perfect repair. My wife was still alive. I was sipping brandy and coffee after a fine supper with several other members of the nineteen –hundred and thirty five. One detail from real

life carried over in to the dream: was proud that I did not smoke any more: but then I absent... I put cigarette to my lips. A friend held a match to it. I inhaled the smoke right down to the soles of my feet. In the dream I collapsed to the floor in convulsion in real life I fell out of my bed at the hotel Araphoe. (53)

Here, Starbuck remembers his wife Ruth as if she is alive. Physically she is dead many years ago but he remembers her time and again. She hovers around his memory which shows his mental illness due to such psychological event. As the theory of individual trauma the individual suffers due to some particular reason which makes his mind divert in simple thing. The character Starbuck is also no other than the victim of psychological and individual trauma. In this sense it is proved dream is also one of the ways to lessen the psychological burden of the mind. The oppressed and suppressed event that cannot come out in real life can be sprout through the medium of dream.

Kali Tal's notion of trauma is also applicable in the text. The adverse living conditions of Starbuck at present is determined by her haunting past memories, nightmares as well as the cherished desire for his dead wife Ruth. As to define psychological trauma he opines: "Psychological trauma is . . . involves actual or threatned death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity . . . The person's response to the event must involve intense fear, helplessness or horror" (87). Different social factors like; domestic abuse, prison stay, loss of loved persons, brought psychological torture and mental distress in an individual mind. The sudden occurrences and happenings in an individual's life shock him or her. In the novel, most of the characters are bearing psychological trauma reluctantly. In the dream time and again Starbuck sees his wife. He remembers her a lot. It shows her direct relation

with him and she has made a deep place in his psychology. For him it is very difficult to forget her.

Not only that he remembers different incidents of his past in his dream and suffers a lot. He sits alone on the bench and remembers his past days. The situation of being alone, one-sided, silence, passive, inactive and heartbroken shows his traumatic and pathetic situation. The lines prove, “. . . so there I was all alone on a bench in the middle of nowhere again. I entered a period of catatonia again-staring straight ahead at nothing and every so often clapping my old hands three times. . . did I tell him the truth about the clapping? No. it was too complicated and silly. I told him that I had been day dreaming about the past events” (40).

This shows the traumatic condition of him. When Starbuck is released from the jail there was no one to receive him. He came out from the jail and entered into a hotel where he was an old customer. When he entered the hotel he saw different scenes: everybody is throwing garbage to him, scolding him, and mocking him. He imagined that he was dead and gone to heaven. When he came to the reality there was nothing what he saw before. Everybody was enjoying there, they were talking with their friends, nobody is concerning him. However, his hunted mind thinks that the hotel is an emergency ward after a great disaster. Mental restlessness, confidence less, hallucination and day dream of Starbuck shows his abnormal condition where Starbuck himself hallucinates and he evokes:

By the time I reached the coffee shop door, however, my self confidence had collapsed, panic had taken its place. I believed that I was the ugliest, dirtiest little old bum in Manhattan if I went in to the coffee shop everybody would be nauseated. They would throw me out and tell me to go to the Bowery, where I belonged. . . and imagined my

surprise! It was as though I had died and gone to heaven! So I sit down and everywhere I looked I saw a customer s of every description being received with love. To the waitress everybody was “honeybunch” and “darling” and “dear” it was like an emergency ward after a great catastrophe. (54)

Here, the protagonist Starbuck is in traumatic situation. His opinion to himself as ugliest, dirtiest and the old man in the village shows his negative thought on himself due to the mental anxiety and torture. The false accusation to him makes his mind to think that everybody would think him negatively as nausea. He thought that he would be neglected from the society. At this situation he thinks to die and go to the heaven than living in the earth. He thinks that heaven is the better place for peace and silence. In the earth only people are given the negative traits and humiliated time and again. His desire to go to heaven even though he is alive is also no other than the hallucinated situation. Being alive his desire to the heaven also shows that he wants peaceful environment than the conspiracy earth. He shows his angriness to the people in the earth who give other people psychological torture. The shift in one topic after another that is from heaven to the emergency ward also proves that he is not in mental order rather his mind visits from one place to other simultaneously. It presents his psychological traumatic situation.

The Jailbird deals with the embodiment of pain and pleasure, past and present, and dream and reality of an individual who experiences the complexities of his/her traumatic experience in American capitalistic society. However, in this novel by Kurt Vonnegut focuses another aspect of history of labors, the Watergate scandal of America in 1935. Vander Kolk and Van der Hart assert that:

[When] the person is (partially) aware of his traumatic memories . . . then the meaning schemes with which current experiences are integrated correspond to traumatic experience. They often can tell the story of traumatization with a mixture of past and present, but their current life is characterized by doubt and humiliation, by feelings of guilt and shame: past meaning schemes determine the interpretation of the present. (178)

As posited by Van der Kolk and Van Der Hart, the present life of a person is guided by the traumatic experiences whatever he/she faced in the past. Consequently, acute mental and physical pang is accumulated which aggravates the present life of a person. Here, both theorists want to say that when the person is in traumatic situation his/her mind moves from present to past and vice versa. They are confused with their present situation. In the novel also the main character Starbuck and Ruth experience the same problem. Starbuck is confused to choose the Capitalism or Socialism. He is even humiliated when he is accused for hiding one million illegal dollars. His imagination to reach to heaven than live in earth is also the result of his traumatic situation. Similarly, another character Ruth is also unable to handle the situation due to her experience to see the scene of concentration camp. The more she tries to forget the situation the more she remembers those inhuman events. In this sense the people who are traumatized by some events divert their mind from present to past for their recovery. They imagine many things and lost in the world of imagination.

Again, Van der Hart describes the process of healing from individual trauma is either the explanation of events to others or through the medium of literature. The people who are in trauma should express their feelings freely so that they can somehow heal the mental restlessness situation. He opines “Traumatic memories are

the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language. It appears that, in order for this to occur successfully, the traumatized person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it”(176). In the novel also Ruth feel somehow heal when she narrates the event to her friends. The lines, “I feel comfort when I am with you and share my pains that I experienced. That event is still in my mind. How inhuman and brutal were the Nazis killing people ruthlessly” (37) proves the statement. It means the people can lessen or comfort their traumatic situation if they express the events with their friends and relatives.

In *Jailbird*, the narrative is a mixture of past and present and is marked by Starbuck’s feelings of guilt. His traumatic past determines the way in which he interprets present trauma. Since he cannot work through the traumatic events that keep piling up, they all blend together in his day dreams and hunts his mind again and again he laments his past too. The following extract elucidates the point, “God knows I did not want to see him ruined and sent to jail. And the most I expected for myself was that I would be sorry for the rest of my life would never feel quite right about myself ever again, because I had accidently done to him I thought life could be expected to go on much as before”(36). It means that the Protagonist is lamenting for his deed that he forces someone go to the jail. The confidence less situation of him also shows that what decision he makes immediately changes. The life for him is full of illusion where he sees conspiracy and treachery. The individual is befooled and asked to obey the rules made by the ruler. If someone breaches it they call them mad. Freedom is lost by such narrow thought. Being careless man he had unknowingly done mistake and said something false about his friend Clews. At the present Starbuck laments and feels guilt about his past mistake. Now his mind is hunted by his past

miss deeds what he had done with his close friend. His past act is mocking him at the present and he was psychologically suffering from that sinful acts. This proves that he was in traumatic condition.

Most of the characters in *Jailbird* are deviated from cultural root and individual identity. The major character, Walter Starbuck whose cultural identity was changed from Stankeiwicz to Starbuck is also his dual identity. “Stankiewich, of course was our discarded family name. And I must laugh now, remembering something my father once told me about his arrival at Ellies Island as an immigrant. He was advised that Stankiewich’ had unpleasant connotations to American ear” (23). Here the shift of name one after another is also the situation of identity less. He even does not know his own name clearly. He says that sometime he is called by one name and next time by other. His lunatic situation and mental restlessness shows that he is not in psychologically peaceful way.

Klein Parker is another prominent theorist of racial trauma. He puts forward the new notion of the transmission of trauma. He is of the opinion that there are some of the methods whereby traumatic legacy get transmitted via interpersonal relation, mutual sense of communication and sharing of parent stories and legend. The survivors of racism tell and re-tell their children those catastrophic situations which they faced in the concentration camp. Through this way, the legacy of trauma continues to get disseminated, affecting those who are the part of broader range of the history of racial trauma. Parker makes the following remarks regarding to the transmission of trauma:

Unconscious and conscious transmission of parental traumatization always takes place in a certain family environment, which is assumed to affect a major impact on the children. Though Holocaust survivor

families certainly differ from one another in many ways, the more pathological families are described as tight little islands in which children came into contact only with their parents, with their siblings and with other survivors. In such highly closed systems parents are fully committed to their children and children are overly concerned with their parent's welfare. (46)

The effects of trauma diffuse from one generation to another. One example of the transmission of trauma is the racial trauma. Oral narration, written discourse and search for relief via confessing about the sufferings and trauma are usually practiced means whereby trauma is supposed to get transmitted. The effects of Holocaust are invincible. Kurt Vonnegut in his novel, the main character Walter Starbuck's wife Ruth was highly suffered because of Nazis. Her parents were killed by them as she also tortured, those movements are hunting always in her mind which seems traumatic events in her whole life. In a lonely mood she remembers her parents and wants to meet them by going to the house of god. For that purpose she wants to become a bird. In the absence of her parents she is feeling quite alone and suffering from psychological pain. She also thinks herself as the bird in the jail. Her parents are far from this earth. She desires to go to heaven in the lap of God that's why she can be free psychologically. The lines prove, "No one ever touch me" she said, and I never touch anyone. I am like a bird in flight. It is so beautiful. There is only god, me and my parents" (20). It shows her anger to the outer world. She only imagines her parents, heaven and her freedom. She does not want to be jail bird that gets everything in the prison but longs to go to jungle to visit her parents where she really experiences the real freedom. She does not want to be like the anxiety full jail bird.

Kurt Vonnegut brings different characters in the novel. They are suffering from psychological pain and mental vacancy at the present. Along with Starbuck and Ruth, Mary Kathleen is another character of *Jailbird*, suffering from the death of her mother. Her mother was dead due to the effect of radium which was the product of capitalistic society of America. When she hugs Starbuck she found herself with her mother. This shows her present life was guided by the love and affection of her mother. She is recalling her mother's love and affection at the present time and begin to cry which shows her distress and psychological suffering. Her hunted mind of her past proves her traumatic condition. The line proves: "I remember the hugs, she said. I remember you said you loved me. No man ever said that to me before. My mother used to say it is me a lot –before she died. I was starting to cry again." (74) Here, Mary Kathleen remembers the past event where she thinking her hugs with her mother. This event always comes in the mind and hunts her. This shows her connection with the past love with her mother. Trauma study focuses upon these events which were happened in the past and still hunting the mind of victimizer at the present. As like the character Mary Kathleen, also suffers in the present due to the past event: the death of her mother and love and affection of her towards her mother.

Trauma study basically focuses on the past events which psychologically hunts the mind of victimizer at the present. Victimizer shows their traumatic condition as the form of nightmare, hallucination, day dreaming, and agony. In the novel the main character Walter Starbuck who is also hallucinating due to the death of his wife Ruth and Watergate Scandal where he accused without any cause. Every time he saw the dream of the past event which mentally hunting him at the present. The event of accused him in the jail bring him under the traumatic condition. Walter Starbuck says, "I am an innocent man. I never committed any crime, but sometimes some sin. I am

innocent of all crime- not only this one, but all crime. I am an innocent man.”(72)

Here Walter Starbuck feels frosted himself because without any caused he was accused in the jail. The event of false charge on him hover rounds in his mind at the present too. Misbehave on him is still stoke in his mind again and again. The capitalistic people were making him a scapegoat for their personal interest. No people were in the side of him he was mistreated which event he can't forget at the time. He says, “Sometime I feel motherless child.”(40) His alone feeling, distress and agony of the past proves his traumatic condition. He is alone and want to get rid from the mental illness. He time and again remembers the same event why he is accused for the false charge. His psychology is haunted time and again.

Walter Starbuck is overwhelmed by the recurrence of the painful memories carefully constructed by the capitalistic agents of American society. Thus the present shock, the shock of the loss of her wife makes him susceptible with the exposure with the past shock. Jon G. Allen has defined trauma in his book, *Coping with Trauma: Hope Through Understanding* as the overwhelming experience:

By definition, traumatic experience overwhelms us when it occurs.

Sadly trauma does not necessarily end when the traumatic situation is long past. Many traumatized person continue to re- experience the trauma whenever memories of the past events are evoked. Along with the memories come painful emotions and the sense of helplessness.

(79)

Along with the characteristic of the overwhelming nature of trauma, Allen also points to the other character like recurrence and re-experience of the traumatic experience and the painful memories and sense of helplessness coming out of the memories. They all are seen in the Walter Starbuck, so we can easily term as a traumatic

characters. The line proves: “Not I even cared. My wife had died two week before they took me away, and my son no longer spoke to me. They had to put handcuffs on me. It was the custom” (23). When he was arrested there was no one for him. His wife was died two weeks before and son was far from him. In such situation he was helpless and alone which is he recurring time and again that shows his mental suffering and psychological problems.

Traumatic memory may involve bleated temporality and period of latency between the realm or fantasized early event and a later on that somehow recalls it and triggers renewed repression, dissociation, or fore-closure and intrusive behavior. When the past uncontrollably relived, it is as if there were no different between it and present. Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* points out different dimensions of trauma associating it with testimony. She evokes:

The trauma requires integration both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure. But on the other hand, the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one`s own and others` knowledge of the past may lose both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall. Yet beyond the loss of precision, there is another, more profound, disappearance: the loss, precisely, of the event`s essential incomprehensibility, the force of its affront to understanding. (154)

Trauma can work as testimony and cure. However, it needs certain transformation and integration. The trauma of Walter Starbuck in *Jailbird* indirectly gets communicated with the lilies flowers planted by his wife Ruth. When he goes to the garden he

himself found in the garden of him in his own house where there are the lilies of Ruth. Although his memories are fine he does not take care about these things. He handles all things properly. The communication and attachment with the flowers that his wife had planted shows that how much he loved his wife. His love towards her takes him to the past and makes him remember those bygone days at present remembering her. His psychology sees to the lilies not only as a flower but as a flower that once had bloomed in his life and withered with the chain of time. It means when the nearest and dearest are far from us our psychology see them to the things belonging to them. It is proved from the lines.

I looked about myself I Bryant Park, lilies of the valley has raised their little bells above the winter killed ivy and glassine envelopes that bordered the walks. My wife Ruth and I had had lilies of the valley and ivy ground under the flowering crab apple tree in the front yard of our little brick bungalow I Chevy Chase, Maryland. I spoke to the lilies of the valley. "Good morning", I said. Yes, and I most have gone into a defensive trance again. Three hours passed without my budging from the bench. (56)

Obviously, trauma does have long lasting effect where the victims experience it in their present condition after it is revisited in the form of hallucination, day dreaming and memories. Nonetheless, trauma cannot be overcome permanently but it can be managed to the great extent.

Hence, Trauma has sometimes been defined in reference to circumstances outside the normal human experience. But, this definition does not always hold truth. For some groups of people, trauma can occur frequently and become the part of common human experience. Like in the novel the female character Ruth was highly

suffered in Nazis concentration Camp. “Her father and mother and others were killed in concentration camps”(18). This unexpected incident hinders the inner psychic of Ruth. She is suffering psychologically because she was the real witness of inhuman scene of concentration camp. The murder of her parents and demonic behavior with her makes powerless to her. Due to this she suffers psychologically and shows abnormal behavior.

Dominick La Capra, another major trauma theorist, distinguishes between acting out and working through. Acting out is pathological and repetitive and forces the victim to revisit the moment of the crisis. The routine of going back can be a mental process, which means that the survivor will re-experience his or her trauma in nightmares or in day time delusions and flashbacks. Starbuck`s act of often recalling the death of his wife and Watergate scandal by which he was put into the jail. He was hunted by the event, “somewhere in there my wife dead. And then the trunk was found. Police came for me I knew the people who brought the trunk to my office, and under whose orders they were operating” (31) shows that his remembrance to his wife Ruth. He is psychologically victimized by such scene. He seems as if he is totally mad and unable to differentiate right and wrong. He is also traumatized from the past memories with, his memories are repeated again and again, through which his psychological pain raised. Working through on the other hand is concerned with overcoming the post-traumatic effects. The traumatized victim needs to gain distance from his/her experience if he/she wants to be able to distinguish between past, present and future. La Capra point outs that acting out is intimately related to working through, and that working through does not mean that the victim will be able to heal or change completely. Walter Starbuck tries different method to get rid from his

trauma ;such as smoking, clapping three times, engaging in work, talking with friends but all his work seem to fail. Moreover, La Capra opines trauma as:

There are two very broad ways of coming to terms with transference, or with one's transferenceal implication in the object of study: acting out; and working- through. Acting-out is related to repetition, and even the repetition –compulsion- the tendency to repeat something compulsively. This is very clear in the case of people who undergo a trauma. They have a tendency to relive the past, to exist in the present as if they were still fully in the past, with no distance from it. They tend to relive occurrences, or at least find that those occurrences intrude on their present existence, for example, in flashbacks; or in nightmares; or in words that are compulsively repeated. (2)

Psychological trauma is a type of damage to the psyche that occurs as a result of a severely distressing event. In the novel *Jailbird*, the characters like Ruth, Mary and Starbuck become the psychological victim due to many psychological confusions and disorders. Mary's mother died due to the affect of radium which was produced for the war weapons. Such capitalistic product takes her mother and other more than 100 women. Due to this psychological uncontrolness she changed herself into a radical communist to go against the Capitalism

Concludingly, this research focuses on the exploration of individual psychological trauma in Kurt Vonnegut`s *Jailbird*. It explores the issue how the innocent characters are traumatized due to the war, social conflict and holocaust incidents. The society presents the people as mad lunatic or alone discarding them from the social works and social adjustment. When one is discarded they feel a kind of torture and pain in their mind and show abnormal behavior in the society. In the

novel too, the protagonist Walter Starbuck at the beginning was a good person. He had lot of contribution in the society. But later people in the power charged him as conspirator hiding illegal one million dollars. This incident obliged him to be sent into the jail. In the jail he got lot of physical and mental torture. The same torture made him psychologically traumatic. At the same time his mind visits past, present as well as future. He is unable to distinguish what is right and wrong. Even he is unable to choose either capitalism or communism. He dreams his wife on the day time and wishes her in front of him. He talks with flowers and shadow as if his wife is alive. The chaotic and mental restlessness situation shows that the injustice torture given to him is the causes of his trauma.

Similarly another character Ruth, the holocaust survivor is also another traumatic character. She remembers the inhuman and brutal scene of murder of her parents in front of her by the Nazis. When she sees the physical torture given to anybody she immediately remembers the Nazis cruel and inhuman behavior. The Nazis killed the innocent children in the concentration camp for their pleasure. The inhuman, brutal, wild and demonic behavior of Nazis shows that they only see the Jews common people as their enemy due to their creed. Ruth passes her childhood in a happy way but the murder of her parents in front of her made her puzzle, traumatic and dumb. She at last dies due to heart attack. It also shows that psychologically she was weak and unable to endure the psychological torture. As a result in a traumatic situation she leaves the word. Her parents were killed by them as she also tortured, those movements are hunting always in her mind which seems traumatic events in her whole life. In a lonely mood she remembers her parents and wants to meet them by going to the house of god. For that purpose she wants to become a bird. In the absence of her parents she is feeling quite alone and suffering from psychological pain. She

also thinks herself as the bird in the jail. Her parents are far from this earth. She desires to go to heaven in the lap of God that's why she can be free psychologically.

Through the minute study of the primary text in accompany of individual psychological trauma theory the researcher has come to the conclusion that Vonnegut's *Jailbird* is the exploration of individual psychological trauma of many characters due to war social conflict and holocaust incident. The society gives negative tags to the people and made them lunatic and traumatic. They move from present to past, past to present and present to future. Though the psychological trauma can't be omitted in one night. The occurrence of same kind of incident and event made them remember it time and again because it is deeply rooted in the same mind. But the evil and devil in the psychology or mind can be lessen either by retelling it to the other people or by writing some creative work. In the novel the main character shares his pain with his friend and involves in job and tries to change himself as a gentle man. Ruth plays musical instrument and paints holocaust painting to minimize her traumatic suffering. Hence, psychological trauma is not the product of self but the product of injustice, inhuman, brutal, wild and demonic social phenomena.

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