

## **Historico-Cultural trauma in Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump***

This research tries to analyze the historico-cultural trauma in *Forrest Gump*, a film directed by Robert Zemeckis. Trauma means 'wound' in Greek, often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with that experience (Caruth3). They are the circumstances that are outside the realm of normal human experience. A traumatic event involves one experience, or repeating events with the sense of being overwhelmed that can be delayed by weeks, years, or even decades as the person struggles to cope with the immediate circumstances ,eventually leading to serious, long-term negative consequences, often overlooked by mental health professionals.

Historical trauma refers to cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, exceeding over an individual lifespan and across generations, caused by significant group traumatic experiences. The historical trauma response is a constellation of features in relation to this trauma. Essentially, the devastating trauma of genocide, loss of culture, forcible removal from family and communities are all unresolved and remains a wound in the heart of people who faced it. Its response often includes other self- destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts and gestures, depression, anxiety, low self esteem. "In historical trauma, the traumatizing events may at least in principle be determined with a high degree of determinacy and objective. These would include events of Holocaust, slavery, apartheid, child abuse and rape" (LaCapra 116).

Historical trauma is an example of transgenerational trauma. For example, the effect of any kind of traumatic events can be transmitted to people of further generations.

Cultural trauma is culturally defined and interpreted as a shock to the cultural issue of a society, and presents a model of the traumatic sequence, describing typical conditions under which cultural trauma merges and evolves (Sztompka 10). It

includes the shocking events that occur in a certain society which affect the group of people living in that society."Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves incredible marks upon their group consciousness, making their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander, 18). Cultural trauma is treated as a link in the ongoing chain of social changes, depending on the number of concrete circumstance; it may be a phase in the constructive morphogenesis of culture or in the destructive cycle of cultural decay.

*Forrest Gump* is a historical film about the historico-cultural trauma, it is a film directed by Robert Zemeckis, scripted by Eric Roth and starring Tom Hanks. The film presents the historico-cultural context of American Society and counter American mainstream culture from the 1960s to the 1990s. The film depicts several decades in the life of the central character, Forrest, who witnesses some of the defining events of later half of the twentieth century in the United States. The historico-cultural events like Watergate Scandal, Civil Rights Movement, assassination of the president Kennedy, Vietnam War and so on and trauma faced by different characters in the movie due to those events are shown through this movie. The central character, Forrest and other characters like Lieutenant Dan, Bubba and Jenny had become the victims of negative effect of American Mainstream Culture and Vietnam War. In this regard, this research aims to show the reasons that cause the traumatic situation in the characters due to several events which occurred during that period. Not only this, this research work will help the reader to get clarity on the issues which are related to the cause of historico-cultural trauma and also will know how some characters in the movie get success in working through of the trauma while others just act out trauma.

*Forrest Gump* is a 1994 historical movie that is based on the historico-cultural events of contemporary *American* society from the 1960s to the 1990s. The central character narrates the events that occurred during his life time and its influences to different characters in the movie. *Forrest Gump* has received with significant critical receptions since its production in 1994. The film gained several awards for its presentation of historical events in a stylistic way. It shows the trauma of different aspects of society like race, status, culture and so on. In this regard, Emawati Nur Wurlandari says:

*Forrest Gump* is one of the phenomenal movies. This movie performs discrimination or distinguishes on races, social status, culture and especially people's capabilities happened at a time. One example of discrimination is discrimination on handicap person. The American regard handicapped as useless. They don't have the opportunity to get better education and put them in low position in society. This movie makes us understand how a handicapped person struggles to reach his dream. (1)

For Wurlandari, the film reflects upon the ability and achievement of a handicapped person. He tries to show how the central character, Forrest gets success in achieving his name and fame, despite of being physically disabled and mentally retarded.

Likewise, American film critic, Roger Ebert describes *Forrest Gump* as:

A meditation on our time, as seen through the eyes of a man who lacks cynicism and takes things exactly as they are. It is an apt description of both the film and the book. Forrest Gump is hugely disadvantaged and yet he is innocent and brave, he emerged triumphant in the end. (2)

For Ebert, the film is a meditation on the people of contemporary American Society

from the 1960s to the 1990s. Despite of low IQ and physical disability, the innocence and bravery of Forrest, makes him win every battle that comes in his way and makes him a successful man in the end.

Another critic Chris Tookey praised in making of the movie. He analyses the relevance of the techniques used in the movie. He opines:

The whole film is superbly made. Director Robert Zemeckis follows up his special effects success with who framed Roger Rabbit to bring off new technological miracles, enabling Gump to hold conversations with three US presidents and John Lenon. Just as effective, though not as abstentions, is the mastery which goes into a classic opening shot, of a symbolic feather being beacon – just like our hero – this and that way.(1)

Tookey claims that this film has been superbly made; the technologies used in the film are best which shows the movie life-like. The 'morphing technique' used in the movie makes the audience feels like they are watching real event of that time.

Despite of many praises and positive criticism, Aeon Skoble criticizes the movie in different way. He argues:

Of course, all the bits in the film are funny and charming. I laughed and smiled on cue with everyone. Hanks is always likeable, and Gump especially so, being innocent that he is. But I am disturbed that film could attend such popularity and appeal by advancing the view that ability is not an important component of business success and that critical thinking is not an essential to achieve prosperity. Despite Gump being a successful businessman, the film theory conveys a tacit anti-commerce message. (473)

He criticizes the message that film tries to give to audiences. He says that the film tells us that we are not responsible for our destinies, that intelligence is not important; the dependent thought will be punished. This film does not give us a message to see the world in practical way, rather focuses on luck or destiny. In the film, the protagonist Forrest Gump has got very low IQ and he was straight forward. He doesn't do things with logic but go on doing what other tells him to do. But he gets success in everything he does. Skoble views the movie from only one perspective but somehow the film gives the message that if we are true and honest from our heart and we go on doing right things, luck favors us. It also focuses on theological nature of human society.

The above critics have analyzed the film from multiple perspectives. Some of the critics point out the achievement of hero due to his innocence and luck and some other critics tell about masterful making and technique of the movie. Though different critics have analyzed this film from multiple perspectives and since no researchers have researched and analyzed this film, *Forrest Gump* from the perspective of the historico-cultural trauma studies, my research tries to prove the implication of the narrativization of historico-cultural trauma in the film, *Forrest Gump*, especially with reference to several main characters who are the real representatives of the traumatized victims of different events and mainstream culture of contemporary American society. This research attempts to show different events that occurred during that period affected the life of people living in that period and the struggles they made to come along through trauma. Furthermore, this research aims to show the historico-cultural events such as Vietnam War, assassination of president Kennedy, Civil Right Movement occurred during the 1960s to the 1990s have greatly affected the lives of people resulting into loss of life, physical disability, mental and physical

illness, failure of dream that shows how those events become like "tear in the social fabric"(Eyerman 2) of the contemporary American society and how the central character reduce the burden of trauma by means of narrativization of traumatic past.

Trauma which means 'wound' in Greeks often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with that experience. Generally, trauma is caused by manmade and natural disasters including wars, abuse, violence, earthquake, mechanized accidents and horror events. Judith Herman argues, "Traumatic events are extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptation to life"(4). In, addition, to terrifying events such as violence and assault, which are more subtle and insidious forms of trauma- such as discrimination, racism, poverty are pervasive and, when experienced chronologically, have a cumulative impact that can be fundamentally life-alerting. For Jeffrey C. Alexandra, "Trauma occurs when members of a collective feel, they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their unconsciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their further identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways"(10).

Trauma shatters an individual or collective actor's sense of well-being. It affects the inner psyche of an individual and leads his/her life towards suffering. Trauma seems to connote a sudden overwhelming experience and stress a prolonged aggravating condition. (Caruth3) It results from a sudden unmediated conversion of inside and outside, good and evil, security and destruction. It turns the life upside down and makes people depressed which often results into the death of an individual. There is a sense in which trauma is out of context experience that upsets experience and unsettles one's very understanding of existing contexts. The experience of trauma poses even greater difficulties, perhaps difficulties of a different order of magnitude.

Historico-cultural trauma that can be seen in the movie and its effects on the life of characters is the main focus of the thesis. Cultural trauma theory which was developed by theorists like Ron Eyerman, Jeffrey Alexander, Kali Tal and historical trauma developed by Dominick LaCapra is related to depict the trauma that makes the life suffer and the upcoming events that shatter individual or collective ideas will be the central ideas that will be discussed in this research work. Historical events like Vietnam War and Civil Right Movement, Watergate scandal are the main causes of trauma for several characters in the movie.

For Jefferey C. Alexandra, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feels, they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leave indelible marks upon their consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (10) American mainstream culture which values money and sophisticated life style causes trauma to the characters in the movie. Some of them dream of being famous and earning large amount of money which makes them involved in bad activities that make them depressed and even take their life. Jenny and Bubba are such victims of this culture.

Vietnam War is the main cause of trauma in the movie. Lots of people's life has been victimized due to this event. Many black soldiers lost their life and their dream was shattered. Bubba, one of the black soldiers, who goes to the battle, was shot in the chest. He has a dream of doing shrimping business and rescues his family from Serfdom, a new practice of slavery. But his dream of giving his family a good life is shattered by the war. Similarly, Lieutenant Dan exhibits suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. He is shot, injured and then handicapped while fighting the war against Vietnam. He has put a positive reward associated with death in war; his family has got the culture of gaining fame by getting killed in war but he is made

to live after war, being crippled. He was traumatically injured by being ripped away from his destiny. He starts living isolated life, drinking alcohol and being overly anti-social. Though he gets success in working through of trauma, the scars given by war remain forever in his heart and mind.

Various cinematic techniques used in the movie clearly represent the trauma faced by characters. This movie utilizes the standard lighting technique. There are three main categories of lighting. They are low key, high key and three points. In this movie, the lighting for most part is bright or high key. This helps to bring out the color of postal scheme. This technique is applied in the scene where the people are shooting the guns to opponents in the battle field. Their faces were full of anger and want to kill the opponents. Three point lighting techniques are also used indifferent situation to show the real expression of character in the movie. This technique was use to express many characters situation like, Jenny facial expression while she was taking drugs, Bubba's expression while he is taking his last breath, Lieutenant Dan's anger towards Forrest on saving his life. Other techniques used in the film are close-up, extreme close-up; medium shot, long shot and others in case of the size of shot.

The overall thesis will be in the form of an essay which includes introduction, textual analysis and conclusion. In the first part, a brief introduction to the thesis, its objectives and problems, literature review, major argument and outline of overall thesis are included. Similarly, in the second part, the textual analysis and review of critics are included. In the final part, a summary along with finding of the thesis will be given to conclude the essay.

The film *Forrest Gump* represents the historico-cultural trauma faced by different characters. It centers on the hardships, pathos, trouble, misery and hurdles faced by characters due to negative influence of American mainstream culture and



events like Civil Right Movement and Vietnam War. The central character Forrest and other characters like Jenny, Bubba, Lieutenant Dan suffer through many events and face trauma in the movie. The movie also represents some glimpses of the Post World War II, which can be seen in characters like Jenny and Mrs. Gump (Forrest's mother). Not a single person but the whole society is affected. Jenny's involvement in drug addiction, difficulties in Forrest and Jenny's relationship, Lieutenant Dan's unfulfilled dream of completing his family culture, Bubba's shattered dream and his death on Vietnam War and Forrest's involvement in different work to keep himself busy to forget his dear people show the traumatic condition caused by historico-cultural context.

Forrest Gump, the protagonist of the movie is seen sitting on the bench waiting a bus and a nurse comes and sits next to him. He starts a conversation and narrates his life story to different people who come and sit on the bench. Through his narrativization, we came to know the trauma faced by other characters in the movie that are related to him. He describes the events that occurred during the period between the 1960s to the 1990s and its negative influence on the people of the contemporary American Society. Trauma causes "tear in the fabric social fabric"(Eyerman 2). Many people lost their life due to war and other movements and those who survive also go through traumatic situation due to loss of their beloved, family members, being disabled and getting betrayed from political condition of country. Film scholar, Robert Burgoyne gives his view in *Forrest Gump*, by focusing on historical aspect that this movie wants to show. He argues:

In foregrounding memory as the connective tissue of nation, however, *Forrest Gump* reveals itself to be a film that functions, more deliberately than most, as an ideological force seeking to redefine

national identity. In evoking memory as the register of national belonging, the film can effectively construct an image of nation that can exist apart from, or float free of, the historical traumas of the sixties and seventies.(9)

Burgoyne examines *Forrest Gump* as a prosthetic memory and arrived at a conclusion that memory is thematized here as the binding tissue that links the characteristics to the narrative of nation (107). From his perspective, the crucial question is whether the film is capable of consolidating national identity while narrating the stories of American racism, political homicide and war. One answer is that the film substitutes the memory for history. Burgoyne doesn't interpret this in positive way, seeing it primarily as depoliticization, the film doesn't reflect on specific circumstances, development and results of historical events but instead constructs an image of the nation that can exist apart from, or float free of historical traumas of 1960s and the 1970s.

Historical trauma may include substances of abuse as a vehicle for attempting the numb associated with trauma. It often includes other types of self destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts and gestures, depression, anxiety, low self esteem, anger and difficulty recognizing and emotions. It associates the unresolved grief that causes trauma. Regarding the historical trauma, Dominick LaCapra argues:

The historical trauma poses even greater difficulties of a different order of magnitude. It is itself a shattering experience. Moreover, the radically disorienting experience of historical trauma often involves dissociation between cognition and affect. In brief, in historical traumatic experience one typically can represent numbly or with aloofness what one cannot feel, and one feels overwhelmingly what

one is unable to represent, at least with any critical distance and cognitive control. (117)

For LaCapra, the characteristic symptom of historical trauma includes self destructive behavior like suicidal thoughts, depression, anxiety which is itself a shattering experience. It makes one numb and he or she becomes aloof from the whole surrounding. While suffering from this kind of traumatic situation, a person engages himself in self destructive behavior. The following picture suggests the involvement of the character Jenny in self destructive behavior.



Figure I: Jenny taking drugs to forget her past

The given picture shows the failure of American dream and negative effects of American mainstream culture. Jenny is a girl who dreams high and wants to live a free life. This scene in the movie is when Jenny gets failure to gain her dream and involves in self-destructive behavior. In her early childhood she has many issues with her father and his physical and sexual abuse toward her and her sisters. That traumatic event causes her anxiety and difficulty for the rest of her life. She got engaged with many people throughout her life. But she did not get the true love and care. She

becomes a hippie, start using drugs and even contemplate suicide for many times. At last she suffered from unknown virus and died in her early thirties. She represents negative influence of American mainstream culture that creates cultural trauma.

The cinematography of the film centers on the suffocation of the character and her self-destructive behavior. She becomes a hippie and takes drugs. Here in the given pictures, far distance shot technique is used. In this film technique, it is claimed that a subject is being shot at a close range will have a more dramatic and intimate effect on the viewer than a scene shot from several feet away. The most common shot sizes utilized by cinematographers are the following: extreme close-up, close-up, medium shot, long shot, and establishing shot. Here, the cinematographer utilizes the technique of long shot. It is shot from far way. The background scene is utilized and focused more than the character. The camera here is seeking to depict the effect of mainstream culture and involvement of people in drug addiction due to depression of not getting the things that they want in their life.

The historical event which shatters the life and dream of so many people in the film is Vietnam War. Protagonist along with other characters was traumatized by the event. Many people lost their life. Some get disable and some lost their relatives. Historical trauma refers to cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, exceeding over an individual lifespan and across generations, caused by significant group traumatic experiences. The historical trauma response is a constellation of features in reaction to this trauma. Regarding the historical trauma, the theorist Dominick LaCrapa in his book, *History in Transit* argues:

In historical trauma, the traumatizing events may at least in principle be determined with a high degree of determinacy and objective. These would include the events of Holocaust, slavery, child abuse, or rape. In

practice the determination of such events in the past poses the problems of various degrees of difficulty. The experience of historical trauma poses even greater difficulties of a different for the obvious reason that our mediated access to such events is through various traces or residues-memory, testimony, documentation and representations or art and cognitive control. (117)

Cultural trauma is a culturally defined and interpreted shock to the cultural tissue of a society that can be treated as a link in the ongoing chain of social changes, depending on the number of social changes; it may be a phase in the constructive morphogenesis of culture or in the destructive cycle of cultural decay. Certain changes that occurred in the cultural aspect of the society affect the whole society. In the movie, black students were allowed to study with the white students at same college. At first, some students and teachers protest against it but later on the president orders to make a new system of giving equal opportunity. This sort of situation is similar in the context of the film *Forrest Gump*. People get involve in Civil Right Movement for the right of black soldiers who are sent to fight against the war and get killed. Their attitude towards country's welfare is not positive and they curse on the rule of country. Similarly another situation which is similar in the context of the film is when President Kennedy was killed. He was taken as a good ruler as he spoke for the right of the blacks by allowing them to study in college with white people. But his assassination makes the people depressed.

Trauma is a sorrowful experience which shatters the belief of an individual and leaves incredible marks in their psyche. Cultural trauma transpires when the components of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to an awful event that leaves ineradicable marks upon their group awareness, making their memories forever

and changing their future individuality in basic and irreversible ways. Neil J. Smelser argues, "Cultural traumas to the effects of process of social change are able to produce a formidable list that includes mass migrations, wars, mass employment, and dislocations" (31). Cultural trauma is culturally defined and interpreted shock to the critical tissue of a society and presents model of traumatic sequence, describing typical conditions under which cultural trauma emerges and evolves. The picture given below shows the cultural trauma faced by the black people and its effect on innocent white people.



Figure II: A black man scolding Jenny for taking Forrest in their party

This picture is from the scene where Forrest and Jenny join the Black Panther party. People in the parties were making different agendas and plans to protest against the white people whose rulers has sent blacks people to get killed in war. Jenny's friends were also member of that party and when she take Forrest to that party, Forrest being a white man, is blamed to be a culprit by one of the black people. They misunderstand him as the opponent team who has come there to learn about their plan. They don't believe in Forrest innocence which creates fight among them. Thus, the Black Panther party has also become the reason of trauma in the movie. The cinematographic

technique used in this scene is medium shot technique. The camera angle was taken from side which focuses on the character's face and it shows the expression of characters. The background scene is not focused. Low lighting technique is used in this scene. This type of lighting sets the mood that lets the audience know that there is something awkward going to happen.

Cultural trauma is shown in the scene in which Bubba's mother; a black woman is serving food to her white master. Serfdom, as a new form of Slavery is clearly reflected in this scene. Though, blacks were given the right after Civil War Movement, they were still treated as slave in new way. Ron Eyerman argues that trauma is linked with the creation of collective identity. The notion of cultural trauma is also linked with subordination too. It is also related with slavery. He further claims:

As a cultural process, trauma is linked to the formation of collective identity and the construction of collective memory. The notion of a unique African American identity merged in the post Civil War period, after slavery has been abolished. The trauma of forced servitude and of nearly complete subordination to the will and whims of another was thus not necessarily something directly experienced by many of the subjects of this study, but came to be central to their attempts to forge a collective identity of its remembrance. In this sense, slavery was traumatic in retrospect and formed a "primal scene" that could, potentially, unite all " African Americans" in the United States, whether or not they had themselves been slaves or had any knowledge of or feeling or Africa. (60)

For Eyerman, the trauma of nearly complete subordination to the will and whims of another is thus not necessarily something directly experienced by many of the subjects

of this study, but came to be central to their attempts to forge a collective identity of this remembrance. Black soldiers who fought in the war were always in fear of getting killed. They were differentiated for their race and were not given proper facilities during the war. In the film, most of the people who are sent to fight in war belong to black race. They lose their life for the welfare of country but are not given any reward and respect for their service to the nation. Rather their family suffers after their death. The dream of the soldiers gets scattered due to their death in war. The following picture shows the traumatic effects on the character, Bubba who was shot in chest while fighting for his country:



Figure III: Wounded black soldier worried about the abortion of his dream

The picture shows the pathetic as well as traumatic condition of the character, Bubba. He was shot in the chest. He has got a dream of doing shrimping business and rescues his family from serfdom, a new form of slavery but his dream of giving his family a better life was shattered by war. He got acts out of trauma. In this scene the camera is taken from front side. Lightening is one of the most important elements of this movie. Here the camera and light focus on the face of the sufferer which shows the pathetic



condition. His facial expression and the darkness in the background truly depict the traumatic condition faced by the sufferer. The following dialogue between Forrest and Bubba will clearly show the traumatic condition of black soldier.

*Forrest find Bubba, lying in the under bush, with a huge sucking chest wound.*

Forrest: Hey, Bubba.

Bubba: Hey, Forrest.

(Forrest takes his friend's hand. Bubba sadly looks up at him.)

Bubba: Fuck it Forrest, why'd this happen?

Forrest: (helpless) I wish I knew, Bubba... I wish I knew.

Bubba: I want to go home... (scene2)

This dialogue clearly shows the traumatic feeling of Bubba. He does not want to get killed in war. Rather he has got the dream of doing business and rescuing his family from serfdom. His dream has been shattered. He was helpless, he wants to go home and make his family free but he was shot in the war.

Allison Landberg coins the term 'prosthetic memory' to describe historical events one has personally witnessed throughout his life and tells it to people he meets in his life(8). The central character Forrest witnesses many traumatic events in his life and later on he tells those experiences to people whom he meet in his life. By narrating his traumatic experiences with others, he helps himself to reduce the burden of trauma. He was time and often rejected by Jenny and also bullied by boys due to his physical disability and stupid talks. He involve in games, keep himself busy in work and even go for a long run just to overcome through trauma and overcome the trauma that he has faced due to loss of his beloved people. Though he became rich and successful in life and gets success to work through of trauma, he is traumatized

mentally from time to time by those harsh realities that he has faced in his life. He was betrayed time and often by his dear people and the country politics. In relation to betrayal trauma Jenny Edkins states:

In some case the situation is called to be traumatic when it produces the symptoms of trauma- an event has to be more than just a situation of utter powerlessness. In an important sense, it has to entail something else. It has to involve a betrayal of trust as well. There is an extreme menace, but what is special is where the threat of violence comes from. What we call trauma takes place when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormenters: when the community of which we considered ourselves members turned against us.(4)

Trauma occurs when we get betrayed by the person whom we trust, when we get unexpectedly hurt by them and when they broke the belief. This can be devastating because who we are, or who we think may be, depends very closely on the social context in which we place and find ourselves (Edkins4). If that order betrays us, the meaning of our life changes, though we continue to live. The picture given below shows the betrayal face by Forrest from the person whom he has trust.



Figure IV: Headman from army giving letter of resignation to Forrest.

This picture portrays the betrayal face by Forrest from his trusted person. In spite of his bravery and his contribution in the war, he is given the letter of resignation from army. He is involved in ping pong game and is sent to China to play for the welfare of country. He wins the game but after returning back, despite of giving him respect, he was discarded from his job. This shows how the country politics is playing with the career of the people. In this regard, Cultural trauma theorist Kali Tal argues:

The cultural and Political inquiry moves back and forth between the effects of trauma upon individual survivors and the manner in the larger collective political and cultural world. Both 'experience' and 'syndrome' metaphors are historical experiences that entirely subjective and emotional and syndrome partake of the objective terminology based in national law, and thus lie outside of society. (50)

Forrest, the central character in the movie is the one who has been traumatized all his lifetime by several historical events. He joins the army and is sent to fight in the war against Vietnam where he loses his dear friend and without his any fault he is given the letter of resignation from army. He was betrayed by the political side of the country. In the anti Vietnam rally, he was misused for the welfare of the organizers. He was disturbed by the Watergate scandal when he lives in the hotel which is recommended by the president. This entire traumatic situation makes him depressed. To overcome that trauma, he starts running and he runs nonstop for three and half years without any reasonable purpose. The picture given below shows the condition of Forrest while he is in a running mission.



Figure V: Forrest Gump with long hair and beard.

This picture captures traumatic mood of the protagonist, Forrest Gump who faces many traumatic situations in his life. He is shown with a long hair and beard which proves that he is careless about his looks and he just wants to forget those entire traumatic situations. He is running for no any particular reason. The cinematic technique which is used in several scenes in this movie is also used in this scene. It is time-lapse technique, a technique of taking still frames at much lower speed, than they will be played back. There are various uses for time-lapse sequences, for example, changes in the scene that are too subtle to be noticed by the human eye, or when used creatively, to show a passage of time. Here Forrest is shown with clean save and short hair when he first starts his running but after a while he is with full of beard and long hair. The three years duration is shown without mentioning title like, "few years later" or there is not any kind of dissolve between the scenes, this technique works perfectly in this scene.

Trauma occurs when a society and a group of people were affected due to some events which causes harm to the society and make the people suffer. It means

not only an individual but the whole society and its people were affected by that event. It creates disorder in the society. For example, in this movie, Vietnam War has been a cause of trauma for the whole American society. Cultural trauma theorist Ron Eyerman states:

As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of 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 the community or experienced directly by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event as the significant cause, its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as meditation and representation. (2)

The trauma of war is experienced by the person who fights in the war and the family who lose their relations but indirectly the whole groups of people are harm by that event. In the movie, *Forrest Gump*, there are several events like Vietnam War, Civil Right Movement and Watergate Scandal which affects the life of many people living in the contemporary American society. Many soldiers get killed in the war, some became disabled and some gets into life time trauma due to loss of their beloved and relatives.

Historical trauma refers to cumulative emotional and psychological wounding exceeding over an individual lifespan and across generations, caused by significant group traumatic experiences. It includes several self destructive behaviors like taking drugs, attempting suicide, anger, depression and so on. The person who is traumatized

is haunted time and again by those harsh situations that he has gone through. Thus he participates in several things to keep himself busy to overcome the stress. Regarding historical trauma the theorist Dominick LaCapra argues:

The experience of historical trauma poses even greater difficulties perhaps difficulties of a different order of magnitude. It is itself a shattering experience. Moreover, the radically disorienting experience of historical trauma often involves dissociation between cognition and affect. In brief, in historical traumatic experience one typically can represent numbly or with aloofness what one can feel, and one feels overwhelmingly what one is unable to represent, at least with critical distance and cognitive control. (117)

Any sort of trauma either it is historical or cultural; it affects the life of an individual. it makes an individual numb and he alienates himself from society. After facing so many traumatic situation, he want to live his life peacefully with the person he loves and cares but when his expectation gets hurt , he do such things that helps him to overcome that sorrow. The following dialogue between Forrest any Jenny shows the result of what Forrest wants to do to overcome through the trauma and what he gets in return.

Jenny: Goodnight...

(She starts up the stairs. and the Forrest blurts out)

Forrest: would you marry me, Jenny?

(She slows)

Forrest: I know I'm not the smartest man around. But I'd make a good husband ...

(a beat) Why won't you marry me? ...

(a beat pained)

I'm not a child. I know what's going' on. I heard people call people "niggers." I see men so scared they cried like babies. I see a man die.

(a beat)

I might be stupid, but I'm not a child. (scene4)

Forrest, the central character in the movie is the single character who witnesses all the events that occurred between 1960s to the 1990s. He has gone through several kinds of trauma. He was born with very low IQ and wore braces in his legs. His mental retardation makes him stupid in the eyes of other people. People do not treat him well and even he gets very few friends. He faces many events like Civil Rights Movement, Watergate scandal and Vietnam War. Everywhere people use him and even tease him of his stupidity. Because of his low mental capacity he is rejected to get admitted in school because of which his mother has to be sexually abused by the principal. Jenny, the girl whom he loves so dearly, never understands his feeling and rejects him every time. Though at last she gets ready to live with him, she dies, leaving him alone. Though he gets success in life and earns a lot of money, the harsh realities that he faces in course of his life time often haunt him. He starts living his life as a simple man but sometime he feels alienated.

During and after Vietnam War was the period in which Post-traumatic Stress Disorder became prevalent in American society. Many soldiers were killed, betrayed and get handicapped in the war and they face trauma due to the pathetic condition after war. Their sudden manifestation of anger, heavy drinking, nightmares, flashbacks and numbness are the results of trauma that they face by the war. In this movie, Lieutenant Dan was the character who exhibits the suffering of Post-stress traumatic disorder. His traumatic condition and his involvement in self destructing

behavior like drinking alcohol, getting angry with friends and frustration show his traumatic situation in clearway. Alex Clichy opines:

Post traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety that is portrayed in many different lights. In the movie, *Forrest Gump* we see this disorder portrayed by an individual who survives the Vietnam War. By analyzing the crucial scene in the movie and Lt. Dan's behavior can one form a diagnosis of his disorder and fully come with the term what it means. . He exhibits clear suffering of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. (1)

For Clichy, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder was depicted in the movie, *Forrest Gump* in two ways. The first explanation for Lieutenant Dan's PTSD is because he was shot, injured, and then handicapped in scene where he fights the war against Vietnam. As he comes so close to death, he may not be able to overcome his emotional and physical trauma. The second trigger explanation of Lt. Dan's disorder is when he survives his war injuries and is forced to live in the war; he does not want to be in. Lt. Dan put such a positive reward associated with the death in war, he was traumatically injured by being ripped away from his destiny (1). The picture given below clearly shows the condition of Lieutenant Dan's condition during PTSD.



Figure VI: Lieutenant Dan drinking alcohol and being furious



The given picture best represents PTSD and its effect in the character Lt. Dan. After Forrest leaves for taking his medal of honor, we are faced with a very torn up Lt. Dan. He gets so much depressed due to his condition that he starts living in a run-down motel, indulging in obscene amounts of alcohol, gets furious in simple things and so on. To show the painful life of people the cameraperson utilizes the method of extreme close-up shot technique. It means the camera is used from too near. Camera focuses in the face of Lt. Dan and his expression shows the effect of trauma upon him.

Trauma is a disruptive experience that disarticulates the self and creates holes in experience, it has belated effects that are controlled only with difficulty and perhaps never fully mastered (LaCapra 41). Some losses may be traumatic while others are not, and there are variations in the intensity or devastating impact of trauma. Those who cannot overcome through the trauma act out and those who can, work through the trauma. In the movie, two characters act out the trauma. Jenny engages herself in self destructing behavior; she is never fully satisfied with the life she live and later on die due to some unknown virus. Bubba dies in the battlefield leaving his dream unfulfilled whereas, other two characters, Lieutenant Dan and Forrest Gump work through the trauma. After getting traumatized by war and other events, they decided to leave those scars behind and start a new life. They started shrimping business and earn a lot of money. The picture given below depicts the work through of trauma.



Figure VII: Forrest Gump and Lieutenant Dan talking about their business.

This picture shows the success achieved by the characters, Lieutenant Dan and Forrest Gump. They earn a lot of money and they seem happy with their work. Though the memory of trauma is still in their heart and mind, they decided to move forward and live a good life by making peace within themselves. In this scene there is the use of high key lighting technique. Both of the characters are in a happy mood and it was the bright sunny day.

In the movie, *Forrest Gump*, LaCapra's notion of act out and work through of trauma is clearly applicable through different characters. The historico-cultural events like Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement, Watergate scandal make many character traumatized psychologically as well as physically. Though some characters get success in work through of trauma, some act out of it. Dominick LaCapra, in his book, 'Writing History, Writing Trauma' talks about trauma and its symptomatic aftermath that creates problems in historical representation and understanding. He also talks about the crucial role of post-traumatic testimonies. He gives his idea about the theoretical and historical elucidation of problems related to trauma and makes his readers clear about the importance of acted out and working through of trauma by giving many examples of historical events. He further argues:

Undecidability and unregulated difference, threatening to disarticulate relations confuse self and other, and collapse all distinctions, including that between present and past, are related to transference and prevail in trauma and in post-traumatic acting out in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes- scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop. While, working through is an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma (as well as transferential relations in general), one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or ones people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to future.(22)

For LaCapra, a sufferer acts out of trauma when he becomes unable to forget his past traumatic situation and indulges himself in self destructing behaviors like talking drugs, attempting suicide and feeling depressed. He works through of trauma when he becomes able to make peace with his past realizing that it was all the past and he had to move forward and keep faith with it. In this movie, some characters acted out of trauma, while some become success in working through it. Jenny was time and often haunted by her past traumatic situation and never overcome through it, rather she get involve in destructive habits like taking drugs, making insecure relationships and at last dies of unknown virus. Bubba also dies in battlefield leaving his dream unfulfilled. But two characters becomes success to make peace within themselves and worked through of the trauma. Both of them become rich and successful. The dialogue given below shows the work through of trauma.

Forrest: Hello

Dan: Hello

Forrest: (looking at Dan's legs)

You have got new legs.

Dan: yeah! Custom-made, Titanium alloy. It's what they use on the space shuttle.

(After a while, he introduces Forrest with a lady)

This is my fiancée.

Forrest: (showing Jenny)

This is my Jenny. (Scene 4)

This dialogue shows us how the characters got success in living a good life. Lieutenant Dan who lost his legs in war is seen with the new legs made up of titanium alloy and he comes in Forrest's marriage ceremony with his fiancée. Both of them are looking happy and refreshed. The eagerness and enthusiasm to live a beautiful life is seen in the eyes of both characters.

There are various cinematographic techniques in the movie which attributed to justify the theme of historico-cultural trauma. Some of the dominant techniques used in the film are close-up, extreme close-up: medium shot, long shot in case of shot. The movie has utilized the close-up shot technique several times to show the real expressions of character in different situations which help the audience to know and feel the pain and suffering faced by the characters. Time-lapse technique is used for several times in this film. It is used in the process that are too subtle to be noticed by the human eye, or when used creatively, to show a passage of time in a movie. Music also plays a great role in the movie. The music played in different situation helps the viewer to know the feelings of characters and the situation of events happening in the

movie. For example, music played in the scene where Jenny is seen singing in the state shows her inner feelings about the struggle in life that she faces to get that opportunity in her life. Similarly, the music played in the time while soldiers were walking in the forest shows their condition during that time.

Lightening is also one of the very important techniques in any movie. It helps to show the mood, feelings and thought of the character. Sometime it also helps to show the theme of the movie. Amy Villager, in his book, *Film Studies* talks about the importance of lighting techniques. He opines:

Lighting helps viewers to understand setting as well as characters and actors within the setting. Throwing a light under a character's face' under lighting, creates a spooky or sinister effect. For example, whereas positioning the light behind the subject by back lighting may create a halo around the hair, suggesting the character's scantiness. (33)

This film uses a combination of lighting technique. The bright light was used to show the happy and good events whereas dark light is used to show the unhappy situation and trauma. The lighting for the most part is bright or high key. This helps in bring out the bright out the color patterns which are typically a postal scheme. An example of use of high key lighting is in the scene where Forrest is getting married outside the house. This brings lights fill the situation of the movie. It is the happiest moment in protagonists' life and it was a bright sunny day. The thing about this movie is that the lighting is bright in the happier settings and dim in the serious or dimmer moods. This gives the audience a good experience about what they are viewing.

The interesting thing about this movie is the use of new computer-based technique, morphing. Through this technique, the director was able to integrate real film clips into the story, and manipulate in such a way that the main character appears

to be a part of the historical footage. This can be best illustrated in the scene in which Forrest and President Kennedy's hand meet in apparently real greeting, or Gump participates in historic ping-pong match. The figure given below shows the use of this technique.



Figure VIII: Forrest shaking hand with President Kennedy

Above given picture is taken from the scene where Forrest gets congratulation by President when he gets success to win the football game at national level. The computer based technique, morphing is used while showing this scene. Through this technique, the director was able to integrate real film clips into the story and manipulate it in such a way that the main character appears to be a part of the historical footage. The real footage of the president was used and picture of Forrest was put to show as if it is a real event occurs in the movie.

In this regard, the film, *Forrest Gump* is about the effect of historico-cultural events and negative effects of American mainstream culture on the life of several characters. This film represents the unbearable traumas that the characters face due to their participation on those events and also due to the betrayal of country politics.

Some characters lose their life, others become disabled and the ones who live are also haunted with the memory of those traumatic events. This film centers historical and cultural trauma on the life of American people along with that of the protagonist Forrest Gump.

Thus, this research proves how the different characters along with the protagonist becomes the victim of the historico-cultural events that occurred in America between 1960s to the 1990s in the film *Forrest Gump*, how they had suffered from those events, what steps they took to overcome the trauma and what result they get through that.

The events shown in the movie and its effects on the characters prove the issue that is discussed in this research work. The historico-cultural events like Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movements and Watergate scandal and the negative effects of American main stream culture is clearly depicted by the trauma face by protagonist and other characters. The central character Forrest, who witnesses all those events narrates whole events and tells other people how he has been the victim of those events and how his friends and relatives are directly and indirectly affected by those events. The pathetic condition of the characters due to the trauma is shown through different dialogues and scene from the movie.

Vietnam War is the main cause of trauma in the movie. Lieutenant Dan becomes disabled, Bubba dies in battlefield and Forrest is betrayed and traumatized by war. Moreover, the nature of Jenny and her action shows the failure of American dream and negative impact of American mainstream culture. In one way or the other, the life of all characters in the movie is affected by the historico-cultural events that occurred in contemporary American society. The traumatic experience faced by different character due to the events shatters their life with full of pains and

sufferings. Some of them act out of trauma and some others work through it.

Thus, this research has proven how the different characters in the movie become the victim of the historico-cultural events that occurred during the period between 1960s to the 1990s, how some of them act out trauma and some others get success in working through of trauma and live their life making peace with themselves. From the narrativization made by the central character, Forrest, we can very clearly understand the nature of trauma that has been caused by different events and how burden of trauma can be reduced through narrativization.



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