

The Global Catastrophic Impact of 9/11 Attack: Analyzing the Mental Condition in the Postmodern Novels and Media in the Post-Apocalyptic Context

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Abstract

Post-Apocalyptic novels unveil the disasters that traumatize the psyche of the people. Apparently, such a catastrophe has an excruciating impact. This paper analyses the impact of the World Trade Centre (9/11) attack on American postmodern characters, its representation through Media and as a result, the reverberating references in Indian novels as well. Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* presents the dreadful effects of the 9/11 attacks through the complex life of the Postmodern characters. The title, "Falling Man" is identical to the name given to a photograph released on The New York Times, "The Falling Man" taken by Drew, Associated Press. It is the media's representation of the 9/11 American fall. Along with the postmodern tenets, themes, and techniques, the paper probes into the mental condition of the postmodern characters in the Post-Apocalyptic context. Horney's psychoanalytic social theory is an effective tool for comprehending how catastrophic events influence people psychologically as well as how they interact and behave. The impact of the catastrophe is traced in the American novel, in the Media's photograph and in the Indian Novel.

Keywords: media, psyche, post-apocalyptic, postmodern, mental condition, postmodern psychoanalysis

1. Introduction

Historical events of disasters are etched indelibly in the minds of every human being. The aftermath of such an incident turns out to be horrendous. Along with trauma, it leads to anxiety about another destructive incident. The two world wars left the world frightened and led to fragmentation, existential crisis, and tremendous change in the psyche of the people. The nuclear explosion in Hiroshima turned out not just to be a terrifying memory in mind but also caused physical health complications. Don DeLillo in his novel, *Falling Man* presents such a catastrophic event, 9/11 that left a deep impact on the people.

The title of the novel, *Falling Man* refers to the protagonist Keith who has endured the World Trade Centre(9/11) attack but is unable to survive the effects of the attack. He is "falling" from his torment yet. It also refers to Richard Drew's "photograph of The Falling Man", a head-first falling of a man from the tower as it was attacked. It is the media's representation of the entire catastrophe in a picture. Don DeLillo as a postmodern writer represents the disaster through his characters in the novel.

"Postmodernism has been used by critics such as Ibad Hassan to distinguish the experimental literature produced after World War II from the high modernism of the period roughly between 1910 and 1930" (Habib 247).

"Post" doesn't refer to absolute rejection but is an extension of modernism in describing the world. The basic tenets of postmodernism include mixing high and low art, intertextuality, absurdity, magic realism, historiographic metafiction, temporal distortion, pastiche, techno culture and hyperreality.

Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* is a postmodern post-Apocalyptic novel as it uncovers the warning that such terrorist attacks are possible throughout the world. The plot is set after the apocalypse or catastrophe with the impact on the postmodern psyche. Don DeLillo's other novel, *White Noise* is also a postmodern apocalyptic novel. Peter Boxall, after his study, has named a chapter, "Death and the Avant-garde" presenting the death and terror that the novel depicts, carrying it to the life of the characters. In DeLillo's *Falling Man*, the readers could identify the cry of the characters and the struggle

they go through to rise up from the effects of the World Trade Centre attack. The novel is set in a postmodern world with post-apocalyptic images. The characters' traumatic aftermath is presented profoundly in the novel.

On film or on videotape, the men and women who leaped or jumped from the Twin Towers on 9/11 were captured in their last moments. Even though there were numerous horrible pictures captured that day—planes striking the Towers, panicked, bloodied people, the Towers collapsing—television producers immediately decided that video of the "jumpers," as they were nicknamed, was too distressing for American viewers. In the weeks following the attacks, the networks repeatedly aired different photos, but by the evening of September 11th, the jumpers were no longer shown. The following day, The New York Times released a photo taken by Richard Drew showing one of the jumpers as he was about to plunge to his death from the top level of the World Trade Centre's North Tower. The number of those who perished in this way is estimated to be around 200, or around 7% of all those who died on September 11.

The 9/11 attacks operate as a backdrop for the protagonists in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. The attacks have a great impact on the experiences and setting of the characters. The utilization of literary devices like fragmentation, self-reflexivity, and intertextuality defines postmodern literature as a genre. The postmodern approaches, such as the use of non-linear narrative structures and the blending of fiction and reality, are used in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Arundhati Roy presents the accounts of a wide cast of individuals who are all coping with the effects of the 9/11 attacks on a personal and political level.

2. Psychoanalytic social theory

Psychoanalytic social theory, a subset of psychoanalytic theory aims to explain social interaction and group dynamics in terms of psychological mechanisms. This theory is predicated on the notion that people's conduct within groups and the development of group identities are significantly influenced by unconscious psychological processes, such as wants and fears. Psychoanalytic social theory places more emphasis on the relationship between the individual and the group than it does on the group as a whole. It is predicated on the premise that group interactions have an impact on an individual's psychological development and that this process plays a significant role in the establishment of social connections and group dynamics.

Psychoanalytic social theory has had a significant impact on postmodern psychoanalysis because it emphasizes the link of the individual to the group as well as how unconscious psychological processes influence our behaviour in various circumstances. Additionally, postmodern psychoanalysis aims to comprehend how group interactions influence our psychological growth and how they might establish and sustain power relations.

The field of psychoanalysis has benefited greatly from the work of psychotherapist and theorist Karen Horney. Her social ideas and critiques of conventional psychoanalysis are well-known. "The Neurotic Personality of Our Time" (1937), "Self-Analysis" (1942), "Our Inner Conflicts" (1945), and "Neurosis and Human Growth" (1950) are some of her most well-known books. Instead of focusing primarily on biological and psychological urges as outlined by Freudian psychoanalysis, Horney's views highlighted the role that cultural and social influences have in influencing personality and behaviour. She maintained that underlying anxiety and a feeling of insecurity, which are influenced by culture and interpersonal interactions, are the root causes of neurotic behaviour.

A comprehensive framework for comprehending the psychological effects of catastrophic events is offered by Karen Horney's psychoanalytic social theory, which is especially pertinent to Don DeLillo's postapocalyptic novel *Falling Man*. Horney's hypothesis is founded on the notion that both external social pressures and our interior psychological environments play a significant role in determining how we behave. The book, which is based on the experiences of a survivor of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, is a potent examination of the psychological effects of a significant traumatic event.

To comprehend the protagonist of *Falling Man*'s emotional journey, consider Horney's theory of "neurotic needs." According to Horney's theory, humans are motivated by unconscious "neurotic needs," such as the need for security, acceptance, and power. Traumatic experiences frequently mould these demands, and the protagonist's encounter with the 9/11 tragedy serves as an illustration of this. The book explores his inner battle, which is motivated by a deep-seated desire for security and control, to deal with the trauma and navigate the uncertainties of post-apocalyptic existence.

Horney's theory offers a perceptive viewpoint on how the main character interacts with other characters. His relationships with his ex-wife in particular might be understood as a reflection of his need for respect and authority. He feels insecure and powerless around her since she's a strong, independent lady. In an effort to reclaim his sense of power and control, he tries to assert authority over her.

Horney's theory emphasizes how people react to traumatic experiences and contends that psychological trauma is both a result of and a component of larger societal dynamics. The characters in DeLillo's *Falling Man* are all trying to cope with the tragic events of 9/11, and this psychological anguish has a significant influence on the plot. Horney's theory

may also be used to investigate how the characters are coping with the trauma and how it has affected their lives, how the characters communicate with one another and how their connections to one another reflect the larger societal forces at work in the novel.

3. Postmodernism and Post-Apocalypse

“The new avant-garde literature (neo-modernist or postmodernist) partly carried modernism further, partly reacted against it – for example against its ideology and its historical orientation. What it consistently pretended to be (and sometimes actually was) was *new*. Determinedly self-destructive, it attempted to cut off its branch of the past, by proposing entirely new methods, a fresh “syllabus” or canon of authors (Nietzsche, Freud, Saussure, Proust) and a new register of allusions.” (Fowler 365)

Postmodernism is referred to as ‘new’ and ‘fresh’. It is a literary and philosophical movement emerged after modernism in 1980s. It reached its pinnacle in 2000 and continues till present day.

“Apocalypse is a means by which to understand the world and one's place in it. It is an organizing principle imposed on an overwhelming, seemingly disordered universe. This accounts in part for the continuing fascination with, and attachment to, stories about the end. Anyone who notes the often alarmist delivery of news reports about global warming or conflicts in the Middle East, or goes to the cineplex to see the latest end-of-the-world scenario avoided (or not), or listens to American presidents speak in terms of evil empires or axes of evil can easily be forgiven for believing we are approaching End-times.” (Rosen xi)

Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic literature is the sub-genre of science fiction, horror, and science fantasy. Apocalyptic literature, defined in the secular form refers to the catastrophe that causes destruction. It is also a thorough criticism of the social and political constructs in the modern world. It's a dominant way of describing the fears of disaster, experienced by those who are trapped in a disordered society. The twentieth century witnessed new forms of disasters such as the AIDS epidemic, the demolition of the ecosystem, and global warming.

Post-Apocalyptic Literature, defined in the secular form is the plot set after an apocalypse or catastrophe. The sufferings of the people who survive are projected in post-Apocalyptic works of art. The plot focuses on the psyche of the characters largely impacted by the disaster. Postmodern writers in the post-Apocalyptic works of art indicate the end through the picture of more concrete agents of death like frightening nuclear explosions and the devastation of our ecosystem which lead to the growing ambiguity of Human beings' survival on earth.

So, Post-Apocalyptic stories highlight the disasters of the world and the world moving towards its end with the atom, and nuclear bombs. Though the creation of new technologies in the way to the defense of a country amidst a war, it also increases the higher chance or risk for the people to be destroyed in large numbers ending up in many after-effects like Hiroshima & Nagasaki.

In *Apocalyptic Transformation: Apocalypse and the Postmodern imagination*, Rosen (2008) refers to apocalyptic literature as the “grandest sense-making structure”. Don DeLillo's apocalyptic novel *White Noise* illustrates the tragedy in America, presenting how the recurring fear of an atomic incident doesn't disappear even after years after the first atomic bomb explosion. Rosen's book presents how contemporary writers engage with the apocalypse in their works of art.

The catastrophic world we survive in makes writers produce more works of art relevant to it. According to Rosen (2008), only a “purifying cataclysm” can make the corrupted world new. The Post-apocalyptic writers of the Postmodern era do not conform to the traditional pattern, but they make plenteous remarks on the present world as it is. Contemporary Scholars are naturally urged to focus on the part of postmodern life and the disasters carried in the post-Apocalyptic state.

“Post-Apocalyptic” is inclusive of all basic concepts of Catastrophe and Judgement. Apocalyptists stand differently in the postmodern apocalypse, as they only voice out their warnings and caution about the upcoming apocalyptic tragedy. “Apocalyptist” recognizes that “something's coming”; he or she is “messianically involved” (Rosen 159-161). According to him, a real “apocalyptist”,

“Yearns for the end, knowing that New Jerusalem awaits faithful after the last judgment. This one has a sense of dissatisfaction and frustration that is born of his recognition that the promised New Jerusalem meant to follow the end has slipped away” (Rosen 161).

Post-Apocalyptic works of art portray the social and psychological disturbance due to the events that devastated the people. Some of the catastrophes are the explosion of a nuclear bomb, the AIDS or HIV epidemic that slew 2 million individuals and left 42 million diseased, the 9/11 terror, and global warming. Such disasters make the existence of human being uncertain around the globe.

According to a 2002 *Time/CNN* poll, "More than one-third of Americans say they are paying more attention now on how the news might relate to the end of the world, and have talked about what the Bible has to say on the subject. Fully 59 percent say they believe the events in Revelation are going to come true, and nearly one-quarter think the Bible predicted the Sept. 11 attack."

Such a response to the 9/11 disaster showcases the interest of people in eschatological narrative and the psychic need for a New Jerusalem, which is symbolic of something better.

On 12 September 2001, the London *Daily Mail* had a photograph of the collapsing World Trade Centre with the headline on the front page saying, "APOCALYPSE!" This indicates that the term apocalypse is not just a reference to the biblical story of hope, judgment, and reward. Apocalypse also indicates the catastrophe or devastation occurring around the world.

Don DeLillo's works focused on nuclear explosions, worldwide terrorism, war, and assassination. The story of his apocalyptic novel, *White Noise* depicts the everlasting fear of death. It's set in the late twentieth century. There are apocalypticists in the novel who inform us about ecological or moral destruction through their speeches. They are Heinrich, the elder son of Jack from his past marriage, who is burdened with technological and scientific information, and also Murray Jay Siskind, who is a guest lecturer at college-on-the-Hill, constantly cautions his colleague Jack and his students of the "presence" of the "modern death" which has happened in the outcome of capitalism. The teenager, Heinrich plays the role of an apocalypticist carrying the message of fear & corruption. His sign was the toxic cloud and says, "a heavy black mass hanging in the air beyond the river, more or less shapeless". The fear of death grips the protagonist and the people till the end of the novel, threatening the whole city. With death and nuclear dread, the novel proves to be a postmodern apocalyptic work of art.

Amis' *London Fields* is also a postmodern apocalyptic novel. As a postmodern writer, He presents the sense of loss and self-alienation, and uncertainty. John A. Dern's (2000) *Martians, Monsters, & Madonna: Fiction & Form in the World of Martin Amis* discusses Modernism, Postmodernism, and anti-modernism as different conditions united in the works of Amis. His novel, *London Fields* is exceptionally postmodern apocalyptic.

3. Falling Man and The Falling Man and the reference in Indian novel

Peter Boxall (2006) uses Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to demonstrate his investigation of these scenes and to spot how the plot of *White Noise* along with every other storyline tends to move towards death. The plot of DeLillo's *Falling Man* moves deathward too. The devastating event of 9/11, the collapse of the World Trade Centre, becomes the central episode of the novel. The characters are engaged with the disaster and they go through trauma after it. There is a state in which they couldn't return to normal life due to their psychological state. The characters and style of writing are perfect examples of a postmodern society. The setting is post-Apocalyptic with the plot set after the apocalypse.

Fragmentation is the primary tenet of postmodernism detected in the novel. There is no chronological plot rather the narrative is discontinuous. There are different perspectives such as Keith, Lianne, Son, and Hammad. So, the timeline is non-linear. DeLillo's novel portrays the search for existence in the meaningless and hopeless world. The survivors, Keith & Florence self-isolated themselves. They disconnect from the world and go through a time of despair. They begin a miserable, monotonous, and fixed life. People began to disbelieve and question the existence of God. Though they needed a supernatural force to pin their hope and depend upon, they are highly doubtful of it. DeLillo also employs postmodern linguistic devices such as Repetition. Repetition of the phrases, "Organic Shrapnel", "He would tell her about Florence" and "Wanted". They represent the horror of the event and inner conflict. And the postmodern narrative devices are Parallel Montage, as there are two parallel plots and occurrences. DeLillo was influenced by radical art exhibitions and drama which led to parallel montage. Thus, it rejects chronological or linear plots. Also, there is a Counter Grand Narrative. According to DeLillo, Hammad is no longer a terrorist but a "boy next door" who leads an ordinary life.

"These are the days after. Everything is now measured by after" (DeLillo 138). The author invites the readers to have a glimpse of the 9/11 attacks in his novel and its aftermath in the post-Apocalyptic framework. *Falling Man* is post-Apocalyptic as the scene has tragic effects on the sentimental condition of the city. The people go through a sudden change. The novel directs the readers toward the apocalypse and also, the distressing aftermath. *Falling Man* is, in a way fits into the meaning of apocalypse, "uncovering" or "revelation" along with the secular reference to disasters in the world.

The Protagonist Keith is the perfect example for the readers to understand the post-Apocalyptic condition of the post 9/11 disaster. The impact on every American and even other nations is huge. Keith walks back to his apartment after the incident and unites with his broken family to cope with the tragic event. His son uses binoculars to find Bill Laden as a symbolic way that he adopted his father's condition and is in dread of another such attack. The wife who was

disconnected from him welcomes him home as she understands his trauma and desires to share it. Keith escapes from the attack but is trapped in the post-Apocalyptic condition, proving that it's impossible to escape the world of disaster.

Mental disorders are detected in the characters. And some of them are in the fear of being pushed into a mental condition. They have lost their way to survive along with their hope and are torn up to the level of not being able to secure their revived relationship (Keith and Lianne). The world of chaos, terror and fear adds to detachment. She works with Alzheimer's patients and fears that the same would happen to her. All the characters are immersed in bad memories. Keith is haunted by inner conflict, and lacking peace. When he is questioned about the experience of escaping the attack, he fails to explain with the hope of being able to forget but unsuccessful. Resigning his job, he plays with his friends to get away from the impact of the apocalypse. Lianne also goes through the suffering of losing her father as he shoots himself. He was an Alzheimer's patient. She is also desperate to hold on to the memories of the 9/11 attack while her husband wants to let them go. She is scared of being affected by Alzheimer's like her father and slowly dies. The haunting image of death, devastation, and dead burnt bodies falling, creates trauma and questions the meaning of life.

Panic attacks, Self-destruction, and Despair are the consequences and symptoms of trauma. Cathy Caruth (1996) argues that the traumatic event is delayed rather than instant. It remains hidden, attempted to suppress, and makes sudden attacks through flashbacks and nightmares. The opening paragraph gives a sense of panic to the readers,

"The bomber is blown to bits, ...they get trapped in the body of anyone who's striking range... months later, they find these little, like, pellets of flesh, human flesh that got driven into the skin. They call this organic shrapnel" (DeLillo 18).

Not just Keith, his wife, and her mother, but their son is also affected and, in that case, 9/11 is an attack on three generations. The terrorists, according to DeLillo committed to dying to gain something better than this.

Keith is suffering from schizophrenia as he is characterized by disturbances in thought, perception, and behavior, a loss of emotional responsiveness and extreme apathy, and by noticeable deterioration in the level of functioning in everyday life. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Schizophrenia is "defined by abnormalities in one or more of the following five domains: delusions, hallucinations, disorganized thinking (speech), grossly disorganized or abnormal motor behavior (including catatonia), and negative symptoms" (87). Freud was interested in Schizophrenia which he called Dementia praecox. The Freudian term, "Dementia praecox" in modern psychoanalysis is known as "Schizophrenia" in postmodern psychoanalysis. Keith, Nina, Falling Man, Justin, and Lianne are suffering from paranoia as they are characterized by systematized delusions of persecution, fear, suspicion, and distrustfulness of others. So, the characters in the novel, *Falling Man* are suffering from mental disorders due to the apocalypse.

Don DeLillo's book *Falling Man* is about the September 11 attacks. In the book, a performance artist imitates the events shown in the image as the "falling guy." When naming his novel, DeLillo claims he had no idea what the title of the painting was. The artist assumes the position of The Falling Man and leaps from a high-profile location (like a freeway overpass) while wearing a harness.

It is recognised as one of the best and most significant works of art from the 21st century and is considered a masterwork of photography. A Time Magazine retrospective published in 2016 stated "Falling Man's identity is still unknown, but he is believed to have been an employee at the Windows on the World restaurant, which sat atop the north tower. The true power of Falling Man, however, is less about who its subject was and more about what he became: a makeshift Unknown Soldier in an often unknown and uncertain war, suspended forever in history"

According to Joanne Faulkner's (2008) argument, instead of the "mere objectification of their death," some people are outraged by the topic of the photos of jumpers themselves (p.71). Faulkner emphasises how difficult it is to determine whether to leap, echoing the opinion expressed by Junod in his 2003 Esquire article: "People who look at the pictures have to decide whether they would have done the same thing and I think that is what makes people so uncomfortable."

Arundhati Roy reflects the effect of 9/11 attack in the postmodern characters of novel, "The Ministry of Utmost Happiness". Anjum, a transgender woman who was formerly a Hijra, is one of the characters who was directly impacted by the 9/11 events (a community of transgender individuals in South Asia). Anjum is forced to flee her house in Old Delhi after the assaults and finds safety in a cemetery, where she starts a society of misfits and outcasts. Anjum and the other characters in the book struggle to negotiate a world that is changing quickly as a result of the attacks and the ensuing international response to them, including the War on Terror.

The inhabitants of "Khwabgah" in the story, who are located 1,000 kilometres away from New York, may be seen sympathising with and experiencing the sorrow of American citizens. The tall structures crumbled like pillars of sand while the Khwabgah's often chatty people watched in silence on television (TMUH 40). The tall structures in this location are an allusion to the World Trade Center. Everyone in the Khwabgah was silently watching the buildings burn

down on live television while keeping their mouths shut in profound horror. The question "Do they speak Urdu?," which Bismillah asked after a lengthy period of silence, reveals his intention to stand with people who are dying inside the burning buildings.

The influence of Media is pertinent to Baudrillard's concept of the "simulacrum," which is a representation of anything that exists independently of the real. Similar to how the characters in the novel comprehend their surroundings, Baudrillard's concept of "hyperreality"—that our perception of reality is mediated and influenced by media and culture. In general, The Ministry of Utmost Happiness's protagonists' lives are shaped by greater political and societal forces, which are represented by the 9/11 events. India has also been troubled by this tragedy in the United States. The novel's characters are a reflection of the same.

4. Conclusion

The Postmodern world with a Post-Apocalyptic Condition of catastrophe is portrayed in DeLillo's novel. Both Physical destruction and Mental disturbance are depicted in the novel. Destruction in this context is the aftermath of the destruction that occurred, that is the traumatic aftermath, mental destruction. Their state of despair indicates the falling society. As one of the greatest American novelists, Don DeLillo's portrayal of the Apocalypse in his novels is extraordinary. The bestseller, *Falling Man*, published in the year 2007, reflects the effect of 9/11, the World Trade Centre terror attack. DeLillo wonderfully pens down the tragedy as the Media powerfully portrays in the picture taken by Drew.

A useful tool for comprehending the psychological effects of catastrophic events, as well as the actions and relationships of people impacted, is Horney's psychoanalytic social theory. The post-apocalyptic book *Falling Man* by Don DeLillo, which offers a potent investigation of the psychological effects of a significant traumatic experience, is a perfect example of how this theory is vitally important to the novel.

The threat of nuclear explosion or any other disaster remains in our collective consciousness as the novel portrays the consequences. The traditional end of an Apocalyptic story is God's reward and deliverance from the chaos with the shift to New Jerusalem & New World. The "altered form of apocalyptic paradigm" (Rosen xiv) is just chaos and meaninglessness which is pessimistic rather than optimistic.

The novel is a perfect example of a post-Apocalyptic condition in a Postmodern context. Fragmentation, discontinuous narrative, non-linearity, parallel montage, counter grand narrative, self-destruction, intertextuality and despair as parts of the destructive effects of the post-Apocalyptic condition in a Postmodern context are elaborated. Also, the mental disorders of the characters in such a condition are traced out through the novel.

Undoubtedly, the iconic photograph "Falling Man" serves as a representation of a veracity that American society continues to respond to and battle with. The book's title is derived from a picture of a man falling from the World Trade Centre shot by Richard Drew on September 11, 2001. The "The Falling Man" photograph, which has come to symbolise the 9/11 attacks, has been extensively shared and analysed in the media and in popular culture.

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