

HYPER-SEXUALITY AS A RESULT OF TRAUMA: A Study of *Fifty Shades Trilogy* by E.L. James**Sheeryn Khan**Student, BA(Hons.) English
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The Postmodern novels deal with the wide variety of themes and perspectives. They are the representations of the postmodern life as Virginia Woolf's "flickering moments", Wordsworth's "spot of time" Joyce's "epiphanies" and Coleridge's "esemplastic" power of human mind. In a Nutshell, they are the representation of matters and manners of life. E.L. James a British novelist is one of the postmodern authors who have written extensively upon the psychology of human mind and its relation to their sufferings. *Fifty Shades Trilogy* is one of such examples. Initially, it appeared as a text representing, just sexual desires and pleasures. But there is so much more to the life of Christian Grey, who is the protagonist of the novel. The novel is the story of a college graduate Anastasia Steele and Christian Grey, a businessman who introduces her to the world of BDSM. The research paper explores the hyper sexuality, present in the psyche of Grey because of the traumatic experiences he has in his childhood and adulthood with reference of Freud's theory of Psychosexual development and the Eric Erickson's theory of development. The paper also investigates that how he is stuck in his past trying to get over it by using Transference on women similar to his birth mother.

The present study deals with hyper sexuality and its relation to traumatic experiences of the past.

Keywords: Hyper sexuality, Traumas, Psychosexual development

From the beginning of the English literature, traumatic stress and hyper-sexuality is been one of the important aspect, from Shakespeare's Othello to Dryden's Absalom, from Hardy's Tess to Joyce's Stephen, almost all the protagonists of various classics have been through stress, trauma

and burden throughout their life. Sexuality, which is one of the four basic needs of human survival, is one of the important dimension carried-off by stress. As Freud argues, it is the process to release our stress. Hyper-Sexuality after trauma is way more common than anyone wants to believe, and it can happen for so, so many different reasons. Hyper-sexuality is seen, throughout literature, an urge to have sex all the time.

The Fifty Shades of Grey (2011) by E.L. James, has a universal appeal for sexual desires, it is seen as a book to explore sexual desires, a protagonist who wants women to be his submissive, and full-fill his sexual desires. A sadist can be more precise termed used to define the protagonist, Christian Grey. As the novel begins when Grey meets Anastasia Steele in his office, and eventually thinks that she could be the next victim for his BDSM contract, but later finds out that Ms. Steele is a virgin and doesn't know much about sex. In the process of making her understand what kind of sexual relationship Grey wants, he starts falling in love with her, but as traumas make you perceive relationships in a different way, he is not able to understand what he is feeling for Anastasia. At the end of the novel, while showing her how much he is traumatized, he takes a step ahead and beats her brutally, but he realizes that he can't afford to lose her. He starts feeling her pain. This was something very new to him. The love he felt for her was something which he never felt for anyone else. In the process to get himself cured, he goes to the therapist who asserts: "You are not the monster you think you are; you are more worthy of affection." (James, 388)

Due to post traumas people start believing that they are not worthy of love, they believe they can't accept love without sex. And they believe sex is the only way to connect with others. They forget to believe the huge difference between doing it for sexual excitement and gratification and doing it because this is the only way that you know how to express or receive love of another. As seen in the novel, even after being the richest entrepreneur of Washington the protagonist is unable to make friends. He does have one friend but only because she shares his predilection of pain, on the other hand humans are social creatures, they crave for company. During his childhood, as a result of his biological mother and father's relationship with him landed him in a stage of mistrust. As an infant, he trusted his mother but she let him get beaten by his father, she leaves him when he needed her the most.

Erik Erikson, an American psychologist observes the theory of development in his text *Childhood and Society* (1950). According to this theory if a caregiver fails to provide adequate care and love, the child will come to feel that he or she cannot trust or depend upon the adults in his or her life. It is well reflected in the novel with regard to Christian Grey. He asserts: “its very hard to grow up in a perfect family when you are not perfect” (304). As child of a prostitute, his parents wanted him to be extremely neat and in control merely. He was taught to hold his feces and urine at an early age. Thus making him anal-retentive According to the psychosexual theory of development by Freud and discussed in his essay ‘The Theory of Psychosexual Development’ which brings out five stages of development i.e. Oral, Anal, Phallic, Latent, Genital. Anal stage lies from 18 months to three years. It is the second stage of Freud, according to which, the anus is the primitive zone of development and pleasure is derived from the anal zone. Christian Grey got fixated at Anal stage. He associates sex with danger, and he doesn’t believe he’s allowed to be safe. Due to post traumatic stress of his childhood experiences, he believes that sex is the only kind of intimacy he can have. His mother dies in a young age in front of him, he starved for days, and have flashbacks if he abstains from sex. He uses hyper sexuality to process his emotions, to get a control on them.

Furthermore, at the Genital stage of psychosexual development is observed when he is seduced, and it gives him a sense of who he was. Freud’s Genial Stage is the final stage of development which takes over at the time of puberty. The individual starts having strong sexual desires for the people outside of the family. Christian Grey at his puberty is seduced his family friend Elena when he starts feeling his strong sexual urges out of his family. He desired to have a lady to be like his mother to exert himself upon.

He was at the age of fifteen, stage of identity crisis according to Erikson’s theory of development, He was encouraged, that what he was doing with her was acceptable; therefore, he eventually fell into control of his life. He knew what it felt like being the submissive and saw how great it was to be a dominant, to be able to control others. Thus, resulting in him wanting to control others. Anastasia understands his situation when he confronts everything in front of her. She thinks: “... this is a man I need. His fear is naked and obvious, but he is lost... somewhere in his darkness.”(349)

The best example of the phenomenon of hyper sexuality is brought out by E. L. James in her novel where she posits: “There’s a very fine line between pleasure and pain. They are two sides of the same coin, one not existing without another” (156). Most often people use hyper sexuality as a way to deal with their traumas; they try to find pleasure in pain. In order to numb the pain, feel the release, or regain a sense of control, people often use sex as self harm. Self harm doesn’t always mean a will to die or to bleed, it often means, away to shun the post traumatic thoughts or a way to distract yourself. Sex is the one of the best ways to escape the former, as discussed in psychoanalysis and portrayed in the novel by E.L James.

As William Wordsworth proclaims “The child is father of the man” and the way he is brought up, shaped the way he is as an adult, with all those post traumatic thoughts, the person make it a way to ignore his inner conflict. The same is reflected in the novel. As Christian is submissive to Elena, his adaptive mother’s friend for six years in his childhood and adolescence, he learned a sense to control the other human beings. He knows how it feels to be dominant. He felt the pleasure out of it. By seeing someone going through as what her has grown through, made him feel released and distressed.

According to Freud’s phallic stage child becomes aware of anatomical sex differences, the most common aspect of phallic stage is Oedipus complex. The name of Oedipus complex is derived from the Greek myth where Oedipus, a young man, kills his father and marries his mother. As in the novel even after being neglected by his mother in the childhood, the protagonist always chooses women who appear to be like his biological mother. This is due to fixation in Phallic stage, he is still not able to forgive his mother that he use transference on those women’s who appears like his mother and wants to punish them. He articulates: “I am a sadist, Ana. I like to whip little brown haired girls like you because you all look like the crack whore- my birth mother (233)”.

“If you grow up with a wholly negative self-image, thinking you’re some kind of reject; an unlovable savage, you think you deserve to be beaten.” (482) According to any radical feminist view it would seem as a man try to rule over a woman, a man who wants authority over a woman. In defense of the protagonist, it can be seen that he is a human trying to deal with his past, and in the process of finding a way to deal with his past, he was made submissive by a

woman in past. To get release from his own trauma, he rules over women who are submissive to him. As Nagoski asserts in his text *Come As You Are* (2015):

“Sometimes, too, survivors find themselves locked in a pattern of sexual behavior. Their brains become compulsive about undoing the trauma, redoing it differently, or simply understanding it. Like biting on a cold sore or squeezing a pimple, the brain can't leave the trauma alone, even though you know you'd heal faster if you could. The result is that the survivor has multiple partners, often following a habitual pattern, without feeling perfectly in control of the decision to have those partners.” (Nagoski, Page 127)

People who have usually been through rough times are not able to heal themselves and try to project their feelings. They try to put their negative emotions such as anger, sadness, gloom and grief inside them for so long and then force it on one thing. Most often that one thing is sex which is the result of trauma and stress and it transit into hyper sexuality.

The world might see *Fifty Shades of Grey* as a book just meant for sexual pleasure but as there are always two sides of a coin, it should be realized that it was just not about sexual orientation or according to a feminist view point, it was just not making a woman man's submissive,(as discussed in the previous researches done on the novel), it was more about a human's attempt to heal mentally.

When E.L. James wrote this book, she was inspired by *Twilight* (2005) a novel by Stephanie Meyer wanted to make her main character a strong and powerful personality with extraordinary abilities who was never meant to love someone but eventually falls in love with a woman who makes him vulnerable and James actually made the protagonist like this.

At the end of the first part of the trilogy *Fifty Shades* the protagonist shows how much anger was hidden inside him and how far he could go and hurt someone in the name of punishment for not following his rules, but eventually at the starting of the second part he was vulnerable he was trying to heal and he accepted that his punishment can actually hurt some, he started believing that sex is not the only way he could get intimacy, later on he was so much recovered, he let someone touch his scars which was given to him when he was physically abused as a child.

James even wrote a trilogy from the prospective of the protagonist namely, Grey and Darker in these two book the entire plotting was same as Fifty shades trilogy, just the slightest difference that these were written with the mindset of the protagonist, that how he feels for women's and his own sexual pleasure and actually what he was going through all his childhood trauma, Post traumatic stress and nightmares and was not able to heal from all this due to fixation in his early stages of development.

Hyper sexuality as a result of trauma was just another major theme of this trilogy which was hidden behind the sexual appeal of this novel, most of the people see it as a erotic romance and nothing else, but as human mind is so complex, it deals with different traumas in different ways. The trilogy might be criticized as Sexiest or domineering relationship present as love, but before being a dominant the protagonist was himself a submissive of a woman and he was taught to be dominant by a woman. He just used sex as a excuse to his trauma and was doing projection. As hyper sexuality is a very common symptom of Post traumatic stress disorder which people also use as self harm.

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