



## Abject Flesh: The Female Body in Subversive Pain and Power in the Select Post Apocalyptic Fictions of Sophie Mackintosh

Aditi Ghosh<sup>1</sup> and Dr. Sabreen Ahmed<sup>2</sup>

- 1) PhD Research Scholar, Nagaon University, Nagaon, Assam, India, [aditionlinenow@gmail.com](mailto:aditionlinenow@gmail.com) ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7032-3831
- 2) Associate professor, Nagaon University, Nagaon, Assam. [sabreen54321@gmail.com](mailto:sabreen54321@gmail.com) ORCID ID: [0000-0002-4305-5584](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4305-5584)

Page No. 57-69

**Abstract:** *This paper attempts a feminist study on the threats to the bodily autonomy of women, who are subjugated in a fraught space. It analyses how the body has been the source of trauma and locates how traumatic responses has been written through the female body by observing the avenues of survival in toxin ecology. The paper argues how Mackintosh in her post-apocalyptic novels re-imagine the new sense of pathos emerging out of a transgression sensitized with a power. It aims to situate in an eco-feminist nexus the threats to bodily autonomy in the trajectory of psychoanalytical feminist theorization by the abjection theory explored by Julia Kristeva in Powers of Horror (1982) which attempts to understand the psychoanalytical reaction of a woman when excluded as a misfit to phallogocentric exploitation by downcasting her natural right to embodiment. To retain the protection of their bodies, women are required to be confined, traumatizing their survival in the post-apocalyptic setting in the novels. The idea of the abject female body and its radical eco-feminist responses in correlation to Baelev's pluralistic trauma theories (Baelev 2014) will be examined through Mackintosh's novels Blue Ticket and The Water Cure as the central argument in the paper.*

**Keywords:** *Post apocalyptic, Transgression, Psychoanalytical, Abject, Trauma, Water Therapy*

### Introduction: Feminism in post-apocalyptic fiction

Post-apocalyptic fiction stresses the means and ways of survival in the aftermath of an apocalypse or a cataclysmic event. It appeals to the readers wondering about the critical issues of 'what if' in the everyday survival of a destructive and refracted society. *The Water Cure* (2018) and *Blue Ticket* (2020), the two debut feminist novels by British novelist Sophie Mackintosh analyzed for the present paper, follow the genre of post-apocalyptic feminist fiction, showcasing the social threats to evolving female bodies and nature. It distinctively projects the intriguing abjection of "what if?" at the centre of their existence (Kristeva 1982). Both novels reveal the defiant relationship between dominance and defiance of control over the natural rights of women's bodies when situated within a liminal space of toxin ecology in the Anthropocene. The gendered norms of the society in the novels have been constructed, where the evolution of the leading female characters has been under constant threat for just having a body. Their control over their bodies was under the autonomy of the refracted vision of the patriarchal society. Eco-feminists strive to dismantle the rigid patriarchal binaries



between the body/intellect and civilization/nature (Ahmed 213). The central focus of this paper is the study of repression synthesized from a feminist psychoanalytic lens and trauma theory with marked eco-feminist interconnectedness.

Reproductive control in post-apocalyptic stories reflects systemic reproductive oppression and shows women's tactical resistance, as feminist dystopian study has increasingly acknowledged. Reproductive-justice activists and scholars contend that Mackintosh's novels represent a critical engagement with reproductive justice, understanding reproductive injustice as targeted, institutional, and intersectional rather than arbitrary.

Through biopolitical surveillance, medical control, and stratified reproduction, regimes of reproductive governance reinforce current hierarchies, as demonstrated by recent analyses of dystopian and speculative fiction. In "Reproductive Dystopias: A Comparative Analysis of Surrogacy in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Farm*", the reproductive dystopias in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and Joanne Ramos's *The Farm* are compared in this essay, with an emphasis on surrogacy, women's autonomy, and social control. In this context, critics of Mackintosh's *Blue Ticket* and *The Water Cure* show how her protagonists create forms of tactical, relational, and physical resistance while navigating coercive structures that deprive them of reproductive choice. Shakshi Saini has represented a comprehensive examination of Sophie Mackintosh and Louise Erdrich's dystopian books, emphasizing issues of social control and gender inequality in the essay "Reflections of Reality: A Study of Sophie Mackintosh's *The Water Cure* and Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God*".

The psychoanalytical concepts in context to women centric approach have been explored through the critical essays such as Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity*(1990) that study the socialisation patterns of gender construction from early stages of life; Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*(1963) that stood against the thwarting of women's intellectual capabilities, Juliet Mitchell's *Psychoanalysis And Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis*(1974) where Freud was located as the enemy for women and Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*(1982) where the productions of self and other for women are induced by social abjection. Butler opines, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (*Gender Trouble* 1990: 43). Such a regulatory frame is visible in the novels of Mackintosh, where due to abjection women's bodies are shaped under the threat of social status. It deals with the outcome of the emotional responses due to abjection of the body and the avenues of survival through it, which affects the psychosexual development of a woman. The paper, thus, also focuses on the transgression of power sensitised in the battle of survival and protection amidst the post-apocalyptic society. Mackintosh narrates, "Our bodies had to be cleansed. We had to be made safe, for ourselves and for others" (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 5).

The meaning and purpose of existence are shattered, and thus, rebuilding and re-establishing one's unrecognised identity becomes the major purpose of survival. The core aspect of post-apocalyptic fiction is seeking recuperative means to be human in a precarious condition of survival. Although post-apocalyptic and dystopian fictions are categorised under the sub-genres of speculative fiction, there lies a thin difference. Dystopian fictions generally highlight the impact of an imperfect society, which is the opposite of the utopian or ideal world. In dystopian societies surveillance becomes the new normal, as it enforces a form of biopolitical control that keep women in a state of constant precarity by limiting movements as "nations states increasingly adopt fortress mentalities" (Dwivedi & Wansbrough 147). However, post-apocalyptic fictions portray how the characters strive for their survival amidst the oddities and



devastated lives caused due to some occurrences. In Mackintosh's novels, *Blue Ticket* and *The Water Cure*, the women struggle pathetically through their bodies to survive against traditional gender roles intrinsic to post-apocalyptic fiction. Keith Booker while reaffirming traditional gender roles states that "literary dystopias (and utopias, for that matter) have typically been places where men are men and women are women, and in relatively conventional ways" (Booker 337). Mackintosh has presented the subversion of traditional gender roles; the women have responded through their bodies towards the unconscious suffering and repression caused due to rejection from society.

The woman lives her body through the different stages of her life and growth, where she is made to believe that her recognition through her experienced bodily habits accounts for the narrative of the body in the situation. Beauvoir begins her essay, *The Second Sex*, questioning with an interrogative statement about what a woman is, thus defining the hierarchical and gender issue in understanding the matter that man has always been the One and that woman as the Other. And these complications of sexes and alterity will remain intact until and unless both sexes do not recognize each other as peers. Beauvoir in Chapter Two, entitled "The Girl," projects that a girl grows and evolves according to the practices, thus separating the hormonal changes between a boy and a girl. (Beauvoir 1949) The girl completely becomes a stranger to herself because of the body functioning against her control. While a young man's puberty and erotic drives confirm his pride and embrace of body, the young woman's body is challenged by her emotional well-being and physical fragility. Emotional responses such as confusion, trauma, and secrets to escape a woman's distress become the characteristic traits of a girl's transition to womanhood because of the uncomfortable bodily experiences, such as puberty, menstrual cycles, with the arousal of fear and disgust (Beauvoir 1949). And hence, the subjugation of women finds the female body as the major surface to operate their power and retain their dominance and control over their autonomy which is precisely the chief argument in this paper forwarded through the reading of Macintosh's novels.

### **Subjectivization and the Horror of Abjection**

The treatment of the female body by the distorted patriarchal vision of the contaminated post-apocalyptic society is filled with a new sense of pathos because the women's bodies are neither objectified nor subjected; rather, they are victimised with the trauma of societal downcast. The theory of abjection has been discussed psychoanalytically by the eminent post-structural feminist critic, Julia Kristeva, in her theoretical piece of work, *The Powers of Horror*. She states, "A woman's body, through its reproductive and bleeding functions, is often cast as abject—neither fully subject nor object" (Kristeva 1982: 11). Kristeva has explored the term abjection to refer to the horror reaction of a human when they face the diminishing breakdown in meaning of the subject and the object, by dismantling "borders, positions, rules" (Kristeva 1982: 4). Her exemplary instance has been about the reaction of a human after observing a corpse, reminding inherently the trauma of one's own materiality. Abject is "an imaginary uncanniness and real threat" that disrupts "identity, system and order" (Kristeva 1982: 4). This theory of abjection has been culturally and socially mechanised to marginalise the weaker groups of society. Both the post-apocalyptic novels, *Blue Ticket* and *The Water Cure*, reveal the diminishing acceptance of women by rejecting their bodies to be unfit for the refracted vision of the society. In the novels *Blue Ticket* and *The Water Cure*, abjection becomes the major cause of their repression. The women's survival through their bodies is haunted by the fear of having just a body that has been an unrecognised corporeality in terms of their existence and survival. The imposed belief that a woman's body needs to be contained to maintain



protection and safeguard has claimed the functioning of the distorted society. As Kristeva says the abject body is treated to be an unclean and improper body which produces the visceral feelings of shame and disgust. This operation of the society has naturally compelled the women of the novels, *Blue Ticket* and *The Water Cure* to survive under the shade of anxiety. The three sisters in *The Water Cure* and the leading women, Calla in *Blue Ticket*, have gone under the feelings of self-loathing and shame over their disregarded female body and its disgusting hunger which eventually requires the containment and control. The dominance over the female body and its autonomy is controlled socially in *Blue Ticket*, and a familial barrier within the constrictions of the inside space the three sisters resided in *The Water Cure*. This suppression of the female bodies has been naturalised ideologically without any distinctive oppression; they are naturally meant to accept it as their only means of survival, keeping them ignorant of their knowledge from their emotional and individual feelings and desires. *The Water Cure* projects the toxic ecosystem of a family, which involves the control of a father over the family members. The father has been named as the King of the kingdom he created with the other members of the family on the inhabited island.

By showing how abjection undermines social and physical boundaries, especially within systems of gendered oppression, modern feminist research significantly expands Kristeva's theory of abjection. Researchers contend that early feminist reinterpretations of abjection examined how the female body is culturally created as both dangerous and subject to regulatory control. Creed examines that the corpse represents ultimate abjection. The body rejects disgusting food in the same way that it expels repulsive wastes like blood, urine, pus, and excrement. This keeps it apart from these chemicals and their places, allowing it to continue existing (Creed 70).

The bodies are either objectified or subjugated under the supremacy of the patriarchal vision. In the dystopian fiction, *The Handmaid's Tale*, the women's bodies have been objectified as a machine for reproduction. Society dictates the autonomy of women's bodies and their functioning. They have been constantly observed and controlled under the threat of confinement and survival. Similarly, in the present primary texts, *The Water Cure* and *Blue Ticket*, women's bodies have been under a constant turmoil of fear and threat. They have been provided protection through their eradication of desire and pleasure. Mackintosh has projected the insecurities raised towards the ambiguity due their degraded exclusion from the society. The three sisters in *The Water Cure* subversively killed the three men who had reached their island towards the middle of the story after their parents disappeared in the initial phase of their growth. This sinister end of the story represents their transgressive agential growth being affected by the trauma and anxieties caused by the psychologically abusive upbringing of them under their parental control. Similarly, in *Blue Ticket*, Calla, has initiated to follow with her individual will, embodying herself. She desperately went against the societal constrictions made for the Blue Ticket women in a quest to know her agential capabilities. But this decision has been aspired under the unpleasant space, filled with terror of bodily autonomy and protection. The women characters of both the novels have been victimised under the actions of traumatic experiences and its emotional response that they found threatening throughout their survival.

### **Abjection, Family and Fear**

In the novel, *The Water Cure*, the three sisters, Lia, Grace, and Sky grew up under the overprotective shadow of their father and family, resided on an island, far apart from the toxin-filled mainland, being infected by men spreading disease, which has not been mentioned



distinctively throughout the text. However, the women are abandoned and alienated, promoting their new upbringing as headed by the King, their father and their mother, socialising the gender roles of a patriarchal societal expectation. They are brought up with a refracted vision, in fact, another toxin-filled world within their family, in the promise of protection. The three sisters grew together, surpassing different emotional responses towards their traumatic experiences since childhood. They have been psychologically abused, in the name of preparation to face off the men from the mainland; however, in the training, they are taught to disrespect and to be dishonest to their own emotions and feelings by self-controlled energies. This repression of feelings has been reflected from the beginning of the novel; the sisters resisted shedding tears on hearing the sudden disappearance of their father. They have been further guided to own the pain as their bodies are designed for it. Their physical growth has been monitored since childhood as they were taught to stay detached from their personal feelings, “It is important to ignore any contrary instinct of your traitor heart. We were quite used to that” (Mackintosh 2018 10).

Psychological abuse stands as one of the major causes for women to feel inferior towards their embracement of the bodies. The parental control in *The Water Cure* and the societal control in *Blue Ticket* over the bodies of women has been traumatised by making them feel ashamed of their rejection and downcast towards the society, labelling them to be misfit for societal acceptance. Both the novels demonstrate the growth of the women from a young age under the shade of confinement towards the establishment of a female adult. In *Blue Ticket*, the female leading character has been abandoned and rejected to receive the blessing of motherhood, relying on the probability of a lottery which defined their fate and right of conceiving a child. This novel has quite a resemblance to Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*, however, the women were objectified in this fiction as a machine of reproduction. The women’s bodies are used to contribute to the dystopian society with children for those women who aren’t capable of conceiving yet belong to an elite and recognized status. In *Handmaid’s Tale*, bodies, and in particular fertile women’s bodies become “fetishized and commodified erotic parts” (Deery 1997: 475). But in the novels of Mackintosh, due to abjection, women’s bodies are evolved under the threat of social status. In *Blue Ticket*, the women have been subjugated in a much-complicated situation where they can neither consider themselves to be a subject nor an object. Depending on the two tickets; White and Blue, the women were rewarded with the right of being a mother, where white ticket women had the authenticity to conceive children, but the Blue Ticket women are discarded from the society to survive their own ways of life without contaminating the sanctity of the White Ticket society. This alienation and separation have psychosexually affected the growth of the Blue Ticket women, especially with a fear of rejection and recognition from society. Calla’s psychosexual growth towards understanding her wants and fulfilments have been terrorized from the beginning, since her childhood, she has been psychologically abused with statements and slogans written on the wall such as “Be careful in your wanting” (Mackintosh 2020 4). The horror filled society in regard to her will towards own body had been terrified the more she was growing closer to adulthood, which eventually decided her place of choice, the doctor said to the blue ticket women, “Go...To the place of your choice. Walk into it. Anywhere but here. Congratulations” (Mackintosh 2020:11). As Calla has been cornered for being a Blue Ticket woman and forbidden to receive the blessing of motherhood, this fear of rejection is being intensified by the constant gaze of the society towards her body. Calla’s downcast has been doubled as before getting pregnant she was thrown away from the White Ticket woman and was demanded to survive alone without



mingling with the aspirations of a white ticket woman; and after getting pregnant she had to hide herself with a fear of violating the societal dictatorship against the blue ticket woman. Both the choices of her life were engraved with the trauma of fear and anxiety. Though the first choice dictated to her has been a societal barrier, yet the emotional response of this constructive enforcement led her to follow individual choice under the fraught space of motherhood which eventually terrorized her survival as her means of existence was through her body. Calla has been under constant surveillance from the beginning of the novel, before she attained the age of puberty and got periods, her unnamed father used to look after her not as a responsible parent but as a passive member of the family whose responsibility ended after she was labelled as a blue ticket woman in the lottery. She has been neglected by her father and was rarely taken care of, Calla herself commented, "He was young to be a father" (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 6). In her later phase, he came into a relationship with R who has highly dejected her knowing her desire to be a mother, as it would bring shame to him if it comes into notice of the society that he would be the father of a baby being conceived by a blue ticket woman. This rejection from her loved ones has heightened her intensity to be recognized by the society and she survived through her pregnant body with a strong-will and successfully delivered the baby under the observance by certain emissaries sent by the society to forbid her from her desperate feelings to become a mother. However, two close observers, Doctor A and Marisol, have been ambiguous as they were also spying her actions but with an emotional attachment, love, care and affection towards her; and also at the same time, being bound to follow the societal norms, have supported the unjust and distorted vision of the society to protect their own survivals. This constant emotional neglect and isolation have traumatised her survival. And at the end, to protect the survival of her delivered baby, she had to mutually agree with Marisol and handed over the baby to her, contradictorily, she has isolated her own child being confined to the destructive society as similar to her own separation from her father during her young age. The ignorant delivered child has been casted off to an ambiguous place under the promise of protection. It is quite interesting to note that this grave motif of the promise of protection serves as the major introspection in the novel *The Water Cure*. The mother's guidance towards her daughter's safeguard became much more conscious when the three men arrived on the island as their saviours after the King disappeared, she has been repeatedly trying to part their daughters from the gaze of the men. The daughters are strictly warned, "No daughter to be alone with a man" and also threaten the men that "No men to touch the daughters, unless sanctioned by me" (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 73).

Grace also followed the suppressive ideologies and remained silent towards the unjust operations over their bodies. Lia has poor self-control over her lingering feelings and instincts, for Grace, it was quite difficult to have a controlling surveillance over them as she herself had been suppressing her instinctual wishes and desires. Moreover, she has further been sexually silenced, though it is mentioned in an ambiguous and abrupt knowledge to the readers but the King (their father) had a sexual relationship with Grace. And there is a probability that Grace is one of those women who visited the island to recover themselves from the water therapy as they carried with themselves the sexual bruises on their bodies from the toxin mainland. However, there is a thrill and uncertainty throughout the story regarding the women's arrival to the far apart island. Grace's pregnancy has been traumatised with the anxiety and fear of carrying a burden inside her womb which obstructs her to enjoy the physical activities that her sisters were capable of and flexible with. This allowed her to get envious of Lia in the initial phases of their growth as she was more expressive and vocal towards her feelings. Because



Grace was pregnant, Lia had to trouble her body twice for her in the name of therapies and training for self-preparation, “I send out small pleas when I am drowning myself, when I am sponging the blood from my legs. *Save my sister! Take me instead!*” (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 23). But Grace’s unwanted pregnancy compelled her to feel envious of Lia and Sky as they can physically move according to her body will but the therapies and physical trainings that they undergo are similar to the threats of her own body will, “sometimes when Lia grasps for me it is like we are both being tortured” (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 27).

The water therapy sessions were run inside the family believing that women need to strengthen their physical growth by welcoming the body pains. This training towards their establishment by dismissing and demeaning their personal desires has developed an anti-Freudian feminist rage against the law of the father towards the end of the novel. The three men, Gwil, Llew and James who visited the island after the disappearance of the father, reveal that they were sent by their father to protect them as they were incapable women. The three sisters channelized their enragement and anger with a horrific and sinister action of eliminating the phallogocentric regime by killing the three men. This projects their sensitization towards a transgressive feminist power because the sisters found a masochistic relief by physically tormenting the men. This initial stage of power sensitization can be instanced through the tortures given to the little kid Gwil in absence of his elder brother. When Llew sensed this ill treatment done to him, he says, “Being cruel to a child. It’s terrible... If you were a man, I would have hit you without thinking about it” (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 149). Although the “female might be more predisposed to masochism, there is no evidence of particular female pleasure in pain” (Blum 157). The sisters were relieved and calmed because they have survived one thing encountering the Llew’s above said words against a woman, “And what is a boy if not a hurttable man, a safe version?” (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 149). In the later phase, this sense of transgressive force is being executed in killing of the three men as their possibilities towards freedom and abandonment.

The operation over the female bodies in *The Water Cure* has been influenced by the twisted scraps of paper from the Welcome Book which preaches with introductory remarks such as, “Thank you for opening your home to me” (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 102). They are also made to read the pages of the Welcome Book which pictures the ill treatment of men over women, a testament of the old world. Grace clearly knows that the Welcome Book has been a refracted vision of preaching, especially designed for the women, she says, “The Welcome Book is largely too abstract to scare me much...” (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 85). Psychoanalysis demonstrates that “the development of masochism in women” is influenced by the Bible in addition to “the influence of narcissistic needs, the internalization of societal attitudes toward women, and pre-oedipal and oedipal relations with the parents.” (Tosone 413). Grace is traumatised by the fear of following a similar tradition of pain that the damaged women have been enduring. She knew the unjust treatment of the women in the contaminated society they were living in yet she remained silent until the end when her anger delimits her restraint towards their confinement and found the other means of survival when she influenced her sister Lia to shoot Llew by justifying that they could kill him and keep themselves safe.

### **The Pathology of Women’s Bodies**

An integral part of ecofeminism is embodiment (Field 2000). Women’s bodies have been pathologized and dominated by downcasting them, which makes them feel insecure about them. According to their mother, “a total lack of preparation for the personal energies often called feelings...especially dangerous for women, our bodies are already so vulnerable in ways that the bodies of men are not.” (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 12). Lia’s discarded feelings are



“limping, wretched things.” In the absence of the father role in *The Water Cure*, the mother asserted bodily power rather than opposing it, “A woman who has not been taking the proper precautions to protect her body can't hide the harm the outside world can do.” (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 32).

In *Blue Ticket*, the constrictions have been driven by the refracted vision of societal expectation. However, in both the novels, the dominance to control over the bodily autonomy of the women has been ambivalent and overpowering because the male characters didn't appear distinctively, in *The Water Cure*, the father has already disappeared or died as assumed by them but his kingdom that he has created with his norms are being socialised and carried forward ideologically by the mother and the sisters, until the end, when they get rid of all their past experiences, and step forward to survive a new life. In *Blue Ticket*, although the doctors have been controlling the bodies of women, but without oppressing them, rather they are put in a more perplexed situation by letting them survive in their own ways after rejecting and abandoning them. This complicates the existence of women as they find it difficult to be recognized by society. Calla's father appeared only in the beginning until she was rewarded with a lottery ticket, determining her sexual rights; the affection of a father remained vague, Calla herself says, “He was young to be a father...” (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 6). In both the novels, Mackintosh has represented the patriarchal death in the very beginning through sudden disappearance in *The Water Cure* and a vague existence in *Blue Ticket*. Both the novels display the compelling presence of the patriarchy, in *The Water Cure*, after the ambiguous departure of the father, the sisters found their mother to refine and absorb more strictly the theories of the king's ideal. The three men arrived on the island after the mother's disappearance from the mainland as their protectors, seemingly projecting the women's incapability to survive alone on the island. In *Blue Ticket*, Calla has been under constant surveillance of her father at young age and after puberty, Doctor A has tried to follow her as her guardian especially because she has violated the norms of the society by getting pregnant. This ambivalent yet controlling presence is felt ambiguous throughout the end of both the novels.

The three sisters were taught that it is the sole responsibility of a woman to take care of their bodies to safeguard them from the outside toxin world, if a woman hasn't been taking the proper safety measures to protect her body, the harm that the outside world can cause cannot be concealed. (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 32). The childhood games were quite terrific, they played the game of dying which involved the folding of their body over and wadding their eyes up tight; Lia used to be the one who died in this game, she laid down and Grace threw salt on her body. The game of survival was taught to them from their childhood days, Grace also imitated the mother shouting at Lia, “We told you not to go out in the world!” The daughters were not supposed to go near the damaged women that visited their island but no sooner they had a look on them, they found themselves similar to the tradition of grief and pain that they have been undergoing, thus, releasing cathartic effect, both the emotions of pity and fear; pity for the damaged women and fear for something similar might and happening with them. There arise the primal fear and primal repression haunted by the confrontation of the rejection of an Other which is so near to their self, symbolising their internal emotions. This is similar to the responses one internalises when observing an abjection art, revealing the cathartic effect through artistic perfection of correlating “abject and the abjection in beauty” (Kirk 3).

### **Contextualizing Abject with Literary Trauma Theory**

The basic postulate of literary trauma theory is an assertion of the fact that “trauma creates a speechless fright that dives or destroys an individual” (Balaev 149). In the essay *Unclaimed*



*Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Caruth's classic psychoanalytic approach emphasizes trauma as an unimaginable break in time and language. Balaev, presents a pluralistic model that highlights the contextual grounding of trauma, its representational plasticity, and the importance of geography, memory, and embodiment in forming the traumatic experience "that draws upon various models of trauma and memory" (Balaev 13). Sophie Mackintosh's novels *The Water Cure* and *Blue Ticket*, which both portray dystopian settings where women deal with trauma not just as a psychological injury but also as a physical, geographical, and gendered occurrence, reflect this theoretical model in action.

Trauma is both spatially structured and intimate in *The Water Cure*. Grace, Lia, and Sky, the three sisters at the heart of the book, were reared on a remote island by their parents, who believed that the outside world was poisonous, especially for women. This constructed environment of peril serves as the location of trauma as well as the medium for its manifestation. Balaev claims that trauma narratives frequently create "a spatialization of trauma," in which the characters' emotional and psychological states are inextricably linked to the place (Balaev 15). The island itself serves as a traumatizing ecology in this book, reflecting and intensifying the daughters' psychological indoctrination. For instance, "There is a sickness in the world and we are safe only here, our bodies clean and our minds contained" (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 23).

Janina Fisher discusses in the essay "Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors: Overcoming Internal Self-Alienation" that mindfulness controls the neurological system and permits dual awareness (or parallel processing), hence, Fisher contends that it is crucial to trauma therapy. (Fisher 2). Additionally, physical practices and rituals like starvation, water treatments, and emotional purging become symbolic performances of trauma. To remain pure and defend themselves from male poison, the sisters undergo harsh cleansing procedures, which illustrates how the body becomes the site of both pain and resistance, a key idea in Balaev's theory, "Afterwards, the salt water is always in my throat, clinging in the cavity of my chest. It is a reminder" (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 41). Here, trauma is lived and ritualized rather than suppressed, which goes against Caruthian notions of unimaginable trauma. In contrast to merely repetition or silence, Balaev claims that sorrow in literature can be communicated through metaphor, memory, and landscape. Calla's journey exemplifies Balaev's claim that trauma is not always pathological but rather depends on cultural context and personal action. Her trauma stems from the loss of her projected future and the deletion of her choice and forced identity, rather than from a single violent incident: "I was not supposed to want this. I was not supposed to feel this much. But I do" (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 102).

Mackintosh describes trauma as an environmental phenomenon that is physically moulded by the island's ceremonial and spatial limits, rather than just as emotional disintegration. Physical space shapes the sisters' traumatic development, supporting Balaev's claim that trauma is mediated by landscape: "The sea keeps us safe. The air on the mainland is poison" (Mackintosh, *The Water Cure* 19). The mythological story of male threat and purity places their trauma in context. The novel's portrayal of the sisters lived experiences, cleaning customs, famine, and regulated movement, indicates that trauma is performed and reported rather than suppressed, allowing for resistance and even meaning-making. Balaev's theory discusses that trauma can be faced, rearranged, and made understandable through narrative and spatial reorientation. Lia's eventual doubting of reality and her symbolic encounter with male intruders signal a shift toward interpretive reconfiguration. As Balaev further explains, "The landscape



functions not only as a setting but also as a metaphorical and symbolic framework for the narrator's evolving understanding of the trauma" (Baelev 65).

The terrain, physical mobility, and symbolic resistance are all crucial to Calla's journey. Although institutional determinism is the source of her trauma, spatial flight and embodied motherhood serve as symbols of her defiance. According to Balaev, trauma stories don't have to be about breakdown; they can also show change and agency: "I ran not just from the city but from their belief in who I was" (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 110). Calla doesn't just suffer; she tells, thinks, remembers, and finally takes action. Caruth's theory that the traumatic subject is trapped in repetitive loops is contradicted by this self-directed narrative arc. Rather, Balaev's pluralistic paradigm allows Calla's trauma to become a place of choice, reinterpretation, and resistance.

*Blue Ticket* and *The Water Cure* are excellent starting points for a comparative trauma analysis. In the end, both books are more in line with Balaev's pluralistic theory, which prioritizes environment, memory, and embodied resistance as mechanisms of narrative coherence and psychic survival, even though they contain remnants of Caruthian trauma, particularly in their portrayals of fragmentation, silence, and institutional violence. Examining trauma from both perspectives reveals that Mackintosh's writing not only challenges structural violence against women but also pushes the limits of trauma fiction to encompass place, ritual, and female agency; the areas which Balaev contends shouldn't be ignored. In *Blue Ticket*, the unpleasant space of motherhood helped Calla to seek her curiosity towards understanding her body's autonomy. Although it is not mentioned clearly whether the baby was a boy or girl but since it was delivered from the womb of a Blue Ticket woman, who is labelled a curse for the society towards reproduction, hence, the baby was handed over to Marisol for its survival. The baby, who was living inside her, is also being introspective towards controlling the bodily autonomy of a woman's body. Valerie, a white-ticket woman who was disgusted with the space of motherhood and so aborted her baby and resided with the blue ticket women as she, too, violated the societal dictatorship claimed for women. She has once questioned Calla, "Did you know that, even now, your baby is taking control of your circulatory system? Your brain, your hormones?" (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 221). She further adds, "Your baby is diverting your blood supply...the baby wants to survive at all costs, the baby doesn't care about you. It's disgusting..." (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 221). Valerie has verified Calla's feeling of being controlled because of the unpleasant desire of her pregnancy and motherhood, filling a fear towards her desperate feelings. Thus, parallelizing both the novels, the babies have been casted off irrespective of their separate reasons, which remain the primal repression as a result of the abjection and downgrading from the society. Mackintosh represents how on Calla's Day of lottery, she was confronted to her abjection moment, traumatising her emotional response where she realised, "We lined up to pull our tickets from the machine, the way you would take your number at the butcher's counter" (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 9). And after she was determined to be a Blue Ticket woman, blocking her reproductive organs by pushing a metallic cover inside her, she felt, "I was a plucked chicken with badly applied eyeshadow, but the locket was around my throat now" (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 10).

Calla was forbidden to go against the socially constructed norms even at the cost of reducing her desperate feelings, the doctor instructed, "Do not let your heart grow complacent. You won't ever be immune to it. Nobody is" (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 30). As she usually dreamt because of her repetitive compulsion of fear, she was rather recommended by the doctor A to keep a dream diary with herself, which will drain out all her cravings and desires without



violating the societal norms. But this has eventually traumatised her much near to the confrontation of fear that she dreams that she gave a birth to a stone which she was unable to write down in her dream diary, and that “I put the stone in my mouth and swallowed it, and I woke up ragged with grief” (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 76).

Although, Calla has violated the restriction claimed towards her body and followed her own body will, she was not completely free from the trauma, “I didn’t know how to explain that all my love was bound up in my stomach, that it was contaminated with fear.” (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 107). After her escape to Marisol’s confidant, there evolved a queer and strange love between the two women and they have also exchanged physical communion with each other. However, Calla’s fear was much more engraved when Marisol also seemed indifferent towards the end, she realised that Marisol was slipping towards the doctor’s syntax and proclamations, it happened when one certain morning, Marisol said to her, “Real love is a degradation... You’ll do anything for your child, and I mean anything. Worse things than you’ve ever imagined” (Mackintosh, *Blue Ticket* 208). However, Grace’s fear evolved out with a repetitive compulsion through her dream where they buried the baby in the forest as if it was a boy. This novel also implies subversion towards the gender roles because a boy has been abandoned from his birth recounting the horror of the toxin filled survival of men and therefore, it pervades to reduce a male birth. The space of motherhood has been unpleasant and uncanny where the baby inside the womb of the mothers also serves as an otherness of fear which internally haunts them towards losing control over their bodily autonomy.

### **Conclusion: The eco-pain of repressed survival**

The survival of the women through their abject bodies is agonised with the reimagination of pain and trauma caused due to the degradation of the bodies and environment. Moreover, the women were confined ideologically by letting them survive in their limited possible ways. This means of abject survival was further tormented with the constant confrontation of the terror and fear for violating the tradition that they were demanded to maintain while remained guilt ridden by her inherent feminine nature which induced eco-pain. Thus, their emotional responses are troubled more with the trauma of resistance against nature, where the power of resistance is reflexive of a sinister outcome of “eco-guilt” (Mallet 2012) and pain without their realisation. The submerged feelings and repressions emerged with a destructive force in *The Water Cure* and the emotional fallout of eco-pain under the uncanny pressures of motherhood in *Blue Ticket*. This paper, therefore, ends on the note how abjection becomes the primal object of trauma and their repressed survival in a post-apocalyptic ecology. The sisters’ rejection of the toxin environment of the mainland for the peace of the water therapies in the sea in the *The Water Cure* is a radically eco-feminist stratagem to survive, and so is Calla’s agency to regain her reproductive rights marks eco-feminist autonomy to natural rights of the body in *The Blue Ticket*. Feminine values of care, concern and nurturing become subservient to what eco-feminist thinker Vandana Shiva calls the masculinist principles of “control, competition and exploitation” (Shiva 1998). This paper therefore, reaffirms how abjection becomes the primal object of trauma and their survival in a post-apocalyptic society where eco-feminist defiance of social identity intersect to critique the intertwined oppressions of gender, environmental control and systemic marginalization.

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