

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**DEPICTION OF THE EFFECTS OF TRAUMA IN FILMS: AN ANALYSIS OF URI:  
THE SURGICAL STRIKE**

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**Abstract:**

The victimization of violence and the result trauma is very much relevant in the present times. From psychology to literature it has been regulating and it is in the forefront of any research. Trauma is not restricted to any event. Trauma theory is not so much a theory of recovered memory as it is one of recovered referentially (Elsaesser, 2001, p.201). Uri the Surgical Strike directed by Adithya Dhar depicts the trauma that the war veterans undergo after an unexpected attack. The introduction serves to set the stage and highlights the basic concepts of the study while the first chapter provides an introduction to trauma theory and how trauma is depicted in films. The second chapter details the plot and story of the film. The third chapter analyses the film in the light of the theory while the concluding chapter provides the summary of the interpretations gained from the study.

**Keywords:** Trauma, war veterans, film, post traumatic stress disorder.

**Introduction:**

Adithya Dhar is an Indian director, lyricist and writer. He made his debut as a director with Uri-The Surgical Strike (henceforth referred as Uri). The movie is based on the Uri attacks that happened in 2016. He is associated with films like Haal-E-Dil, Teez, Aakrosh, Kabul Express as writer, screenplay, lyrics writer and dialogue writer. He won the Best Director award at the 26th Screen Awards for the film Uri. In 2016 the Uri attack happened; four terrorists entered the Uri base camp and nineteen soldiers were martyred. This was followed immediately by the surgical strike. This was the first time the Indian army carried the war into the enemy camp, which they succeeded in destroying.

Trauma is known as an emotional response to a terrible event. It is the response to a deeply distressing incident that overwhelms the individual's ability to think and respond. They often find it difficult to cope with the feeling of helplessness. Trauma is the experience of the survivor. Psychological trauma is damage to the mind

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as a result of a distressing event. The symptoms and the experience may vary from person to person. It can cause acute stress disorder which can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Glen R. Schiraldi defines that the traumatic events that lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are typically so extraordinary or severe that they would distress almost anyone. These events are usually sudden. They are perceived as dangerous to self or others, and they overwhelm our ability to respond adequately (Schiraldi, p. 3).

There is a mutual influence between movies and literature. It started to exist since the start of cinema. To make you see, the former through the mind; the latter through the eye. The root difference between the two media lies between the percept of the visual image and the concept of the mental image' (Bluestone, 1957, p.137). Bluestone also states that, "a film is not thought; it is perceived" (p. 141). Literature shares the ability to employ the devices of narrative with films.

Films just like literature are concerned with realism. Film is concerned as a branch of literature. It is the artistic expression of literature. The relation of both is as old as humanity.

**Chapter 1: Trauma Theory**

Trauma theory emerged in the 20th century. Twentieth century is the age of traumas. It saw a series of wars, conflicts, revolutions, confusions and competitiveness and so people faced many traumatic experiences. All the traumatic experiences of this century are reflected in the work of art. The term 'trauma theory' first appeared in Cathy Caruth's work "Unclaimed Experiences Trauma Narrative and History". Traumatic experiences always affect our mind. This theory has some psychological connections too. The theory stems from Freud's work "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" and "Moses and Monotheism". This theory links the experiences of trauma to the evolutionary heritage of humans.

Famous American critic and 21st century writer Shoshanna Felman called the 21st century 'as the century of traumas'. She wrote much text on testimony and trauma especially her subject was about holocaust and collective trauma. Trauma theory became significant with the publication of two important books. They are Cathy Caruth's Unclaimed Experiences Trauma Narrative and History and Kai Tal's World of Hurt Reading the Literature of Trauma. Other important works include Dominic La Capra's representing the Holocaust – History Theory and Trauma and Judith Herman's Trauma and Recovery. Over the last two decades trauma has increased exponentially in society.

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Traumatic experiences are highly individualized and shaped by a wide range of factors, from genetics, to previous life experiences, and support system available in the aftermath of the event. Trauma is defined as an injury to the body or the psyche by some type of shock, violence or unanticipated incident (Barker, p.492). Trauma is pervasive and touches many life domains. Its impact transcends race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion etc. Exposure to trauma increases the risk of a range of vulnerabilities such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, mental health problems, excessive hostility, and anxiety.

The effects of the psychological trauma came into existence as a mainstream is when the veterans returned back from the Vietnam War. This led the American Psychological Association to finally get with Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a serious issue in 1980. The horrifying impact of the trauma are been explored by the film-makers and the authors since decades. Films have depicted various symptoms and incidents regarding trauma. Film industry over the years has managed to leave an impact on the psyche of the people. Trauma in film is mostly portrayed through war films. It is the catalyst for the recognition of PTSD.

Herman in his book states that, the systematic study of psychological trauma therefore depends on the support of a

political movement. The study of war trauma becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the sacrifice of young men in war. The study of trauma in sexual and domestic life becomes legitimate only in a context that challenges the subordination of woman and children (Herman, p. 1).

**Chapter 2: Uri-The Surgical Strike**

The movie Uri is divided into five parts. The movie begins with a trap being set in June 2015 on a group of the Indian Army troops in Manipur by the militants. In an act of revenge, Major Vihaan Singh Shergill (Vicky Kaushal), a Para Special Force Officer and the entire unit including his brother-in-law Major Karan Kashyap (Mohit Raina) invade and attack the Northeastern militants and also kill the key leader. After a successful strike, the Prime Minister of India (Rajith Kapur) appreciates him and the whole team during a formal dinner. Vihaan requests an early retirement as he wants to take care of his mother who is suffering from Alzheimer's. The Prime Minister agrees to transfer him to a desk job in New Delhi.

Vihaan takes up a desk job at the IDS Headquarters in New Delhi. This piece puts forth a brief description of the Pathankot attack. A nurse named Jasmine D'Almeida (Yami Gautham) is designated to take care of Vihaan's mother. Vihaan meets Flight Lieutenant IAF pilot Seerat Kaur (Kriti Kulhar) who is trying to

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manifest her patriotism to her martyred husband who was an army officer who died in the Militant attack. One day Vihaan's mother is found to be missing. He eventually blames Jasmine for her irresponsibility and dismisses her from the job. Vihaan's mother is later found under a bridge and Jasmine reveals herself being an intelligence agent. This discloses how families of the Special Forces soldiers were given security because of the threat put forth by the Northeastern terrorists.

Four armed militants attack the brigade headquarters on 18 September 2018 at Uri, Jammu and Kashmir. They managed to kill 19 soldiers. The terrorists are attacked and then killed but Karan dies in an explosion from the grenade attached to the rifle of the terrorist. The Indian Ministry resolves to take stern action against the perpetrators of the attack. National Security Advisor Govind Bharadhwaj (Paresh Rawal) proposes a surgical strike. Vihaan leaves his job and sets forth for Northern Command Base in Udampur. He appeals to the Chief of the Army Staff General Arjun Singh (Shishir Sharma) to include him in the operation and receives approval to do so.

Vihaan chooses the best Ghatak force commandos from the Bihar Regiment and the Dogra Regiment including the Special Forces as the soldiers who were killed in the attack were from these regions. Govindh also puts forward the proposal to paint the attack helicopters with the

Pakistani Air Force markings. During the preparation Govindh networks with ISRO to receive satellite images and DRDO for drones. When he goes to meet the DRDO Chief Brain D'Souza (Ivan Rodriguez), he meets an intern whose name is Ishaan who has developed a drone which is named as Garuda which is in the shape of an eagle. With the help of the drone and satellite images, the team pinpoints the correct locations of the hideaway and the training camps of the terrorists.

Vihaan selects Seerat to be the pilot. The commandos depart for the strike in Pakistan occupied Kashmir in a MI-17 helicopter on the night of September 28. As the latest intelligence from the spies in Pakistan had warned the team about the Pakistani army deploying an early warning radar-based Surface in the Air Missile system in Muzaffarabad area, Vihaan's team are unable to go beyond the Line of Control. He and his entire team eventually decide to go by foot through a cave. The whole team managed to invade and kill the entire terrorist groups at both launch pads. Vihaan kills Idris and Jabbar, who were the main players in the Uri attack. On their return they faced an attack from a group in machine gun bunker and from a Pakistani Air Force MI-17 helicopter, which they overcome. The movie comes to an end with Pallavi, Govindh and the commandos happily attending the formal dinner with the Prime Minister.

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**Chapter 03: Analysis of the Effects of Trauma in Uri**

The main objective of this chapter is to present the development of feelings and thoughts of revenge after traumatic experiences and their impact on the post-traumatic symptom. 'Revenge' is the act of committing a harmful action against a person or a group in response to grievance. It is the act of 'wild justice'. Revenge is historically a popular literary theme and it continues to play an important role in contemporary works. Examples of literature that features revenge as a theme includes the plays Hamlet and Othello by Shakespeare, the short story 'The Cask of Amontillado' by Edgar Allan Poe among others. Revenge is a theme in itself and it is also considered as a genre.

Racheal M. Stein stated in her book: *Vengeful Citizens, Violent States; Theory of War and Revenge* that, 'Revenge has long been recognized as a root cause of violence in human societies, the question of whether it plays a role in international conflict has received scant attention in the field of International Relations, and prior approaches that have focused on either individual leaders or states themselves as the locus of desire for revenge have proved both theoretically and empirically unsatisfying' (22).

The film Uri is a war-based movie. Indian Army's strike at the terror launch

pads in Pakistan, after the Uri attack claimed the lives of 17 army personnel. The movie is all about how the Indian Army fought against terrorism with revenge as a trigger. To punish and to undertake revenge are extremely two different things. In this movie we could see how the protagonist and his team carry out an act of revenge. War is an armed conflict. It is characterized as extreme violence, destruction, aggression, mortality using the regular or the irregular military force. However, brotherhood and selflessness may also be a part of war, especially in the armed forces, as portrayed in the film. The movie focuses on the war effort which was carried out by the Indian Army to avenge the death of fellow army officers who were killed by terrorists.

As mentioned earlier a sense of revenge is the foundation of war. The war crimes that run through Vihaan's mind do not allow him peace. He was constantly haunted by the thought of losing his brother-in-law as well as his fellow army officers. He was constantly trying to visualize how they could enter and attack the enemy camp. As part of his retaliatory efforts, he gathers finely skilled officers and trains them. He constantly motivates them by asking "How is the josh?" to which they would reply "High sir!". The capacity for self-sacrifice is evident among the soldiers. The willingness to die for another person is also a form of love. It is an essential part of the experience. For some of them, their lives were of lesser

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value when compared to India's war against terrorism.

It is a shared commitment to save each other's life that is portrayed. Soldiers usually fight for their survival. There is a sense of satisfaction when the unit kills an enemy. This feeling of satisfaction can be clearly seen when Vihaan and his entire unit successfully kill the entire terrorist community in the particular area. Their motive in killing was not just to protect the self. It is also for the protection of the homeland and kin.

However, killing is a difficult act as it has many consequences. Soldiers feel happy after killing their enemy. Soldiers usually fight for their survival. There is a sense of satisfaction when the unit kills an enemy. This feeling of satisfaction can be clearly seen when Vihaan and his entire unit successfully kill the entire terrorist community in the particular area. Their motive in killing was not just to protect the self. It is also for the protection of the homeland and kin. However, killing is a difficult act as it has many consequences. Soldiers feel happy after killing their enemy.

One such achievement was the success of the surgical strike. The ultimate goal was to kill each and every terrorist and they achieved it. The enemy had committed an act that could never be forgiven and they had to pay, the narrative states. It was also an act that they didn't want repeated. In this

case, revenge becomes a means to restore justice. Revenge is a somewhat neglected psychological behavior. Feelings or some sensation of pain could be triggers. With PTSD, the brain does process trauma right away. The brain attaches minute details to the memory. These act as triggers. Triggers are usually tied to the senses.

**Conclusion**

Uri is fashioned as a different kind of Bollywood war film. The film portrays the retaliatory strike undertaken by the Indian army on terrorist launch pads in Pakistan and how a paramilitary officer who had retired from the front line goes back into the field after he loses his family member in a terrorist strike. Dhar brings life to the movie and portrays the act of revenge undertaken by the Indian army. Heroism is defined and soldiers are shown as heroes who are always ready to protect India from any kind of attack. There is a strong thread of patriotism evident in the film.

Everyone who is affected by trauma experiences it in different ways. The film also shows how survivors of trauma can turn out to be the strongest people and an inspiration to others. In Uri the protagonist, and others, who have been wronged take action in the names of those who were murdered in a terrorist attack. Their intention is two-fold: to seek justice in the name of those whose lives were lost and to motivate the enemy to refrain from such

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attacks. India is presented as a strong force with strong leadership in the political, strategic and military front. Through the process of executing a successful military strike against the enemy in enemy-occupied land, the film explores the possibility of trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder leading to the acts of revenge and the act of gaining justice alleviating the stress of the trauma to an extent.

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