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POST-TRAUMATIC IMPACT ON BEHAVIOUR AND PERSONALITY- A STUDY ON STIEG
LARSSON'S DRAGON-TATTOOED GIRL

J. KIRTHIKAYENI¹, Dr.P. ILAMARAN²

¹Ph.d Research Scholar, Department of English, PSG College of Arts and Science
Coimbatore.

Email: kirthikayeni@gmail.com

²Associate Professor and Head, PSG College of Arts and Science, Coimbatore



J. KIRTHIKAYENI



Dr.P. ILAMARAN

ABSTRACT

The best memory one could have even of one's own life is definitely his or her childhood. But when the childhood goes wrong, our whole life is topsy-turvy. The trauma experienced during childhood pricks us day by day creating obsession and weakness thereby forming a barrier in our overall personality development. Childhood trauma is more powerful that it can leave an everlasting impression on our behaviour and personality. This paper makes a case study of Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander, a victim of childhood trauma and attempts to observe the change from the normal behavioural pattern as an impact of the trauma experienced during her childhood.

Keywords: Stieg Larsson, Lisbeth Salander, Female Detective Fiction, Trauma, Behaviour pattern

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The childhood of a person is supposed to be the happiest period in one's life. As an adult whenever there is a problem, we tend to bring back the nostalgia of our childhood with its innocence, carelessness and impartial love. It is really strange that during childhood we would love to be adults but entering the adulthood and experiencing the fever and fret of daily life, we start longing for our childhood. None of us can forget our childhood adventures where we were like Tom Sawyer roaming around with friends and controlled by our elders. It is impossible for anyone to forget our first day in school and our first teacher who handled us. Even when we are in our easy chairs, telling stories to our grandchildren our childhood will always come into play. There are other stages in our life like adolescence, adulthood and old age but what we always love to remember and cherish is the happenings of our childhood. But if the childhood of a person goes wrong due to some miss happening, it always reflects in all the stages of our life. An incident, an accident, verbal and physical abuse, alienation, physical and mental weakness, losing the beloved ones etc might be the reasons for childhood trauma and they leave a lifelong impression on an individual. Stieg Larsson's Lisbeth Salander is one such person who had unimaginable childhood trauma. Lisbeth Salandar appears in what is popularly called as

“Millennium Trilogy” namely *The Girl with Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl Who Played with Fire* and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest*. Though her author did not live long to see her impact on the genre of crime detective fiction, she has outlived him bringing fame and glory to his creation. Lisbeth has experienced verbal abuse, physical abuse, alienation, helplessness, loneliness and sexual abuse within the age of 12. This trauma had been her lifelong companion and had affected her physically, mentally and socially.

Lisbeth Salander and her sister Camilla Salander were living with their mother Sofia Salander. During the occasional visits of her father Alexander Zalachanko, the whole family had endured great suffering. Her father was a psychopath who will start verbally abusing her mother and the abuse will end up in a domestic violence. He carried a gun and was threatening and there were elements of sadism and psychological threatening. Lisbeth and Camilla will be usually confined to their room. When Zalachanko leaves, Lisbeth will find her mother heavily wounded and whimpering on the floor. Lisbeth is not able to tolerate the injustice done to her mother and she wanted to react in some way thereby put an end to the brutal act of her father. However Camilla had different feelings and in order to survive, she chose to ignore the whole incident and act as if nothing had gone wrong in their daily life. But Lisbeth is not that kind of a person who would give up that easily. Though she was a child, she wanted badly to help her mother. She was not able to tolerate the state of her helplessness. So she tried twice to kill her father. Once she tried to stab him near the heart but luckily he survived and then next time she poured a carton filled with gasoline on him and lighted him alive. This time it had been a huge success. One of the feet of Zalachenko was amputated, his face and other parts of the body suffered serious burns. She could never forget that day: He bet his mother so badly that she lay on the kitchen floor unconscious and then Lisbeth decided to rise up to the occasion.

She was sitting in a car with the window rolled down. She ran to the car, poured the petrol through the window, and lit a match. It took only a moment. The flames blazed up. He writhed in agony and she heard his screams of terror and pain. She could smell burnt flesh and a more acrid stench of plastic and upholstery turning to carbon in the seats. (2 “Fire” Larsson)

After this Lisbeth Salander was handed over to the police. There she tried to explain what happened to her mother but nobody listened to her. It was only after long waiting they had discovered her unconscious mother and sought medical help. However Agneta Sofia Salander had serious brain damage which she would never recover from. Lisbeth was sent to St. Stefan's psychiatric unit for further treatment. No action was taken against the domestic violence and her mother and sister suddenly disappeared from her life. She was in restraints at the psychiatric clinic for 381 days. Life had been hell during that time. She showed violent behaviour, no response or reaction to any conversation or questioning and above all she felt irritated by her psychiatrist Peter Teleborian. He was not sexually abusive but his mannerisms were sadistic and irritating. He kept observing her movements and harnessed her tighter when she resisted reacting or co-operating with him. He just kept observing her with a masochistic pleasure about her helplessness. The only strength Lisbeth could imagine was when she rose up to the occasion to help her mother. She kept on imagining how she was bold enough to burn her father alive. This thought of him burning and suffering and agonizing gave her the strength to forget the present harnessed scenario.

The childhood trauma experienced by Lisbeth Salander has had a tremendous effect on her behaviour, character, psychology and even her day to day routine. The first and foremost effect of her trauma is reflected in her recalcitrant lifestyle. After releasing from the psychiatric unit, Lisbeth was put under guardianship. By guardianship an individual who is not capable of living independently and managing his or her own expenses is put under the control of a responsible person who would inspect him/her from time to time, help in managing fund and produce reports from time to time about the improvement of the individual. Lisbeth Salander was put under the guardianship of an advocate Holger Palmgren, a nice man interested in altruistic activities. He is the only positive inspiration in salander's life. He understood Salander and tolerated all her eccentricities and violent behaviour like a father handling a difficult teenager. She had joined a rock band named "Evil fingers" and started dressing herself like a junkie belonging to some Satan cult. She got herself drunk, used drugs, had sexual intercourse with whomever she like no matter male or female. She had a wayward Lifestyle and was usually an outlaw. Holger Palmgren never attempted to advise her on her behaviour. Instead he talked to one

of his friends at Milton security Agency and got her a job of checking mails and making coffee. He was liberal enough to allow Lisbeth Salander handle her own expenses. Suddenly one fine day Lisbeth discovered him when having stroke on the apartment floor and had admitted him in the hospital. When the doctors had no hope of his survival, Lisbeth unable to tolerate his upcoming death deserted him in the hospital. After the stroke, her guardian was changed by the government. She was handed over to a new guardian, Nils Bjurman. This man turned out to be anything but goodness. Right from the first conversation she understood that their relationship is going to be quite complicated. Bjurman perceives that Lisbeth Salander is a young woman with no morals and can be exploited to get sexual favours for him. He keeps repeating, "If you're nice to me I'll be nice to you" (207 "Tattoo" Larsson) in a sadistic tone there by implying his need indirectly. On one occasion he forces her to perform oral sex and in the second attempt, he rapes her brutally. For Lisbeth Salander who was trying to come out of her shell and lead a normal life, find a job, come out of guardianship and manage her own lifestyle with the help of her former guardian, she was once again put under trauma by her present guardian. It is the unique characteristic of Lisbeth that she can never tolerate helplessness. When there is a situation where she is utterly helpless, she rises to the occasion, take matters in her hand and put an end to the problem in her own style. She cannot endure the torture given by her guardian. She prepares herself for the next meeting, tasers and handcuffs him, then tattoos him covering the area of his chest and stomach with the words "I AM A SADISTIC PIG, A PERVERT, AND A RAPIST." She leaves him with the warning that she will definitely kill him if he lay hands on her one more time.

Lisbeth is basically a woman of few words. She does not talk much and sometimes she does not respond at all to people who greet her. Her dressing, black makeup, funky hairstyle, pierced eyebrows and tattoos come as a barrier for people who would like to start a conversation with her. One might think that her weird appearance is done intentionally in order to avoid much contact with the public. If there is an advanced gadget and a handsome man nearby, she will no doubt choose the gadget over the man. She has become an introvert mainly because of her childhood experience. When she tried to explain to the police officers and the Attorney about the plight of her mother and about her sadistic abusive father, nobody lent their ears. She was a lifesaver for her mother but instead she was locked in chains for helping her out of her trouble. It was then she stopped talking because she stopped trusting people. At Milton Security Agency, when she started her work sorting mails and making coffee, she was seen as an alien. Her colleagues tried to make some contact in the beginning, but when they knew that she was a totally messed up individual, they left her alone. When Mikael Blomkvist starts investigating the case of the missing Harriet Vanger with Lisbeth Salander, he takes tedious efforts to establish trust between him and her so that they can work together peacefully on the case.

Lisbeth seems to have lots of relationship issues. She is not able to maintain proper relationship and as a result experiences loneliness. In her relationships either she ditches or the fate does the job perfectly. After "all the Evil" had happened in her life, the relationship with her guardian was soothing to her. He was friendly, concerned and all that she wanted at that time to overcome her trauma. When he disappeared from the life of Lisbeth Salander, then stepped Michael Blomkvist, who understood her and accepted her as she is. He admired her courage, genius hacking skills and determination. She had started the relationship and thought that it would last for lifetime and for the first time in her life she felt that she fell in love. But when she was about to propose Blomkvist, she witnesses him being in close quarters with the editor of Millennium - his childhood friend and lover Erika Berger and Salander just throws him out of her life. Similarly, in *The Girl Who Played with Fire*, she starts a relationship with George Bland, a teenage student in Genoa. But when the storm Matilda arrived and she decided to leave Genoa, she again ditches him even without saying goodbye. She has relationship issues even when it concerns a smooth relationship. In the case of her girlfriend Mimmi, she cares for her, loves her but fails to keep in touch and maintain a strong relationship. "I am what I am," Salander said. "I ran away from everything and everybody. I should have said goodbye (102 "Tattoo" Larsson). When it comes to her boss Armansky, the head of Milton Security Agency who had identified her talent and promoted her from a clerical job to the job of a private investigator, her attitude is still the same. Lisbeth is aware of her problem but can't help it because when she maintain or try to maintain a serious relationship with a person, she always has insecurity and the fear of losing them because right from her childhood starting from her

mother followed by her Guardian Holger Palmgren and her lover Mikael Blomkvist, everything seems temporary for her.

Salander knew that she is a perfect victim for anyone because she is a tattooed junkie with a zero social status. She also knew that there would be no one to help her or support her. Due to the childhood trauma, she rejects the help of anyone because literally she does not trust them. She reacts to a crisis and solves it in her own style which she calls "Salander's Principles." According to these principles, when a man messes up with her, he is marked in the revenge list. Salander hates men who illtreat women and sees to that proper justice is served to them in her Court. Since she does not trust anyone around her, she is always alert. This alertness had made her genius hacker leaving no trace of her entry and exit when she hacks top secrets of individuals and concerns. Her only trust and love is upon her gadgets which help her rule cyberspace in the name of WASP. In cyber space she exists by genderless identity WASP and is renowned as one of the world's best hackers. It is only in this cyber space she had gained recognition and is celebrated for her talents.

The violent aggressive behaviour exhibited by Lisbeth is the outcome of the anger she has upon the prejudiced patriarchal society. Lisbeth is often found emotionless but the dominating emotion in her is anger and revenge. No good soul is killed or disturbed due to her revenge. Her physical weakness (weight 40kg) is not a barrier when it comes to revenge. She plans minutely every step of hers and executes them efficiently. Though she is anorexic, she wins over a gigantic man in *The Girl Who Kicked The Hornet's Nest*. Whenever she is in a deep trouble or physical and mental inability, 'revenge' has always helped her as a positive emotion giving her the determination and will power to break the barriers and come back with renewed energy.

Out of severe pain comes enormous strength. Lisbeth Salander, though having the effect of her childhood trauma in her day to day life has learnt to survive with it. Stieg Larsson had created his female lead as a young woman who in spite of her childhood trauma emerges to be a genius hacker and a person of great willpower and perseverance, setting an example for the real sufferers of childhood trauma. Lisbeth Salander serves as inspiration for the world to learn to live with trauma yet be the best of the best in proving one's talents.

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