

Trauma of Revenants: a Perspective on the Film “THE REVENANT”

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Abstract

Since time immemorial literature is giving immense scope of revealing the life of revenants. The world famous literary works like Robinson Crusoe, Heart of Darkness, Lord of the Flies etc comes under this category. The world of the revenants is really interesting for the reading public. The inscrutability and mystery of such life is a topic of everlasting interest among the viewers. What happened to them during this long absence is a question that matters much. The explication of such details would increase the enthusiasm of the public. This perspective is made into use by the recent film makers too. Here my endeavor is to analyze the traumatic life of revenants and its portrayal in the recent film “The Revenant”. What happens to the revenants during their long absence, what all things they have faced when they returned, how the society perceived such people who returned after long absence are the questions which are attempted to find out.

Keywords: Revenant, trauma, rootlessness, alienation, and uprootment.

I. Introduction

The word ‘revenant’ means a person who returns as a spirit after death. Nowadays the word is used to talk about someone who returns after a long absence. But it can be used to talk about ghosts which are the spirits of those returning from the dead. The word revenant comes from the French ‘revenir’ which means ‘to return’. If the person comes after a long absence he should have to undergo series of baffling situations. The society, the locality, the family etc. might be changed drastically which actually provides a sense of rootlessness and estrangement for the man who returns. The long absence generally creates a sense of psychological alienation in the individual which later resulted in distress and agony. The revenants have to undergo several kinds of trauma when they return after long absence.

II. Trauma

Trauma can be explained as a type of damage to the individual that occurs as a result of severely distressing events. Trauma is often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with that experience. A traumatic event involves one experience, or repeating events with the sense of being overwhelmed that can be delayed by weeks, years, or even decades as the person struggles to cope with. Trauma can be caused by a wide variety of events, but there are a few common aspects. The people who became revenants in their life actually lose the exuberance of life during the long absence and had to face several hazardous situations when they return. Nobody is exempted from such a fate because the life is flowing just like a stream and changes are inevitable. How the society perceives such people is rather mysterious. Social penetration about that long absence could be easily deciphered as a tool to gather information about the past life of the revenant. Their past life is of interest for the onlookers even though it is mind-numbing for the survivors.

III. The Revenant

The Revenant is a 2015 American epic historical survival action film by Alejandro G Inarritu. Inspiration behind such a film is the life and experiences of frontiersman Hugh Glass in 1823 which was revealed in the novel of Michael Punke. The film is a reflection of the trauma of a revenant and his subsequent survival. The quest for revenge after one of his men, who betrayed him, killed his son and left him behind after he was attacked severely by a perilous bear. His sense of vengeance demonstrated as effective panacea for his physical lesions. Here the traumatic aspect of the protagonist Glass was a complex structure with delicate intricacies. Physical, psychological, sociological and environmental traumatic experiences made his life tragic. This catastrophic aspect of the life is conquered by the willful sense of revenge. The spirit behind such a recovery is the result of unyielding sense of revenge. Here the filming of the triple layered trauma of a revenant is really heart touching. The unexplainable trauma of Glass the protagonist of the film discloses constant danger and death.

The instances like Indian raids, hunger feasts on disgusting carcasses, relentless treks across freezing terrain and loss of beloved son and wife constitute the trauma of Glass. Being the embodiment of relentless competence of survival Glass proved the supremacy of inexorable spirit rather than burly physicality. His sustenance in the freezing environment with a wounded body is a result of his insistent strength of mind which is instigated by the spirit of vengeance. The life of the protagonist is actually a string of events that contain fear, horror and threat of death- the very definition of trauma. The reasons behind his survival amidst all the dreadful state of affairs were actually not any positive emotional stretches that were love, peace, and safety instead it was the sense of revenge.

Generally revenants had to face uprootment and disjoint from their own familiar sites which inculcated in traumatic experiences. Trauma of an individual who became alien in his own society and who had faced several fatalities is considered as composite. Consequently his life became an agony which may lead to unpleasant realities of life. Sometimes the revenants will forget the unpleasant aspects and lead a renewed life but in many cases they ended up abruptly unable to figure out alterations.

IV. Trauma of Hugh Glass

Thus trauma is the word that can highlight the predicament of such people who lose relations, physicality, native place, localities and even identities. The reasons behind this trauma are multiple but all those suffer a similar aspect of estrangement and loneliness within the society. The protagonist Glass undergoes corporeal trauma due to attack of bear which presumably took his life. And the team mates in the pelt hunting abandoned the weak Glass with two assistants and his son in the frozen environment. The amount of suffering due to the sores in the body is unexplainable. Injury in one's cadaver is producing appalling effects which culminated in the perpetual suffering of the individual. The indispensable trauma suffered by Glass in this film is based on corporal injury.

Corporal injury opens up immeasurable trauma in one aspect which is later added with psychological trauma. The trauma of protagonist is not single stratum but includes various coatings. The second layer was related with mind which was merchandised by the thought of the demise of his affectionate wife and son. The thrashing memory of lost son and wife pour oil to the ever lightening fire of his soul. The living memory of his lost wife supply him strength to survive with all oddities in the frozen land. The revenant is always haunted by the reminiscence of the war in which he lost his wife.

The life of a revenant is not gratis from the past instead he is perpetually in relation with the glorious and contented past. The past roots can be easily conceivable even though the present connections are beyond plausible. Lack of opportunity of present linkage is the reason behind this psychological dilemma which actually disturbs all revenants. Then the present is a dreadful reality whereas the cozy past is yearning. This aspect of a revenant is vividly portrayed in the film the revenant. The protagonist hushed his present environment where as the memory of his wife still inspires him to continue his survival. Her words about the strong tree which survived storms with its strong trunk are powerful enough to instigate positive energy in the already dead mind and physique of Glass. He is the epitome of a happy and contented husband and father who lost everything in the present and experiences the life of a revenant. The otherwise negligible life is continued even after all these hammering only because to take revenge.

There may be many reasons to live in this world like love, belongingness, relations, physical circumstances, wealth, comforts etc. But this is not meant that only positive attributes instigate desire to live but the reality is that darker aspects like hatred ,revenge, etc prove to be the strong inspiration to live on. Many people struggle to continue their pitiable life only because of the intention of taking vengeance upon those who had done something cruelest to them. The revenant struggles hard to exist in the frozen land only to take revenge upon the person who kills his own son Hawk.

Thus in this film, corporal trauma which leads to psychosomatic trauma and later the trauma due to environmental hazards are penetrating the life of the protagonist. The environment proved to be creating trauma to the protagonist of the film by the frozen landscape where existence is really a tough game. The season was the worst part of the year and the landscape was bucolic with no physical facilities. On the whole the trauma is enhanced by the harsh climate which culminated in making the life of the week dangerously wounded protagonist a seed of questionable dream.

V. Conclusion

The most significant aspect of life is it actually nourishes the hopes, aspirations, future predictions in the mind of the people to inculcate a desire to live in this world. Diseases, accidents, and wars are frequent in the world which could rub out the individuals in a permanent manner.

Even then, people are thinking about the hopeful future and the eternal providence of pleasant experiences in the world. But the reality is somewhat distant from such expectations. Thus to live in a world of uncertainties and qualms is not as easy as growing a plant during monsoon season. But it is hazardous to plant a sapling in the vast desert. So as to live in traumatic circumstances is a breath-taking experience. Even then the revenant transgresses such trauma by keeping his sense of vengeance more alive, made him a combatant of adversities. The hardships he endured reveal the adventurous life of a revenant that fought with all idiosyncrasies in life. Thus the trauma of a revenant is multifaceted which emphatically portrays the uprootment and social alienation of the individual.

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