



## 9/11 TRAUMA AND PARANOIA IN MCEWAN'S *SATURDAY*

**DURGA PATVA**

Research scholar

Department of English MEL

Lucknow University, Lucknow (UP) INDIA

### ABSTRACT

*The theme of McEwan's novel Saturday though spacious and digressive, slowly but certainly grows around waste and trauma. This paper, aims to focus on the trauma and terror caused by the 9/11 attacks. Such an accommodating protagonist of the novel- Henry Perowne the novelist gives accounts paranoid-conspiratorial belief that "airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed" (McEwan 15). This paper will also scrutinize ideological contradiction of the protagonist which proceeds from political and moral sentimentalism, and how it forms suspicion and ennui, and sees in waste something more than dangerous, threatening, or even disastrous. After 9/11 many authors have tried their hand at writing about terror and trauma brought up by 9/11. McEwan is such an author who poses a noteworthy, dramatized analysis of 9/11 impact on the survivors through his novel Saturday. He is the acclaimed author of ten novels and short stories. This paper explores the large quantity of themes in McEwan's Saturday like: trauma, terror and Violence as a way to express at what 9/11 transported not just to the world in terms of communal, social, and governmental implications, but what it intended to the victims on an individual's level. McEwan's Saturday is like a crossbred form in which he syndicates features of 9/11 trauma, dismay and vehemence through the different characters and their traumatic reactions to war on terror.*

**Keywords:** - McEwan, 9/11 attacks, Trauma, Terror, Violence, Saturday, Trauma Recovery.

Ian Russell McEwan was born on 21 June 1948, Aldershot, Hampshire, England. He is the son of David McEwan and Rose Lillian Violet. In 1970 he received his BA degree in English Literature from the University of Sussex and from the University of East Anglia he got his master degree in English Literature. He is English novelist as well as screenwriter. He began his career as a writer with the short stories. His works acclaimed him worldwide fame and name. He won the Somerset Maugham Award in 1976 for his first collection of short stories



*First Love Last Rites*; the Whitbread Novel Award (1987) and the Prix Femina Etranger (1993) for *The Child in Time*; and Germany's Shakespeare Prize in 1999. He won Man Booker Prize for *Amsterdam* in 1998. He also won James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *Saturday* 2005. His novel *Atonement* received the WH Smith Literary Award for (2002), National Book Critics' Circle Fiction award (2003), Loss Angeles Times Prize for fiction 2003 and the Santiago Prize for the European Novel 2004. He was awarded a CBE in 2000. He has been shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize for many times (Google source).

9/11 attacks on American World Trade Center has historical significant because of the destruction of *World Trade Center* (which symbolize American power) of America by terrorists on 11 September 2001. That many people have died by terroristic act on this day so in the history of America it has come to be known as the black day. It is said that there were nineteen terrorists (perhaps from Saudi Arabia) belonging to the terroristic group: al-Qaida, accomplished this unprecedented attack. For undertaking their purpose they used four American Planes by hijacking them. Two planes used by them to destroy World Trade Center, One crashed into the Pentagon (military headquarter, Washington DC) and the forth crashed in Pennsylvania. According to the different sources almost 3000 people have died during the attacks. This event left great psychological, economic and political impact on the people of the whole world. Since then the accepted bitter truth is that terror has become the part of people's daily life. Terror is the employ of stratagems to infuse fear and insecurity in the victim who are the witness of such event. This event not only shook the root of humanity but also put a question mark on human existence because what happened after 9/11 was the natural reaction of people witnessed the death of their dear one, personal damage and sorrow which gave birth their inveterate trauma and terror.

Trauma is generally known as a disease related to mental disorder or sudden shock or it may be a paralytic attack caused by unprecedented or unpleasant incidents or event. The symptoms of trauma come out by and by after the recurrence of traumatic images or events or narrative in the form of victim's strange behaviour. Ellen Verbestel defines trauma, "Unlike the wounding of the body, which is a simple and in most cases healable injury, the wounding of the mind is much more complex because it is not experienced in real time, which makes it harder to register for our consciousness" (9). Sigmund Freud is the first who brought trauma theory into light by sightseeing psychology and psychoanalysis the main concerning terms of trauma theory. In his *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895), later on this trauma came to be known as 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' (PTSD), which included the "symptoms of what had previously been called shell-shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses both human and natural catastrophes" (Verbestel 10) and this psychiatric condition often taken by some authors as the main theme which delineates as a "response to an event 'outside the range of usual human experience' on 9/11" (10). In the words of Caruth, "trauma", means "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed,

uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Verbestel 10). She further writes that trauma “takes the form of repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event”(10).

Regarding trauma Spiegelman’s consideration is genuine because he defines trauma as, “an external interruption that follows witness, but rather as something that resides in the temporality of the witness and more exactly in time’s standing still.” (Keniston and Quinn 99) About trauma Versluys writes that, “Trauma makes time come to a standstill as the victim cannot shed his or her remembrance and is caught in a ceaseless imaginative reiteration of the traumatic experience” (3). In trauma theory main focus is on the witnesses who organize terror of memory, extreme power and suddenly changed conditions mostly shelter of traumatic historical events reviving trauma not for themselves only but for all the people. Perhaps for this Sven says “If, in one of its aspects, trauma can work to establish affective ties and thus support the formation of collectivities, the question arises about how the limits of this collectivity are set.” and “the trauma of 9/11 travelled to encompass the nation”( 35). A traumatized person cannot overcome trauma in a day rather he has to pass different stages in healing for what Freud’s term is “mourning and melancholia” LaCapra calls this process “acting out and working through”(15) by this process the victim keeps repeating painful event and tries to overcome his trauma. “Acting out” means traumatized person act according to his traumatic experiences and in “working through” he learns to share his traumatic experiences with others.

McEwan’s novel *Saturday* (2005) published one year later after the 9/11 attacks. It explores the dominance of the news media and the narrative of the barbaric other. McEwan is admired for successful representation of 9/11trauma, terror and violence in his literary work *Saturday* by exploring the aftermath effect of 9/11. *Saturday* delineates more fundamental gripping and screening that how life can change in an immediate, for recovering or for criminal. The novel is apprehensive in erratic points to the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001. McEwan calls this terrorist attack a “failure of Imagination” (Kathryn Mary Elizabeth Lee 78) which McEwan also indicates in his *Saturday*. On the one hand it has criticised by some critics but on the other hand it is supposed to be one of his best works. In this connection Verbestel writes, “Few critics had negative remarks about the book, which explains why the novel won the James Tait Black Prize for fiction in 2005” (48). Some critics have the opinion that the novel has nothing to do with the 9/11 event so it is better to quote here what Versluys says “the questions the novel poses are what, in the aftermath of September 11, one owns, how tight one’s grip on life is, and how quickly one can lose it” (188). There are so many authors like Don de Lillo, John Updike, Foer, Spiegelman and Ian McEwan faced up to terror in their own ways. In *Saturday* the novelist also draws attention on that it is the time when everyone thinks that whatever happened in New York due to 9/11



it may be happened anywhere with anyone. It deals with the impact of terror and trauma on people created by 9/11.

The novel *Saturday* is set on a particular day February 15, 2003 Saturday on that day thousands of people gathered in Hyde Park to protest against the impending war in Iraq by America and its associated part which included Great Britain. The novel's span is a day presenting the life of Henry Perowne, the protagonist, a successful neurosurgeon. He lives in the posh Fitzrovia neighbourhood, a prestigious place in London with his wife, Rosalind and two children Daisy and Theo and grandfather. Henry wakes up at 3:40 before morning "baffled and fearful" (McEwan 4) before dawn by experiencing burning aircraft descending towards Heathrow Henry mistakes this burning plane as a terrorist attack like 9/11 attacks on America, the sight brings to Henry's mind the most dreadful assumptions that he could not sleep later he finds that the plane was steered by a Russians and has landed safely. While this turns out not to be a terrorist attack, by the way of Perowne's first fears, it sets up the book's atmosphere of ominous and the dominant contrast between hazardous world proceedings and Perowne's basically exultant family. On Saturday his troublesome time starts because his mind fills with the scaring assumptions seeing the broadcasting of a plane crash.

Everything that happens in the novel with Henry is due to the terror came into his heart because of the haunting images whatever he has seen on the TV which frightened him so much that a minor plane crash seems him like 9/11 attacks though "it's already almost eighteen months since half the planet watched and watched again the unseen captives driven through the sky to the slaughter, at which time there gathered round the innocent silhouette of any jet plane a novel association" (McEwan 16). Since 9/11 event has happened "everyone agrees, airliners look different in the sky these days, predatory or doomed" (McEwan 16). However a haunting torment remains to disturb Henry's Saturday because an enormous peace march is under the way to remonstrance the forthcoming assault of "Saddam Hussein's Iraq" (google). Henry's mistake is that he takes a minor plane crash as a terrorist attack and this mistake not only affects Henry's life but also all characters life. Its influence can be seen throughout the whole novel.

Henry was feeling guilty for he did not call emergency help. Thinking about all this he goes to play his squash game but he cannot concentrate and gets involved in an accident with a nearing BMW in a narrow street cause's minor damage on both sides. The cause of his car crashing is that Henry gets paralyzed by the event of burning plane and his body gets numbed, "He's not in shock, he's not weirdly calm or elated or numbed, his vision isn't unusually sharp, he isn't trembling," (McEwan 82) he was shocked by the previous incident so could not understand what to do "the half-minute's pause has given the situation a game-like quality in which calculations have already been made" (McEwan 83). It shows that it takes some times to overtake any shocking and traumatize situation. But Baxter and the three young men from the other side threaten Henry with a robbery and a beating. He discharges

robbery and a thrashing by recognising that Baxter grieves from Huntington's disease. This time Henry has to confront his guilt. He tells Baxter the analysis and bids hope of a non-existent usage, ever-changing the power dishonourable of the happenstance from muscle to brain and by doing this he humiliates Baxter in front of his buddies. Being Ashamed in front of his friends Baxter allow Henry to go but he could not stop himself to stunning punch on Henry's chest. Though Baxter let him go but Henry cannot pay full attention on his squash game while he was playing with Jay Strauss, his American colleague; he continues to think about the incident with Baxter. The word crash haunts Henry like terrific memory:

...his own word 'crash', trailing memories of the night as well as the morning, fragments into a dozen associations. Everything that's happened to him recently occurs to him at once. He's no longer in the present. The deserted icy square, the plane and its pinprick of fire, his son in the kitchen, his wife in bed, his daughter on her way from Paris, the three men in the street – he occupies the wrong time coordinates, or he's in them all at once. (McEwan 105)

On the one hand Henry is traumatized by the guilty feelings on the other hand his wife Rosalind also gets haunted by the past memories be relevant with the death of her mother, Marianne and the absence of her father, the famous poet John Grammaticus. She is particularly traumatized by the death of her mother just as Henry says that she "was not so much grieved for as continually addressed. She was a constant restraining presence, watching over her daughter, and watching with her. This was the secret of Rosalind's inwardness and caution" (McEwan 46).

As a result of his car crashing and his humiliation by Henry, Baxter forcibly enters in his house for taking revenge by attempting to rape his daughter and to kill his wife and humiliating all the family members on the behalf of Henry's behaviour. The factual traumatic event takes place then in the novel when at the dinner time all family members gather arguing on the matter of the Middle East and the impending war after playing game and celebrating Daisy's poetry prize winning memorandum. The family's celebration at this festive banquet gets disturbed by a scary stopover Baxter, who according to Versluys acts as "the substitute terrorist" (191). Baxter and his friends create humdrum by threatening Rosalind with a knife and by breaking Grammaticus's nose. The main victim in this incident is Daisy, who faces what M.L. Ross calls the threat of "a violent sexual penetration" (Verbestel 52) Henry's body freezes again, "mid-step, in an unstable position" (McEwan 207), when Baxter compels Daisy to take her clothes off in front of others. It seems lethal solemn permeation in Perowne's cloistered "space by a home-grown hostile" which in turn echoes the "initial penetration of English airspace by putative hostiles" (52). What happened in Perowne's home is so stunning that it shakes the soul of all family members. In this connection Spiegelman says that, "...trauma that makes it impossible to hypothesize or

fictionalize an event to take the place of its occurrence” (keni and Quinne 111). Baxter’s invasion in Perowne’s home is not less than a terrorist attack.

Instead of being frozen Daisy starts shivering with terror seeing Baxter, “Daisy is staring right at Baxter but her looks is terrified, her voice is breathless and her chest rises and falls rapidly” (McEwan 214). There is no limit of her fear when Baxter addresses her and says to take her cloth off at that time, “she stares at him in disbelief, trembling, shaking her head faintly” (217). Henry’s wife Rosalind badly terrifies that when Baxter demands her phone then her reaction was as “she exchanges a look with Henry and puts her hand in the pocket of her coat” (208). The scene was so terrible that she can speak only “Oh God” (265). Having listened Daisy’s recital on Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach” Baxter’s mind gets changes and he abandons his idea of seducing Daisy. It happens because he mistakes that the poem has written by Daisy herself being impressed by her flair of writing he drops his concentration on Daisy. And this is the chance for Henry and Theo that they defeat Baxter by throwing him down from the stairs. Then police came and Baxter got out of the home by the police.

After that all the characters try to forget this event as soon as they can. Daisy says about her undressing in front of Baxter that she “tried to pretend that I was ten year old, at school, getting changed for hockey” (McEwan 229). Grammaticus becomes laughing stock by saying Daisy about Baxter that “Daisy recited Arnold for the second time when I actually began to feel sorry for that fellow. I think my dear you made him fall in love (229). But when has carried away by the Police Rosalind also seems to recover from the traumatic event by inviting everybody for dinner “it might do everybody good to come and eat”(231) and all the members follow her though “no one has an appetite” (231). Thus family warmth works here like remedy for the recovery of trauma which is seen in all the Perownes.

But to forget an event is not so easy just as Spiegelmen writes “the persistence of trauma of 9/11 takes the form of the event’s constant timeless presence; even memory cannot place the event as past” (Keniston and Quinn 101). Time has passed but Henry senses Rosalind’s dreadfulness and shock when they are on the bed he realizes “the shivering appears to emanate from her knees in tight, dry spasms, as though her bones were grating in their joints” (265). It shows she is mentally shocked her traumatic reaction and experience she herself describes, “I felt myself floating away, “It was as if I was watching all of us, myself included, from a corner of the room right up by the ceiling. And I thought, it it’s going to happen, I won’t feel a thing, I won’t care” (McEwan 229). She is still afraid of Baxter’s act of putting knife on her throat: “In my memory, it’s no time at all – and I don’t mean that it seems brief. It’s no time, not in time, not a minute or an hour. Just a fact...” (McEwan 268). In traumatic condition the victim cannot focus on the present happening just as Henry cannot concentrate on his game and Rosalind cannot enjoy her husband company when they are together.

McEwan resides Perowne's fidgety acumen with eerie conceivability. Through intelligibility, intuition, and literary elegance, *Saturday* shows how a common man's life is troubled not only with apocalyptic trepidations, but with worries of a more isolated nature--like whatever the influence of hereditary providence may have in accumulation, and the way these terrors are strengthened by affection and kinfolk's bonds. Through the character of Henry the novelist focuses on the innocence western world (represented by Henry) and terroristic act (through the character of Baxter) in the light of 9/11. Critics like Magali Cornier Michael and Molly Clark Hillard have the same opinion that, "Baxter's invasion of the perowne's household with the terrorist invasion of America on 9/11" (Lee 79). McEwan ventures a good transaction almost of the roots of humanoid conduct and complications with recognizing premise of terror violence and trauma caused by 9/11.

The nous of traumatization appears to haunt Perowne throughout the novel. Henry has threatened by Baxter within his own home is like the terroristic invasion on America. Perhaps in the novel McEwan exemplifies 9/11 incident by the story of Perownes. Perowne, according to Keniston and Quinn is "the representation of civilization, rationality, and paternal authority" (150) and Baxter is like a terrorist who barges in on Henry's home beat his father, threatens Rosalind and tries to rape Daisy. Baxter's attacks in Henry's home is like the terrorist's attack on America due to this Henry's family faces the same terror and danger which America has felt during the time of 9/1 attacks. Keniston and Quinn aptly write, "The peril Perowne faces on 15 February mirrors "what the United States experienced on September 11, 2001, on a microcosmic level" (150).

McEwan's *Saturday* is the manifestation of the march in contradiction of the war in Iraq and the plane crash and full of references to the war on terrorism in general. But McEwan's characters due to their optimistic points of view get successful curing their trauma with the familial warmth. They soon get over their trauma particularly Henry's Children. Apart from it *Saturday* also focuses on the main traumatic experience takes place in one before the last part and the preliminary responses of the victims to trauma. McEwan in this novel presents quandary of the world which is coped with the global problem of terrorism. Everywhere terroristic acts are being dedicated in the name of religion in all this it is humanity that is being slaughtered for no fault.

## WORKS CITED

- Cvek, Sven. *9/11: Event, Trauma, Nation, Globalization*. Zagreb: Filozofski Fakultet. 2009. Print.
- Keniston, Ann., Jeanne Follansbee Quinn. *Literature After 9/11*. New York: Routledge. 2008. Print.
- Lee, Kathryn Mary Elizabeth. *Fiction as Resistance: The pos-9/11 novel as an alternative to the domineant narrative*. Diss. Massey University, Albany. New Zealand. 2012. Print.



McEwan, Ian Russell. *Saturday*. London: Vintage. 2005. Print.

*MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper*. 7<sup>th</sup> ed. New Delhi: East- West Pvt. Ltd.  
2009. Print.

Verbestel, Ellen. *Trauma and Post-9/11 novels: Foer, McEwan and McInerney*. Diss. Ghent  
University. 2010. Print.

Versluys, Kristiaan. *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel*. New York: Columbia Uni.  
Press. 2009. Print.