



9/11: A LETHAL BLOW ON HUMANITY AND A DATE WHICH WILL CONTINUE LIVING IN INFAMY

Ranbeer Kumar

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, College of Vocational Studies, University of
Delhi*

Abstract

*In my paper I have tried to study the 9/11 causes and its consequences revolving around Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man*. The plot of *Falling Man* revolves around the 9/11 incident in a circular manner which starts from the attack and finishes at the same point and shows the change in an individual in the likes of Keith and other characters greatly throughout the novel. I also intend to analyze 9/11 incident in the lights of science and politics and the loopholes in the system which gave way to the attack. *Falling Man* is quite symbolical as it represents the falling humanity and falling of ethics and faith at the same time. Throughout the novel, Lianne sees an artist nicknamed *Falling Man* in various parts of New York, who suspends himself upside-down with rope and a harness in the pose of the man in the famous photograph of the same name by Richard Drew. It is not just the man who is falling from the skyscraper tower but its humanity which declines and divides people on the basis of religion, region or nation.*

Keywords: *Falling Man, 9/11, attack, tower, terrorist, CIA, FBI, humanity, life, religion, God, faith.*



Scholarly Research Journal's is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com

Keith is the protagonist of the novel *Falling Man* who has witnessed and fortunately escaped the fatal incident of Twin tower demolition only with some minor injuries. A man looking at the North Tower which has been just hit by the plane is traumatized by the breathtaking devastation. He is not in his normal self and chooses to go to his estranged wife after the escape. But this story is not just about Keith who escaped it, but is also about others who were not so fortunate that day. It is also about the people who were involved in this attack directly and indirectly, victimizers and the victims, survivors and the non-survivors and how this incident changed the fate of a common man in New York, rather an American, and maybe the whole world which was left in grief and terror.

It was on this black day of the year 2001 which not only changed America but the whole world in matter of no time. Thousands of people lost their life with another lakhs lamenting the loss of their dear ones and the rest of the six billions in the state of terror and

grief at this attack on World Trade Center. It can be considered as the biggest attack against the mighty super-power on the planet, United States of America after December 7, 1941 on the naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. It was not merely 4 planes and 19 men which demolished the bases of WTC, but it was a big blow towards humanity which took the whole world by surprise and terror. The sight of destruction was so overwhelming that anyone who would have witnessed must surely have got goose bumps. It is quite surprising that a Multi-billion dollar security operators of the U.S military, intelligence and aviation authorities could be totally blind sided to the simple plots, which exploits fatal gaps in their defenses. American Airlines Flight 11 hits the North Tower of the World Trade center demolishing the building between 93rd and 99th floors. Fighter Jets are being sent to look around for the missing Jet. Meanwhile within a gap of few minutes United Airlines Flight 175 hits the South tower of WTC. Its panic which spreads all around Manhattan. A national ground stop order to stop all the flight to take off until next order was taken but it did not proved enough to stop the third blow in the form of American Flight 77 which was headed towards Washington and hits Pentagon. In order to eliminate all the airplanes from the sky an order to land all the aircraft regardless of their destinations which was an unprecedented move was taken in urgency. Over 4000 aircraft in the American air space was landed to the nearest airports within minutes but intentions of United 93 leading devastations crashes in Western Pennsylvania killing another 44.

110 storey gigantic South tower collapses into ashes and later the North tower claiming the lives of over almost 3000 people. This dreadful view of the towers with smoke pouring out of the WTC building looked similar to a volcanic eruption. The most sophisticated security network on the planet had failed to confront this well know threat impending on them. FBI counter terrorism teams has a big task ahead to chase down the leads to stop Al-Qaida and its leader Osama Bin Laden. 9/11 commission was set up to investigate the events of the disastrous day. A nation which spends billions of dollars on military and intelligence system to safeguard themselves were under scrutiny. But all this colossal expenditure did not proved sufficient to protect the nations pride and were insufficient to stop the hijackers of 9/11.

CIA which already had information about Al Midha, one of the 9/11 terrorists who had been already identified as a threat to American security was left unchecked travelling within the boundaries of United States. The intelligence worked perfectly in identifying out the possible threat but CIA failed to pass on the same information to FBI for necessary measure which were confidential according to them, allows the plot to slip through the

cracks. If Al Midha uses his visa to operate in American soil it is FBI's responsibility within the US territory to keep a check on his movements and take him under their control. CIA had an exclusive interest in the terrorist and did not shared classified details of this case to the FBI and the lack of the communication is not an oversight but it's a matter of policy according to them. This lack of transparency and wall between the two intelligence agencies was not an excuse enough for the lives of thousands lost in the attack. There is a lot more in the story which remains still a mystery for the general public till date. Was this just an attack by some terrorist group or was it an attack invited by United States themselves. Was this an outcome of unnecessary intrusion of US Army in Iraq and Afghanistan? There are many such questions which is left unanswered by the 9/11 Commission. CIA shares certain information but keeps certain crucial information from FBI which would have been of great help in their counter plans. It was until this incident, hijackers had been interested in winning bargaining positions rather than suicidal threats.

Even after the first attack nobody knew that it was flight 11 which had hit the north tower. Fighter pilot looking for a passenger jet in ordinary cases requires guidance from the civilian air traffic controllers which needed a good communication between two entirely different organizations. And unfortunately there was no such system which was devised to work mutually in an efficient manner. The idea of hitting a suicidal plane in WTC was something inconceivable. The twin towers underwent such a destruction that it lost its existence into ashes. National command center was left irrelevant in this time of need. There has been numerous failures which constituted to be the reason for this havoc. First being the lack of communication between the intelligence agencies in the country and the remaining can be attributed to the political administrations and over-ambitions.

The institutions which were supposed to protect America from any particular threat were not sufficient to cope with it. It was in a way a failure of Government as a whole. The military and the intelligence seemed powerless to tackle the attack which the nation underwent. But the most painful was the image of the people who were stuck in this attack and were pleading for help. There were falling men seen from the building, people who jumped from the building in order to save their life. One can only imagine what it would feel like to fall from a 110 stories building. What would have been the mental state of those who lost their loved ones? There were people inside who were half burnt, fatally injured and few stuck in deadly terrible situation. People around in the streets remained merely a mute spectator and looked as helpless as were the people stuck. They could see the people on the 50th floor crying for help and had nothing but a mute sympathy with nothing to answer. There

were phone calls ringing all around asking some kind of help but unfortunately no one to rescue.

A different genre in literature was born after this incident which dealt with this tragic incident came to be known as 9/11 works. I have tried to restrict my research keeping in mind the report by 9/11 Commission and couple of other non-fiction works along with the Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* set in a real background. There have been several works written after this terrible incident which deals with the disaster and its devastating effects of this day on an individual, New York City, United States of America and the entire world. Surely this day was an attack on the United States of America but in reality it was an attack and assault on humanity. Don DeLillo in his 2007 novel *Falling Man* deals with a similar plot where he takes the subject of the 9/11 and reflects on this attack as one against humanity. DeLillo in his novel talks about the 19 men who attacked the WTC eventually killings people who must have had never seen or would have been of any direct association to the culprits. We in a way see the futility of war and its devastating effects. Two different nations, miles apart from each other are at declared at war. We can assume the over indulgence of US military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan could have been one of the reasons for the agitation in the form of attack. But how on earth is an individual who cares for nothing but for his bread and butter is responsible for this kind of devastating incident? What fault of a common man has lead him to be on the receiving side of the story? Why is it that the general public has to bear the brunt for none of his mistakes?

“He dies in a car crash or walking across the street, hit by a car, you can kill the person in your mind a thousand times, the driver. You couldn't do the actual thing, in all honesty, because you don't have the wherewithal, but you could think it, you could see it in your mind and get some trade-off from that. But here, with these people, you can't even think it. You don't know what to do. Because they're a million miles outside your life. Which, besides, they're dead.” Here the author talks about the terrorists who were involved in this attack were of no relevance to them as they were miles away from their world and had no communication or interaction whatsoever. Here the enemies of a New Yorker or an American is one who have never been directly or indirectly connected to each other. God knows what pleasure these people derive by taking away lives of innocent, and even are ready to give their own without even thinking twice in the name of some deformed ideologies which they name it Jihad. People plotting against people and rather nation and invoking terror and grief in order to satisfy their own personal motives and manipulating them in the name of religious endeavors reflects the sad state of affairs.

In the very beginning after the attack when Keith visits his apartment he thinks on non-availability of taxi as almost all of them in New York belonged by the name of Muhammad which is Muslim community. We come across the DeLillo's take on Islam and Jews in the novel. "Islam is the world outside the prayer room as well as the sūrahs in the Koran. Islam is the struggle against the enemy, near enemy and far, Jews first, for all things unjust and hateful, and then the Americans." The writer gives us a fair amount of description about Bill Lawton i.e. Bin Laden who speaks thirteen languages. We come across the rivalries of Shia and Sunni in the Islamic nations. We get a fair idea of how young children are burdened with guns instead of books and toys to play with lives of others. The treatment of Islam follower's post 9/11 has not been a good news at all. Everyone with beard or Sherwaani is considered to be a terrorist and is looked at with suspicion. Well this stance of America seems to be unacceptable. There is one more side to the American politics which deals with specifically American expansionism and imperialism and its aggressive foreign policies of the 20th century. Focusing on its reasons we come across a few analysis in the following lines by the Polish American writer Zbigniew Brzezinski. "As Zbigniew Brzezinski wrote in his 1997 book *The Grand Chessboard*, "America's primary interest is to help ensure that no single power comes to control this geopolitical space [of Central Asia] and that the global community has unhindered financial and economic access to it." [1] Brzezinski acknowledged in his book that, "the pursuit of power is not a goal that commands popular passion, except in conditions of a sudden threat or challenge to the public's sense of domestic well-being." [2] He also wrote that, "The public supported America's engagement in World War II largely because of the shock effect of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor." [3]"

In the novel we encounter the complicated relationship of the modern western world in the form of Keith and Lianne who were once husband and wife but now shares a fine distance after the attack. Keith who escapes from the WTC building injured slightly, walks to the apartment he previously shared with his son Justin and estranged wife Lianne. She wonders for his return as they have proved to be completely incompatible during their early years of marriage. DeLillo has very well brought out the psyche of Lianne and Keith in the initial part of the novel, where they want to be close to each other but are separated by their inhibitions. The following lines shows the mental state of both the characters and their feelings towards each other.

"It's interesting, isn't it? To sleep with your husband, a thirty-eight-year-old woman and a thirty-nine year-old man, and never a breathy sound of sex. He's your ex-husband who was never technically ex, the stranger you married in another lifetime. She dressed and

undressed, he watched and did not. It was strange but interesting. A tension did not build. This was extremely strange. She wanted him here, nearby, but felt no edge of self-contradiction or self-denial. Just waiting, that was all, a broad pause in recognition of a thousand sour days and nights, not so easily set aside. The matter needed time. It could not happen the way things did in normal course. And it's interesting, isn't it, the way you move about the bedroom, routinely near-naked, and the respect you show the past, the deference to its fervors of the wrong kind, its passions of cut and burn. She wanted contact and so did he."

At times the prose form seems to be very poetic and has quite an evident involvement of philosophy of religion and theology in the novel. There is quite an extended discussion on the relevance of God who could have resisted this attack, if existed. There are certain counter arguments given by characters who still believes in the existence of Almighty. There are certain obvious logical questions and arguments which progresses in a never ending direction. Where was God when this happened? Where was his power when nineteen terrorist claimed lives of thousands of innocent people in the tower? Were all the victims guilty and not good human beings? Why did God let this happen in the first place? These are the few questions which is being asked time and again by the various characters in the novel. The site of paper flying all around in the sky and fumes surrounding the lower Manhattan was ominously mysterious. The twin towers collapsed eventually demolishing the hopes of thousand lives in heart of darkness. Truly there cannot exist a God who is all powerful and just at the same time. How could God do justice by letting this incident happen and not doing anything about it? Or probably he did not had the power to ensure everything right? Faith in almighty was shaken after such a disastrous incident. America was under attack for sure and all the news channels had this news flashing over and over again. People were able to see this chaos taking place in front of their eyes and they were as helpless as the victims.

"Those men who did this thing. They're anti everything we stand for. But they believe in God," she said.

"Whose God? Which God? I don't even know what it means, to believe in God. I never think about it."

"Never think about it."

"Does that upset you?"

"It frightens me," she said. "I've always felt the presence of God. I talk to God sometimes. I don't have to be in church to talk to God. I go to church but not, you know, week in, week out-what's the word I'm thinking of?"

"Religiously," he said."

On one hand we see the faith in the Almighty but at the same time the same faith is questioned with the philosophy of logic and reason. The following lines tells us Lianne's take on religion and God which is in some aspect DeLillo's philosophy himself.

“There was religion, and then there was God. Lianne wanted to disbelieve. Disbelief was the line of travel that led to clarity of thought and purpose. Or was this simply another form of superstition? She wanted to trust in the forces and processes of the natural world, this only, perceptible reality and scientific endeavor, men and women alone on earth. She knew there was no conflict between science and God. Take one with the other. But she didn't want to. There were the scholars and philosophers she'd studied in school, books she'd read as thrilling dispatches, personal, making her shake at times, and there was the sacred art she'd always loved. Doubters created this work, and ardent believers, and those who'd doubted and then believed, and she was free to think and doubt and believe simultaneously. But she didn't want to. God would crowd her, make her weaker. God would be a presence that remained unimaginable.”

But the fact remains that 2749 people died at the World Trade Center which included citizens from 87 countries. Among them were 343 New York City Firemen, 84 were Port authority employees of whom 37 were police and another 23 were New York City Police. And there was no God nor any supernatural power which was seen to rescue the helpless victims. Out of them only 20 were pulled out alive. Oliver Stone directed movie World Trade Center revolves around the fireman who lost their lives in the incident. It delves deeply with the painful story of rescue team caught in midst of the demolished remains of the buildings. None of them seems to indicate any sign of miracle in the plot which would have saved the innocent public. Keith in the novel could see this devastating and inglorious incident with his naked eyes and was himself in a state of shock and trauma.

Moving forward I intend to focus on the reason and loop- holes which gave way to the 9/11 attack and the other shortcoming in Political administration which proved dangerously fatal.

My paper is not to prove the conspiracy theory right or wrong but it is to see the possible loop holes which existed in the system which costed thousands of lives in a matter of seconds. There has been administrative failures and so are the intelligence shortcomings well projected after this unfortunate disaster. It was not the building which was relevant in the attack it was the human lives which had to pay the price of such loopholes by giving their sacrifice. There has been certain disturbing facts which actually affected me a lot and it may be one of the

reason for bringing up certain facts which was responsible for the attack on American 9/11. I would like to focus on a few of them.

The architecture which constituted the two gigantic tower was held with strong steel welded and bolted throughout the building which was not supposed to be pancaked on the contrary. There has been several other instances where the cores of the building survived and the remaining got burned out, but it did not happen in the case of WTC. Floor after floor popped out in no time still remains a mystery. It must be noted that steel is a metal which cannot burn and can only melt at a temperature of 2750 degree Fahrenheit or above, which can be attained only in a blast furnace or only on usage of thermite and there was no such temperature reported in the demolition. We were led to believe that these tremendous gigantic building framed in steel totally collapsed from small scattered fires and nearly ninety minutes of smoke. The 110 storey building took approximately ten seconds to come down completely which shows that there was no resistance created by the lower floors which is again not comprehensible. There was one more mystery to add to the demolition of the twin towers which is not known by many. There was one more 47 storey skyscraper, 7 WTC which got demolished on the same day of the incident. The building was not hit by any plane nor there was any physical damage induced to it but building 7 demolished like one in a controlled implosion. There were other buildings in the proximity which was not affected at all. It just not questions the strong steel framed building collapsed by fire but it also brings our focus on the lost thousands of Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) case files on corporate fraud by WorldCom and Enron. 70 billion California electricity swindle disappeared within a matter of approximately 6 seconds. These evidences surely indicates something problematic and shady picture of the US administration.

Scott Forbes an employee of Fiduciary Trust located in Twin towers informed about the power outage almost the whole weekend prior to 9/11. According to him the Port Authority had notified three weeks in advance about the power down which meant no security at all without any of the cameras in operation. In the guise of internet cable line being upgraded in the building, was it some pre-planning already being setup. Scott informed this unusual and lengthy power outage was not at all considered by any authority nor the 9/11 commission. There has been reports about the security alert was lifted and bomb sniffing dogs were removed five days in advance of the disastrous day. The disastrous consequences of the attack has been on thousands of rescue workers who have developed lung cancer and serious permanent health conditions and rescue dogs involved post attack still continue to die.

Larry Silverstein has been another mystery among all the others who just two months before the attack took a huge insurance policy on his buildings and the terms and conditions included a special clause 'in case of terrorist attack'. He was the individual who made the maximum profit out of the attack and was awarded \$7 billion for the Towers collapse. He argued that it was two separate planes which did hit the building and it was two terrorist attacks on the two different towers and claimed the compensation twice by the insurers. While it was thousands of innocent lives which costed a nation, they were few busy making money. There cannot exist any currency which could compensate life in any form or the other. And there cannot exist any theory which can predict the unpredictability of death. The general acceptance of the attack being carried out is by the Al Qaida but there cannot be complete denial of the involvement of US administration in the wider conspiracy. Political goals and personal benefits may have become the agenda of this devastation which completely ignored the demolition of tower 7 in the 9/11 commission report. Various government offices ranging from the CIA, Department of Defense, the IRS, the SEC branch investigating the infamous Wall Street corporate fraud cases, the Secret Service, or New York City's Office of Emergency Management (OEM) were all located in Building 7 which got destroyed without any plane hitting its walls. Questions that arise regarding Building 7 are simply part of the natural speculation arising out of its suspicious collapse. 9/11 Commission was setup to answer certain important questions of the general public. But surprisingly, the Commission did not even bothered for the existence nor for the absurd collapse of Building 7.

There has been a lot said and written about the conspiracy theory of 9/11 which has been supported by David Ray Griffin's *The New Pearl Harbor: Disturbing Questions about the Bush Administration and 9/11* drawing analogies between the 1941 Pearl Harbor attack and the September 11, 2001 attacks.

On the other hand we have the David Dunbar and Brad Reagan's *Debunking 9/11 Myths: Why Conspiracy Theories Can't Stand Up to the Facts* which tries to debunk many of the conspiracy theories based on March 2005 issue of *Popular Mechanics*. The book contains foreword by U.S.SENATOR John McCain.

We can just imagine with the case of Keith who did not underwent any major complication except on personal front. He was an eye-witness to the infamous historic incident of the 9/11 which affected his life greatly. His personal goals seems his interest in the game of Poker which he engages thereafter, for rest of his life. We do not see any direct intersection of interest between a common man and the diplomatic relations between nations

but even if one is not associated or concerned with it, it is going to get commoners affected in the long run. I wonder this association of public interest and political interest coming together by any chance, but did not find a way out by which an individual can dissociate his interest from that of his nation at any level. One has to bear the brunt of being an American at some level and on the same platform an Iraqi or an Afghani or rather a Muhammad or a Khan has to face the same.

Samuele F. S. Pardini in his review of *Falling Man* says “*Falling Man* is a secular prayer for a new humanism a religious secular poetry in prose form. He achieves it by the way of the perfect execution of all aspect of language: diction, rhythm, dialogue, inflection, a sense of space that it tries to capture and the work of time it tries to convey, from the spectacular first line that takes the reader into an entire world, “ It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night” (3), to the moving line that closes it, “Then he saw a shirt come down out of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waving like nothing in this life (246).” The themes of unpredictability of life which we love the most and the futility of war is reflected in the narrative. A sentimental touch is very evidently reflected throughout the narrative and the reminiscent past the narrative very aptly delves in the process.”

References

- "*Debunking 911 Conspiracy Theories And Controlled Demolition Homepage*". *Debunking911.com*. Web. 19 Dec. 2014.
- "*National Commission On Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*". *9-11commission.gov*. Web. 3 Dec. 2014.
- "*National Commission On Terrorist Attacks Upon The United States*". *Govinfo.library.unt.edu*. Web. 9 Dec. 2014.
- "*9/11 ANALYSIS: 9/11 And America's Secret Terror Campaign | Global Research - Centre for Research on Globalization*". *Globalresearch.ca*. Web. 17 Dec. 2014.
- "*9-11 Review: UNLIKELY: 'The South Tower Was Powered Down Before The Attack'*". *911review.com*. Web. 12 Dec. 2014.
- "*9/11 - Hard Facts, Hard Truth | WTC Building 7*". *911hardfacts.com*. Web. 30 Nov. 2014.
- "*One In Seven Believe U.S. Government Staged The 9/11 Attacks In Conspiracy*". *Mail Online*. Web. 11 Dec. 2014.