

# Manifestation of Psychological Trauma in Broken Verses by Kamila Shamsie

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## Abstract

This paper aims to explore Trauma Theory by Cathy Caruth in Kamila Shamsie's novel Broken Verses through qualitative analysis. The main objective of the paper is to delineate mental trauma embedded in the memory of the characters, which molds their present and future identities. The significance of the research is unraveled in the traumatic, rampant ravages in the ecstatic childhood, hurling victims in an eternal void of identity crisis. The tools for the research constitute of the novel Broken Verses by Kamila Shamsie as the primary source. Whereas Trauma Theory by Cathy Caruth serves as the secondary text from a theoretical perspective. The study fills the gap in research on Broken Verses as a critical study of the cynical Pakistani politics and the seeping in of fundamentalism in the government body. The research leaves open the intellectual space to explore Fascism in Shamsie's selected work.

**Keywords:** Trauma Theory, War on Terror, South-Asian Literature, Memory, Pakistani Politics

## Introduction

The research paper focuses on mental trauma and identity crises in the novel Broken Verses by British-Pakistani novelist Kamila Shamsie. The study intends to reflect the sensitivity of ruptured childhood damaging the future of characters due to traumatic experiences. It delineates that childhood trauma serves as a permanent memory related to traumatic experiences and the way it remains a part of their unconscious. The study aims to discuss that trauma cannot be uttered but can be acknowledged in their social behaviors in childhood that may differ from other normal children. It also incorporates the basic insight of childhood and how trauma effects the wonderful childhood, leaving the victims helpless. The study also examines the characters who suffer through

trauma by dint of social and political circumstances. The research also aims to enlighten the outcomes of distressing experiences in childhood and to study how children suffer, both physically and emotionally because of these experiences. It validates how a single incident can lead to a lastingly interrupted childhood and execute a similar attitude on life as well. The study uncovers the abrupt and long-term influence of trauma on a person's behavioral, emotional and mental patterns.

Kamila Shamsie is a British-Pakistani cosmopolitan writer and a novelist who is well-known for her laudable work. Her award-winning novel *Home Fire* gave her universal praise as a new contemporary British-Pakistani diasporic novelist. Shamsie was born in Karachi to a renowned journalist and editor, Muneeza Shamsie. Kamila Shamsie is unsurpassable at digging the past and intertwining the personal and political conflict. She is also known as a political writer whose writings show a unique format of Parallelism. Parallelism in literature is the denomination covering all the varieties of equality that humans encounter in art. Shamsie's novels follow the same uniformity. Some of her new novels show a vast view of Feminism's first wave, including women's sufferings and their works during the first World War. According to her, "Wherever in the world you go, you're living in the world's oldest and most pervasive empire, which is the empire of patriarchy. I don't know a place I've been to where it doesn't exist." (Hanman, 2014).

*Broken Verses* is a tale of loss and a quest to retrieve that loss. Shamsie's novel embarks on a journey to depict a daughter, Asmaani, in search of her mother, Samina who vanished into thin air one fine day. Asmaani brims with the hope of finding her. On her odyssey, she gets entangled in love with Ed, who fathoms the psychological complexities lurking within her.

The main concept of a traumatic ordeal was originally explored by Sigmund Freud in his psychoanalysis, while treating his patients. "The concept gained a diverse significance due to social concerns that lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These social concerns included rape, child abuse, violence and warfare" (as cited in Mambrol, 2018). Trauma is incorporated in the fields of psychology, psychoanalysis, feminism, and literary theory. Trauma studies came under the spotlight as a separate regime to explore in the 1960s. In 1996, Cathy Caruth used the term Trauma Theory for the first time in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. According to Caruth, trauma is a "wound" that is located in the deepest layers of oblivion and the level of its damage cannot be determined by the conscious. Caruth tends to exercise the idea of unconsciousness and consciousness that was given by Sigmund Freud. She scrutinizes a quintessential aspect of trauma that tends to ingeminate itself quite the same way as it occurs, that is, without the will of the effected person. According to her, trauma can never be properly healed as it is ignored due to the linguistic obstacles. Trauma cannot be described in language. Cathy Caruth firmly proposes that language fails to express the manifestation of trauma and is only seen by the victim's actions or habits that they are not aware of. Researcher Michelle Balev in one of her articles claims that trauma in its victim develops a dangerous and intense fear which is out of the expressive domains and explodes the personality of the trauma victim (Balaev, 2014).

Trauma itself is a devastating impression on a victim's mind that does not come alone but is accompanied by permanent or temporary mental agony and destruction of personality. It causes a certain level of mental instability that can be varied according to the harm one suffers from. Trauma is a mark that can damage various factors on different levels. It badly effects the routine, behavior, outlook, career plans or any other important task of life. Adults, children and even the elderly are prone to suffer from mental trauma. Children are also affected by the severity of trauma that leaves a permanent mark on their lives. Consequently, there is a failure to express or handle that torment. The trauma of an early age is not just a disturbing memory from childhood but an exceptionally important aspect that determines the growth in life. Children are more likely to respond harshly due to traumatic incidents. It is so because as they are in their growing period, their mind is not fully developed and brutal experiences emerge in their early life, leaving a permanent scar on their existence.

### Literature Review

Kamila Shamsie repeatedly shows in her texts how one's environment effects the mental health to a great extent. In her novel *Broken Verses*, she explores the feminist movement in the Islamic World specifically Pakistan, during 1970's and 1980's amidst the military's endorsement of Islamic fundamentalism. As a writer, she is actively involved in politics and writes about human duty and engagement during the era of chaos because: "If you grow up in Karachi, you don't have that separation between what is happening at the political level and what is happening in people's lives" (Liao, 2017).

Many other writers know Kamila Shamsie's writings to be "deeply rooted in a patriarchal culture in which women are silenced and marginalized to the domestic compass" (Saigol, n.d.).

"Shamsie considers the role of language in forming and sustaining identities, with a specific prominence on the ability of the English language to assist as an adequate means of enunciating thoughts and feelings outside the English-speaking world. There are indications in the novel that psychological and emotional expressions do not essentially tally when spoken in different languages." (Hussain, 2019). As Mark Stein has mentioned, Kamila Shamsie's work tends to challenge the "habitual classification of literary texts in terms of national or regional literature." (Omaishat, 2015). Kamila Shamsie's novel *Broken Verses* has received many praises as well as criticism for her writing style and story line. "Broken Verses cannot decide whether it is literary fiction or pop fiction, and herein lies one of its biggest flaws" (Elen, 2012).

Furthermore, "Shamsie uses bizarre plots in her novel *Broken Verses* that cannot truly describe political snobbery and literary themes" (Elen, 2012). *Broken Verses* recounts many plots of psychological trauma under Shamsie's pen by defining the identity crisis and violence occurred in the era of General Zia-ul-Haq. The novel highlights the suppression of dissension and civil society in Pakistan by the dictator, and the draconian laws against women. The study aims to highlight the feminist voices which were persecuted and suppressed by the regime (Ullah, n.d.). Consequently, the study aims to highlight the feminist voices which arose in Pakistan and were persecuted and suppressed by the regime.

Trauma Theory is an unassimilated event that shatters identity and remains outside normal memory and narrative representation. It draws attention to the severity of suffering by suggesting the traumatic experience irrevocably damages the psyche. Elaine acquired Caruth's Trauma Theory as it makes people imagine that traumatic events do not simply occur overtime, but come into being 'belatedly'.

## Research Methodology

The research uses Kamila Shamsie's *Broken Verses* as a primary text and Cathy Caruth's *Trauma Theory* as secondary sources. The research aims to widen the ambits of Shamsie's writings, using literature and linguistic expression to escape psychological trauma caused by Pakistani politics.

## Discussion and Analysis

*Broken Verses* is a heartbreaking story about a life full of resentment and destitution, state brutality and savagery, trauma and its long-term effects on the personalities of the novel's characters. The novel's main character is Aasmaani Inquilab, the daughter of renowned political leader and activist Samina Akram, who has spent her entire life fighting for freedom and women's rights. The novel depicts Pakistan's history, the social and political traumas of reformist activists, and their future. The story's events take place at the end of the 1980s and are characterized by violence and state exploitation. Pakistan established life as a flimsy sovereign state after Partition. Pakistan, which was formed as a result of the subcontinent's partition, was a geographical outlier to begin with. This statement describes Pakistan's struggle after partition to provide a stable state for its tenants. This exemplifies the crisis and barbarism perpetrated by Indians and British rule after the establishment of Pakistan. It was a trembling state at first, but after partition, independent leaders fought tirelessly for its freedom and power. In the novel, the Poet's murder, is a political squabble. "When I was a child, the Poet told me that the sky-union painters had negotiated reduced working hours on days of oppressive heat," the narrator says. (23). Subsequently, in the circumstances that prevailed in Pakistan at the time, the bureaucracy and the military emerged as the country's major establishments, particularly significant in the need to build a new, independent country in the aftermath of Partition, as well as in meeting the apparent external threat from India. The political supremacy of civil-military fascism in Pakistan was also evidence of Punjab's pre-eminence in Pakistan's post-colonial state. Such personal issues altered Aasmaani Inqalab's life. They cause trauma due to the obvious loss of parents and the love of a mother. Furthermore, emotional pain and the search for personal identity add to the burden. The main issue for Aasmaani is the absence of her mother's love, which is essential for all children. Partition was responsible for her life's injustices and the fateful separation from her mother. Samina Akram was forced to abandon her daughter and disappear for many years in order to save her life and to protect Aasmaani from political

persecution as a result of her mother's activities. Aasmaani believes her mother abandoned her years ago: "I had played myself as a victim of my mothers' lack of love for far too long, had wrung myself out thinking it" (302). A missing mother figure becomes Aasmaani's desire to know herself. "She had built her identity around all of those things" (250). Aasmaani is looking for her identity while working at Pakistan's first independent TV station. This process is closely related to growth and maturation, and it is frequently expressed in conjunction with Aasmaani's obvious need to overcome her fear and anger towards her mother and her political activity. Letters written in a secret code to her mother by Omi, The Poet, mark a watershed moment in Aasmaani's life. Aasmaani wants to know the truth about her mother and the Poet by the end of the novel. As a result, she becomes involved in activism. For Aasmaani, the Partition and its long-term consequences continue to have an impact on daily life in the subcontinent. "How could a government be stupid enough to kill him while everyone knew he was working on a collection of political poems?" (161) Shamsie inquires. The partition of India and the establishment of strict political control by the Pakistani government altered the lives, lifestyles, and future of approximately two million people, including Aasmaani, her mother, and the Poet. Every character in Shamsie's novel who is affected by political conflict suffers from Necropolitical Trauma. They experience an identity crisis and memory loss as a result of this trauma. In her Trauma Theory, Cathy Caruth describes how trauma affects not only individuals but also leaves an indelible mark on both consciousness and unconsciousness. Kamila Shamsie demonstrates how the Partition endorses the bureaucracy and military in Pakistan to dominate the state's evolving structure. "It is true that in concrete battles, tyrants may have an advantage in terms of tactics, weapons, and ruthlessness." (306) Our means of protest attempt to shift the battles into abstract space. "Tyranny must be forced to defend itself through language. Weaken it through public opinion, Supreme Court rulings, debates, and subversive curriculum. Take control of the media, of the printing presses and newspapers, of pirate radio channels, of spreading the word." (306) This statement encapsulates the current political squabble. Pakistan, as a new nation, faced extraordinary trials and tribulations that affected ordinary citizens like Aasmaani, but she fights everything that stands in the way of her freedom and her voice against brutal dictatorship. "Character is merely an invention, but it is an invention that serves as both a reason and a justification for our behavior." (90) Shamsie's statement helps to understand how a young child loses her identity as a result of a political crisis that causes a major trauma affecting her memory and locate collective unconscious memory of South Asians as depicted by Shamsie.

To summarize, Kamila Shamsie vividly depicts the political situation in Pakistan following India's partition and its impact on ordinary citizens and their lives. "It already seemed impossible to have denied this truth for so long." (302) Shamsie reveals that people experienced partition in a variety of ways, including the way communal violence

manifested itself palpably in their midst, the deaths of family members, kinsmen, and friends, the trauma that young women endured as a result of sexual abuse, and the loss of properties and ancestral lands. Denying the truth does not make things go away or wipe them off the face of history. *Broken Verses* is a touching mother-daughter storey in which Aasmaani struggles with memories from her unusual childhood throughout. "Do you realise how much I idolized you as a child? "When I was ten, you were Marie Curie crossed with Emily Bronte crossed with Joan of Arc." (128) Through the statement, Aasmaani demonstrates a strong and irreplaceable bond with her mother, attempting to portray the importance of her mother in her life by idealizing her mother by associating her with beautiful and successful women of history. "The office was so small that the two of us sharing its space seemed like an intimacy," (19) Aasmaani says. The plot also includes love, with mutual attraction developing between Aasmaani and Shehnaz's son. Shehnaz is Aasmaani's mother's friend, whom she meets while working at an independent TV station where she gets the job.

In *Broken Verses*, the trauma of forgetting and memory recollection is central to how characters connect with one another and detach themselves from the state in order to create their own histories. Individual experiences of class, gender, and difference are thus manifested through trauma, and the subject is demoralized by necropolitical governance and power that seek to erase specific bodies. The use of social and political power to command how some people live and how others must die is referred to as necropolitical governance. The novel's necropolitical act is the brutal murder of The Poet. The body becomes a focal point of historical trauma as characters strive for social justice, encountering a tangle of moral and ethical quandaries along the way.

The novel's most disturbing observation, that of trauma, mental disassociation, and a broken body, is found in the character of Aasmaani. She is an obvious witness to Pakistan's democratic crisis, and her mother's direct experiences with the necropower of a militarized state haunt her. "My teachers used to tell me that I was the girl who could be anything, and I believed them. I just didn't realise anything could include this." (70) This statement demonstrates Aasmaani's desire to be a better version of herself rather than simply suffering from childhood trauma and an identity crisis. The writer combines Aasmaani's memory of the complicated lives of Samina and Omi with the obvious inclusion of the eminent case of Safia bibi to demonstrate how the necropower of the state is ratified on women's bodies. The case exemplifies Sharia law's prejudice: despite the fact that Safia's father filed a rape report, the law punished a blind labourer woman for adultery while allowing her rapists, landlord, and others to go free. This is a significant event in the history of Pakistan's Women's Movement in the 1980s. Activists were taken aback and reacted by contesting the law and challenging the so-called Zina Ordinance. All of history's events lead to Aasmaani's mental trauma and identity loss.

Cathy Caruth also emphasises trauma as a result of the Vietnam War, which gained more concrete prominence as a topic of study at the time of its codification in *University of Wah Journal of Social Sciences Volume 5, Issue 2, December 2022, pp. 57-64*

1980, as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). *Broken Verses* is a mystery novel with social and political commentary. Shamsie's novel exquisitely captures Pakistan's assurance and the country's disruptive political veracity. Omi's prison poems depict the various scenarios in which he is imprisoned and awaits his death as a result of cruel torture. Each lash of a whip is a reminder of tyrants' insecurity, and a rumor of his execution is a source of sadness.

## **Conclusion**

The study comprises of *Broken Verses* by Kamila Shamsie as the primary source and Trauma Theory by Cathy Caruth as the secondary text. The critical study helps to understand how a young child loses her identity due to political crisis that causes a major trauma effecting her memory and then locates collective unconscious memory of South Asia. The separation of India and firm political control implemented by the Pakistan government changes the lives, lifestyles and future of about two million people. Kamila Shamsie proves that Partition endorses the bureaucracy and the military in Pakistan to dominate the evolving structure of the state. The political supremacy of the civil-military fascism in Pakistan is also proof of the pre-eminence of Punjab in the post-colonial state of Pakistan. The novel shows the history of Pakistan, social and political traumas of reformist activists and their future. The events of the story occur at the end of the 1980's manifested by violence and state exploitation.

Shamsie shows complicated relations between a mother and daughter caused by political violence and dictatorship in Pakistan. These Mother-daughter relations echo and are derived in part from the deep bond that Aasmaani develops with her mother. The personal issues and the changed life of Aasmaani Inqalab, involves trauma due to loss of parents and mother's love, emotional suffering and a quest for personal identity. The main problem for Aasmaani is the absence of her mother's love which is important for every child.

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