



NARRATIVES OF TRAUMA IN SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE

Edited by Goutam Karmakar and Zeenat Khan

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This volume addresses cultural and literary narratives of trauma in South Asian literature. Presenting a novel cross-cultural perspective on trauma theory, the essays within this volume study the divergent cultural responses to trauma and violence in various parts of South Asia, including Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Afghanistan, which have received little attention in literary writings on trauma in their specific circumstances. Through comprehensive sociocultural understanding of the region, this book creates an approachable space where trauma engages with themes like racial identity, ethnicity, nationality, religious dogma, and cultural environment.

With case studies from Kashmir, the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh, and armed conflict in Nepal and Afghanistan, the volume will be of interest to scholars, students, and researchers of literature, history, politics, conflict studies, and South Asian studies.

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Film and Video, Intersections, Journal of Environmental Planning and Management, Comparative Literature: East & West, MELUS, South Asian Review, IUP Journal of English Studies, Journal of International Women's Studies, Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, Interdisciplinary Literary Review, Journal of Gender Studies, Journal of Postcolonial Writing, National Identities, Nationalism and Ethnic Politics, Journal of Narrative and Language Studies, Asian Journal of Women's Studies, and Asiatic, among others.

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THE CONSTRUCTION AND DISSOLUTION OF THE MASCULINE SELF

Re-reading the Unspeakable Trauma in Sorayya Khan's *Noor*

Fatima Syeda

Introduction

The subject of male victimization, though ignored or silenced previously, forms a very important aspect of gender studies and its relevant fields of study. Just as male victimization is not voiced, male traumatic disorders are also silenced and rendered unspeakable. The presentation of trauma by most of the early writers in trauma studies (Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, and others) is that of a wound caused by experiences that are unspeakable and linguistically evasive. Unspeakability appears, in the works of these writers, as a preeminent feature of trauma and traumatic experiences, evading materialization or even full comprehension, not just for the victims but also for those around them. This research aims to focus on the sociological aspect of trauma to establish that, in the cases of men, the traumatic experience remains unspeakable due to the conflicting positions of males in society. In the novel *Noor* (2003) by Sorayya Khan, the male protagonist (Ali), experiences the trauma of creating a masculine self, particularly during times of stress (the division of East Pakistan in this case). This masculine self, created under certain pressures, however, surrenders, rather than dissolves once confronted with the traumatic experiences of war. The whole process renders these men speechless as they continue to resolve the conflicts between their original instincts and the sociological roles they are forced to perform.

It is very intriguing that the lack of the ability to speak about the traumatic experiences is accompanied by the presence of an impetus to rediscover the traumatic happenings, which may also help the men rediscover their true selves. Although Ali seemingly evades the horrors of his traumatic experiences, he may be seen working instantly to sow the seeds of revelations of truth by deciding to bring a child with him from East Pakistan. These revelations manifest themselves as a series of artistic representations drawn or painted by Noor, the victim Sajida's daughter. The implication

is that both the victim and the perpetrator are connected by a traumatic memory, which once materialized, releases both of them from the burden they have been carrying upon their consciousness since the actual happenings. It seems as if both Ali and Sajida find themselves locked into the memory of a single traumatic experience, and only they themselves can release each other from this interlocked binding.

The elements of incomprehension are enhanced by the initial refusal on Ali's part to talk about the actual events. Though he locks each and every detail very carefully into the innermost recesses of his self, his masculine self, created during wartime, recedes, rather dissolves along with the progression of the confrontation of the traumatic experiences. Even during the war, he discovered that he had lost his ability to perform sexually. This impotence is reflected in his life after he arrives in Pakistan. He loses his appetite, abstains from eating meat, refuses to marry, and demonstrates superhuman patience, which was never a part of his persona prior to the war. This research offers a study of the psychosocial aspects of the unspeakability of Ali's traumatic experiences by examining the creation as well as dissolution of his masculine self in *Noor* by Sorayya Khan, supported by the theoretical framework developed from the fields of masculinity studies and trauma studies.

Masculinity as a Traumatic Social Construct

Manhood has been associated with many attributes, but combative drive and excellence are two of the foremost defining features of masculinity. David D. Gilmore, a well-known critic of masculinities, studies the struggle men make to acquire a socially approved masculine self. According to him, manhood is treated as 'a prize to be won and wrested through struggle' (Gilmore 1990: 1). The fact that men have to strive to fulfill the demands of the socially constructed view of masculinity proves that the performance of men in a society is in no way a manifestation of their natural or biological self. He asserts that men, all around the world, have to face similar exhortations to acquire a masculine self. He writes about the presence of 'something almost generic, something repetitive, about the criteria of man-playing' (Gilmore 1990: 2). This performative aspect reinforces the social practice of the construction of the concepts of manhood. All such constructions negate the Freudian concept of the presence of both masculine and feminine in all human beings. The military training of men trains them to repress the feminine and softer aspects of their personality and produce 'militarized masculinities' (Baines 2014: 83). Forcing men to acquire a gender identity that does not come natural to them causes trauma. Greg Forter writes about the 'trauma induced by patriarchal identity formation' (Forter 2007: 260), which he believes is 'so chronic and cumulative, so woven into the fabric of our societies' (Forter 2007: 260) that it no longer appears as trauma. Polemic gender identities and their role playing, in his opinion, 'have been thoroughly naturalized in ways that make it necessary to excavate and "estrangle" them' (Forter 2007: 260) if one needs to read them as social traumas. He investigates how patriarchal structures can be regarded as 'normally traumatogenic institution(s)' (Forter 2007: 261). One of the greatest struggles for men is to avoid

alignment with women. Michael Kimmel, another major writer on masculinities, asserts, 'Masculinity is a homosocial enactment. We test ourselves, perform heroic feats, take enormous risks, all because we want other men to grant us our manhood' (Kimmel 2016: 65). Ali, in *Noor*, takes such an enormous risk when he decides to go to the war in East Pakistan. Surrounded by his mother, his aunt, and his fiancé, he feels the urge to go into the world of men and prove himself. He feels that if he goes out to fight for his country, his mother will be proud of him. He says, 'I'm worthy of this' (Khan 2003: 70). Going to the war meant 'an adventure of a lifetime' (Khan 2003: 214). Despite his mother's repeated warnings, he goes to the war without realizing that he will have to lose a part of himself to prove himself man enough to be involved in a war.

It is during his experience in a combative position that Ali becomes conscious of 'the mode of masculinity appropriate to soldiering' (Mason 2016: 160). At one point, while talking about a fellow from East Pakistan, he tells Noor how this man was posted in Baluchistan, 'where army officers promised to make a man out of him' (Khan 2003: 156). Ali's own choice of being involved in the war between East and West Pakistan had sprung from his wish for a free life. And this is how he went to war: 'strong and brash' (Khan 2003: 71) 'running full speed into a life that was unscripted and abounding with possibility' (Khan 2003: 240). His combative status, however, earns him a position far more restrained than the one he enjoyed in West Pakistan. While reminiscing about his experiences in the army, he clearly conveys his sympathy for the victims. It is obvious from his descriptions that he had a soft corner for the women who were exploited by the army officials. He, however, could not manifest this softer aspect of his being in front of his fellow soldiers. In one particular case, he was ordered to fetch a girl for his officer. All the while he was bringing this girl to the officer, his attention was more focused on her wounds and bruises than on her body. On the other hand, he was unable to express his vulnerable self because of the 'ultra-masculine context of the military' (Mason 2016: 163). While pushing the girl into the officer's room, Ali remembers, 'I put my hand on her bruise ... I tightened my grip to show the officer I was, indeed, in charge' (Khan 2003: 181). He has to hide his feelings of pity for the girl to demonstrate his fitness for the job of a soldier.

During war and in other combative positions, there seems to be a strict denunciation of feelings of shame, fear, or any sign of weakness. Paul Mason writes, '... military training involves a renunciation of the feminine' (Mason 2016: 160). Any show of weakness will deprive these men of the manly status awarded to them for repressing their softer selves. While relating Khalid's (one of his drivers) death, Ali recounts how Khalid's family rejected accepting his body because his widow refused to accept that Khalid could have 'Fear' (Khan 2003: 222) on his face while dying. The family did not claim his body, nor did they bury him. This may be studied as a clear case of the brutal societal expectations of a man turned into a soldier. Khalid's family could not accept him because of his lack of courage in the wake of his death.

Any man who shows a sign of weakness is naturally denied the status of a man. In this regard, men require 'validation of other men' (Stoltenberg 2000: 168), an

essential step in the confirmation of their status as men. John Stoltenberg writes, 'You grow up to become a boy and you are terrorized into acting like a boy and you are rewarded for being a boy ... and you learn what you need to learn to be accepted into the company of other men' (Stoltenberg 2000: 173). Ali's senior officer offers him to rape the girl once he himself has raped her. On Ali's refusal, he ridicules his lack of power, asking, 'Do you have a prick on you or not? It's your turn' (Khan 2003: 182). What comes next is a series of derisive remarks by this senior officer, who may be regarded here as a representative of the conforming social status of an Army man. Robert Augustus Masters views such derogatory remarks as 'powerful shame amplifier(s)' (Masters 2015: 1). He discusses the interdependence of shame and performance in a society. Each man lives in the fear of trespassing in the realm of gender boundaries. Kimmel writes about such fears: 'Homophobia is the fear that other men will unmask us, emasculate us, reveal to us and the world that we do not measure up, that we are not real men' (Kimmel 2016: 65). The senior officer's derisive remarks about Ali refer to his lack of the required masculine power.

The lack of masculine power deprives men of being called military men. Ali is subjected to humiliation by his officer, who demands to confirm his masculine power by having a look at its physical manifestation. Ira Brenner writes about the 'traumatic pathway to the development of a masculine self' (Brenner 2009: xiv). The senior officer curses him, '*Behn Choud* (sister fucker) ... You have a prick or not? ... Show me' (Khan 2003: 183). Ali's body betrays his manly status, and the display of the physical manifestation of his manliness proves him to be someone less than a man. The show of his 'shriveled and hidden' (Khan 2003: 183) organ diminishes his status both as a man and as a soldier. Seeing this, the officer declares that he cannot be a soldier. Ali accepts his unmanly status but is aware of the shame that accompanies such an acceptance. He says, 'shameless, right?' (Khan 2003: 183). Kimmel, too, writes about this shame and fear syndrome, 'We are afraid to let other men see that fear. Fear makes us ashamed, because the recognition of fear in ourselves proves to ourselves that we are not as manly as we pretend, that we are' (Kimmel 2016: 65). Ali remembers the story of a soldier who was ordered to cut off the private parts of their enemy (men): 'He pictured the confused officer whose lobeless ears trembled as he trailed behind, obeying orders to sever genitals with nothing but a blunt kitchen knife and his own hands' (Khan 2003: 76). In severing the genitals of their enemy soldiers, these men themselves were also emasculated or re-masculated. The price paid by all such men is the loss of their identity. Gilmore writes, 'Manhood ideologies force men to shape up on the penalty of being robbed of their identity, a threat apparently worse than death' (Gilmore 1990: 221). This study argues that men pay a price by being emasculated as a result of this exhortative construct of a wild and violent masculine self. Ali's disillusionment with war starts right after he finds himself in an environment that requires a violent and unnatural performance from him. Devoid of all the noble reasons to fight in this war, he now remembers his acts of killing as desperate attempts to 'save himself' (Khan 2003: 215). In an attempt to hide and silence the fear and vulnerability and to avoid the excoriation of the male community, men are reduced to something less than men. The realization of their

weaknesses was traumatic, rather fatalistic. Gary Baines writes, 'Recognition of vulnerability and mortality meant that fatalism invariably set in' (Baines 2014: 38). In most cases, men tend to hide any such feelings or emotions.

Ali's mother, fearing her son's death in the war, receives a son who has lost his true self. She feels the estrangement of war upon her son, who 'had returned home a man' (Khan 2003: 74). On coming back from the war, Ali's greatest urge is to lock away all the memories of the traumatizing experiences of war. His choice to remain silent is his own decision. Shoshana Felman writes, 'Silence here is not a simple absence of an act of speech, but a positive avoidance and erasure' (Felman 1991: 221). The reality is 'insistently asserted (re-asserted) as not known ... because (of) essentially remaining unacknowledged' (Felman 1991: 221). Furthermore, the conflicting effects of war, that is, the construction of a required masculine self and the dissolution of the same very self in the wake of the violent events and the nature of his involvement in them, render him emasculated. His head felt like a

wall-size cabinet of drawers that could be nailed closed ... he relegated the screams to one drawer, the pit of dead bodies and scattered flinching into another ... he put the rich colour of blood disappearing into a pit of mud into its own compartment, as far back as possible.

(Khan 2003: 75)

The process of burying his violent manly exploits is cross-checked by him. 'He fortified the drawer with more nails' (Khan 2003: 183). The whole thing becomes a kind of a rite in which he renounces not only the memories of war but also his manly status.

The Unspeakable Trauma and the Dissolution of Masculinity

Ali's war memories thus lie locked in the innermost recesses of his mind, not, however, without changing him into a man who has renounced his masculine self. In one of his conversations with Noor, he explains to her how birds shed their feathers each melting season and grow new ones. Noor, worried about the birds' shedding 'necessary parts of themselves' (Khan 2003: 216), does not realize that her grandfather has also shed a part of himself. Harvey L. Schwartz writes that 'more vulnerable traumatized individuals must resort to dissociation to switch off unbearable feelings and sensations ...' (Schwartz 2013: 9–10). Ali switches off all the feelings that are unbearable for him, and yet, these remain with him in the deeper alcoves of his mind. Anna Hunter cogitates on the storage of traumatic memories, 'the traumatic event is stored only in the subconscious memory of the sufferer ...' (Hunter 2018: 67). After his return from East Pakistan, Ali could never again sleep during the Monsoon season. His mother tells Sajida, 'Ali gave up meat and marriage ... he didn't pray ... his face was gently transformed ... he can never sleep during the monsoons' (Khan 2003: 148–169). From a boy who used to scream, cry and shout, he has turned into someone who is 'an ocean of patience' (Khan 2003: 170). From

being someone who used to devour food, he has become a really slow eater. He has become a vegetarian because he'd smelled flesh in every possible manifestation. Freshly dead, not-so-freshly dead, rotted, singed, burned, baked, and every variety in between, and he never wanted to set eyes on it, much less his tongue on it, again' (Khan 2003: 185). He cannot explain his renunciation of meat without externalizing the horrors of war and the role he played in it. It is this inability of his that results in the locking down of war memories.

Ali's mother, Nanijan, sums up the change in him by saying, 'He dwindled He was once a 16 ½ neck size. Then he lost his shoulders. People thought he was weak. He was thin. He wasn't the same was all' (Khan 2003: 171). His dwindling status stands in sharp contrast with his 'once sturdy frame' (Khan 2003: 174). This reduction unmans him, rendering him incapable of manly tasks. He resolves never to get married or enjoy any of the other privileges of a normal life. He has never let anyone else, except Sajida, in his life. The completion and the ultimacy of Ali's fortification may be seen when he forces his son-in-law to live with them and when he builds his new house. Ali's sector, as it was called, was completely fortified, blocking even the view of the Margalla Hills.

The unspeakability of his traumatic war experiences relies mainly on the conflicting roles that these men perform, especially during times of stress. Michelle Balaev, while discussing the conventional approach toward trauma, primarily by Cathy Caruth, writes, 'Trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language' (Balaev 2014: 1). The masculine self, created in the wake of the peer pressure during the war, recedes as soon as Ali finds himself unable to absorb more violence any more. He surrenders to his vulnerable self and resolves to reject the demands of a society that expects him to live up to the socially constructed image of man and masculinity. Ira Brenner quotes John Munder to discuss the conflicting identities of men that may lead to trauma: 'Men ... struggle against two dangers—the danger of succumbing to their feminine nature and the danger of affirming their masculine integrity through repeated acts of aggression' (Brenner 2009: 2). It is not only his mind but his body as well that rejects the normative masculine ideals, accelerating the 'dissolution of the masculine self' (Brenner 2009: 103). From the claim that he will make his mother proud by fighting in the war, he reaches a point at which he decides to leave East Pakistan even before he has completed half of the time of his placement there. He was supposed to stay for two years, but after about eight months, he returns, weak, ill, and transformed.

The inability to recount or confront the traumatic experiences of war by Ali may correspond to the conventional interpretations of trauma that are mainly psychoanalytical and post-structural in nature. Dauri Laub writes, 'There are never enough words or the right words ...' (Laub 1995: 63) to relate a traumatic experience. This previously established fact that trauma cannot be expressed in any linguistic form is consolidated through Ali's resolve to carefully lock away all of his war memories. However, if one moves a bit away from this conventional approach toward trauma,

one may see that this unspeakability does not just refer to the post-structural or psychoanalytical aspect of trauma but also includes the sociological aspect. Laub asserts that no one can 'stay entirely outside of the trapping roles, and the consequent identities, either of the victim and the executioner' (Laub 1995: 66). Both the victim and the perpetrator face this lack of expression; the reasons may depend upon the relevant sociological aspect. For instance, in Ali's case, trauma is unspeakable due to Ali's inability to reconcile the conflicting roles he has to play in society.

The paradoxical nature of the societal expectations placed upon a male character threatens to ruin Ali's mental peace. The same society that takes pride and honours Ali's heroic character in the war is not ready to accept the bloody, violent, and aggressive face of war and military heroes. His own mother, who had been fearing his death during the war, considers no violent aspect of the war to be discussed when he comes back battered by it. After years of Ali's 'dormancy' (Stampfl 2014: 24), when she finally comes to know about the facts of his experiences, she is not ready to accept them. And though she holds him responsible for his own actions, she realises that she too has contributed to leading him toward taking these actions. She recognizes his need for a 'closure' (Khan 2003: 178) while also acknowledging her failure to assist him in finding one.

Ali's decision to bring Sajida to West Pakistan may be examined as his hidden desire to find an expression for his deeply buried traumatic war experiences. His surrender to his vulnerable self and his recession from his so-called masculine self put him in a conflicting situation, which deters him from expressing his traumatic memories. Simultaneously, however, he had decided to bring a girl child from East Pakistan. Ali reflects near the end of the novel that he brought her because he wanted to erase that hyper masculine self, which was created as a necessity of war but is now someone 'he wanted, so badly, not to be' (Khan 2003: 221). On their return to Ali's home, both of them may be seen clinging to each other, thereby necessitating a retention of their traumatic memories. For Balaev the need to 'explore trauma as a subject that invites the study of the relationship between language, the psyche, and behavior without assuming the classic definition of trauma that asserts an unrepresentable and pathological universalism' (Balaev 2014: 4). Ali did not let Sajida leave, even when she got married, even when Nanijan suggested it was a good time to 'let her go' (Khan 2003: 92). She tells him, 'You can't hold on to her forever' (Khan 2003: 92). Ali, however, holds on to her until she gives birth to her third child, Noor, who later helps both Ali and Sajida confront and express their war experiences. This aspect renders the 'trope of the unspeakable' (Stampfl 2014: 15) reduced to a mere phase during one's recovery from trauma and not an ultimate condition.

The bond between Ali and Sajida and their resolve to hold on to each other signifies the urgency of the resolution of the 'traumatogenic' (Stampfl 2014: 31) experiences that bind them both. This may be one of the reasons that both Ali and Sajida accept Noor more readily as compared to the other members of the family. It was only after some time had passed since Noor's interest in drawing and

painting was discovered, that Ali recognized Noor's ability to 'pluck from someone else's head' (Khan 2003: 165). Ali's involvement in Noor's creative paintings and drawings no longer allows him to muffle the memories of his past. It is significant to see how both Ali (perpetrator) and Sajida (victim) welcome each of Noor's paintings, almost thankful to Noor for bringing to the fore what they had always kept secret. Their readiness to give names to the paintings and to display them in a gallery reflects upon their hidden desire to reveal what has long been hidden in their consciousness. Furthermore, 'the unspeakable is always already (paradoxically) part of a universe of discourse, a form of signification' (Stampfl 2014: 25). Nanijan was aware of the presence of this discourse. She reflects that she never asked him about his wartime experiences because 'she'd been afraid of the answer' (Khan 2003: 165). She could perhaps hear Ali's testimony 'informed by acute silences and epistemological gaps that reflect the impact of a traumatic experience on the speaker's psyche' (Stampfl 2014: 20). Being thankful for his life, she, too, muffles her questions and leaves them unasked and thus unanswered.

Noor's art work offers healing not just to her mother but also to Ali. Ali remembers his old way of calming himself down through exercise and feels that 'sitting in Noor's presence was much like that' (Khan 2003: 213). He finally decides to 'include her (Noor) in his healing' (Khan 2003: 213). Once the process sets in, he makes sure that what has remained unspeakable till now should be spoken now. Caruth writes about trauma, 'It is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in an attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available' (Caruth 1996: 4). Ali himself engages Sajida in a conversation, which leads to the recognition of their past and long buried truths. Saira Mohamed writes that 'only by reclaiming those traumatic memories and enabling the sufferer to put the experience into words could those symptoms be relieved and the traumatizing experience be re-appropriated as a lived experience' (Mohamed 2015: 1171). Ali poses different questions to Sajida because, 'he wanted Sajida to share what she knew, suspecting that if she put it into words, something important might be laid to rest' (Khan 2003: 219). Shoshana Felman writes about the elusive yet reiterative nature of the traumatic experience that carries the seed of the urge to complete itself. She writes about the sufferers of trauma whose life after the traumatic experience 'strive unwittingly and compulsively toward an impossible completion of the missed experience' (Felman 1991: 203). It is during his conversations with Sajida, that Ali realizes that he has never been able to distance himself from the memories that he thought he had locked away. He tries hard to keep these memories at bay, 'but when the whiffs of stories rose like a stench from the file cabinets inside his head' (Khan 2003: 231), it becomes hard for him to resist their acknowledgement. He realizes that the only way to deal with them 'was to put them into words... But the words were always wrong, lacking' (Khan 2003: 233). His action of naming Noor's paintings trains him to use words to express his traumatic experiences. Joshua Pederson in his article 'Trauma: Toward Revised Understanding of Literary Trauma Theory' refers to Susan Brison's belief in the healing powers of narrating trauma. He writes, 'Speaking trauma pulls it from the realm of painful obscurity

and hastens the process of rehabilitation' (Pederson 2014: 338). The very first thing that he does is apologize to his daughter 'for his fear' (Khan 2003: 234). He also implores her to understand his situation, and she tries to understand him. She, who could never think of her father as being afraid of anything, tries to accept the fact that he too once felt fear. She, however, keeps on wondering about the manifestations of this fear: 'Did he cry? Shake? Run?' (Khan 2003: 236). She can identify with him because she has also been guilty of hiding things from Hussein. It may be for this reason that she takes the first step toward understanding, and later on, forgiving Ali.

The ultimate episode of the pit/mass grave provides a common ground for the trauma both Ali and Sajida have been facing since their arrival from East Pakistan. The narration of this incident reveals the void in Ali's character caused by the violence he was forced to perform.

He'd climbed out of the mud and taken the pit with him. It was as deep as the boots he'd worn when he stood thigh deep in the mass grave. It was a sinking hole forever filling with muck, the stink of it, the frozen stiffness of bloated, rotting corpses, the soft sound of bullets hitting live flesh in stinging rain.

(Khan 2003: 250–251)

All his life, Ali has been trying to fill this void. Sajida and her little family have helped him not to drown, but the pit remains there inside him. He feels the inevitable presence of the dark deeds committed by and around him: 'what had, in fact, been the war, would go on happening inside of him for as long as he lived. (Khan 2003: 251). Ali's healing from this traumatic experience could come only from Sajida's understanding of his intricate position. He is one of the soldiers who were appointed to fill the mud pit with dead bodies, but he is also the one who saved Sajida, brought him along to be raised with love and care. Sajida feels that 'the two of them would have been forever joined by a pit of mud ...' (Khan 2003: 254). And, while she recognizes that Ali had the ability to kill her that day in the pit, she also recognizes that healing necessitates reconciliation, because, as Susan Rubin Suleiman writes, 'trauma is not only a drama of a past event, but also, and perhaps most importantly, a drama of survival' (Suleiman 2008: 280). The survival of both Ali and Sajida depends upon the healing from this trauma.

Conclusion

The trauma of Ali and Sajida assumes the shape of a collective trauma at the end. 'The moan, deep and immense, rose gradually. It began in Ali's belly. It rode through his strained vocal chords and gaping throat. It hurled out of his mouth, stretching wide like a dead buffalo's. The groan filled Ali's sector like no other sound had ever done before (Khan 2003: 260). Ali's trauma is not just that of the horrifying memories of war but also that of the creation, distortion, and finally dissolution of his masculine self, necessitated specifically by war. Ali's condition may remind one

of what Cathy Caruth finds remarkable in trauma: ‘the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound’ (Caruth 1996: 2). This wound may heal if both Ali and Sajida are able to perceive the gender politics involved in constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing Ali’s masculine identity. The last posture of Ali and Sajida is important in understanding their relationship. ‘Sajida leaned toward her father. Stretching, she locked her arms with his’ (Khan 2003: 260). Their interlocked positions make it clear that none of them may heal privately and that collective healing is the only way to ensure reconciliation and restoration in their lives.

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