



# Maternal Trauma and Transmissibility in Sorayya Khan's *Noor*

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## Abstract

Unspoken or ignored representations of mothers who have been victimised may manifest within families as certain explicit mental responses. Survivors of maternal trauma may pass it on to their children in a country that is emotionally petrified. The primary focus of this study is to read *Noor* by Sorayya Khan in order to discover betrayal and to reveal latent traumas (PTSD) affecting mothers in particular when there are violent events. Historically, Mothers have been the source of loss, alteration, violence, abuse, transmitted to the next generation, and circumstances of confusion and anxiety. *Noor*, Sorayya Khan's debut book, tackles issues of hatred and violence, showing how such terrible experiences can influence mothers' suffering. This magnificent work of art awakens the silent voices of disadvantaged, neglected women and children. Against a background of war and natural disaster, people are subjugated, traumatised, forced to relocate, and subjected to brutality and sexual assault. This study tends to expose the abuse that mothers have experienced trauma that can weaken the stable psychological base of the community. This essay's main goal is to answer some fundamental questions, including what trauma actually is, how war affects society's way of life, how traumatising mothers can lead to an untreatable disorder, the way trauma may serve as an impetus for the collapse of all facets of society, and how inherited trauma creates devastated nations. The main goal of this study is to evaluate and investigate the problems that the victims (Mothers) experience throughout wartime and how these problems set the stage for the characters' subsequent lives, creating a defunct nation.

**Keywords:** Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Liberation War, Psychological trauma, Maternal trauma, Transmissibility of trauma

## Introduction

In a male-dominated social structure, women's subordination, especially mothers, has always been neglected, particularly deteriorating during territorial conflict and internal clashes. Prolonged debasement of women fosters psychological distress which may lead to a lack of self-awareness, identity crisis and aloofness within close quarters of family and relatives. Trauma is psychological distress that recurrently brings flashbacks of physical or mental wounds. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is primarily characterized by depressive behaviour and anxiety due to psychological conditions induced by traumatic experiences. This behavioural pattern reflects on the physiological condition and impacts society and its stakeholders. As a result, society becomes superficial, distraught and afraid. The trauma percolates from generation to generation and grows into advanced forms that redirect society. The people get plagued by pernicious conditions of anxiety and trauma of something that they either partially experienced or overheard as intergenerational experience.

This research investigates the underlying cause of human trauma and its aftermath shocks, which have often been identified with pathological disorders. It also highlights sufferers' bewildered and entangled behaviours, particularly mothers, in nightmares, tormented past experiences, distorted concepts of the real world, and dreams. This article assesses the characters in Sorayya Khan's novel *Noor*, using a psychological approach and neurotic fixation caused by traumatic events. It is vital to highlight that trauma appears to be a condition that can be transferred; it is passed on to future progeny due to its dependency on the sufferer's cognitive habits and reactions. Importantly, it manifests as an internal disease or psychological ailment. Simply, it can be traced back to an individual's shortcomings or vulnerability that caused the emotional or physical injury. The shortcomings or drawbacks always determine an individual's life at a subliminal level, deterring them from facing situations ably. As a result, sexual violence, atrocities on the body, or any wound can create psychological obsessions and its ramifications are found in behavioural actions.

Psychological trauma emerges and is recognized sporadically throughout human existence. Traumatic events often act as triggers that provoke cognitive behaviour as new stimuli stimulate unforeseen psychological disorders, similarly, PTSD takes cues from familiar stressors in immediate surroundings and acts as a stimulus. In the novel *Noor*, Sorayya Khan focuses less on the war and its reiteration, she manages to shift the locus into maternity situated inside a domestic space which is afflicted by the trauma of war and a fragmented nation. The novel effectively captures the ripple of war and its impact on lives, a catastrophe that happened long back can disrupt the stability of lives that were either related to the war in some capacity or did not partake in any way. The novel unravels the horrors that ensued during 1971 in erstwhile East Pakistan and the following war between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. The story vivifies the gruesomeness through the paintings of a differently able girl, Noor, whose mother Sajida had experienced the ghastliness of war and was brought to West Pakistan by a war veteran, Ali. The artworks of Noor trigger the repressed trauma in Sajida's past, the overwhelming trauma of the mother finds its way to the child's mind and carries it forward.

This paper tries to find questions on intergenerational trauma, mainly how an experience of the mother's past passes down to her offspring and becomes a mental disorder beyond revoke. It questions the war and its impact on the fabric of societal relations. It poses the topic of how trauma suffered by women can develop into an incurable illness. How can hereditary trauma develop into a generational trauma, creating a traumatised society? To find an answer to the questions above, this paper looks at the theories of PTSD by Ataria and Freud's defensive mechanisms for guidance.

In addition to dynamic triggers, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, transferability, and, most importantly, its repressed repercussions in human society as a whole, Sorayya Khan's *Noor* is a paradigm of mother trauma projection. Memory's function becomes crucial as it attempts to erase the past to construct a new world. Ishtiyaque, the critic, argues that communal memory, as opposed to the impacts of inflicted trauma, is what causes forgetfulness; the former involves an unpleasant event in general. In the book *Noor*, Ali, a 1971 war veteran, is forced to experience forgetfulness, a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In these situations, trauma afflicts the victim and because it is transmissible, it either spreads or reproduces itself. Noor's artwork serves as little more than a reminder of past atrocities planned against the context of the conflict in 1971. Her artistic skills offer the visual and expressive essence of memory. While the latter relies on a creative dismissal of the past to reshape the present, the former concentrates on the historical distinction of memory. In other words, this critic relies on stressors or cues produced by trauma to explain the function of memory in *Noor*, especially the awareness and experience of reality.

## War and Maternal Trauma

Since Pakistan's independence, it has experienced hardships, a dismal history, and horrific atrocities including mass murder. Pakistan was torn apart after Independence due to the partition between East and West Pakistan. This re-mapping resulted in significant territorial breaches and injuries, a geopolitical disaster, and a subsequent partition that transformed East Pakistan into Bangladesh. All the female characters in *Noor* are plagued by particular psychological problems and tensions as a result of these historical shifts. In other words, despite the terrible repercussions in the form of maternal disputes along with the transfer of this malignity in various traumatic forms, the maternal figures stay silent and wordless.

This part examines the indignities and hardships experienced by the victims; the Fall of Dhaka in 1971 highlights the link between trauma and past tragedies. When criticising the anguish and sorrow that have tarnished socio-communal life, mother figures are frequently pushed aside. Since the conflict is a consequence of political upheaval, this abomination is also an ideological one. As a result, war has a political impact on the

community; in other words, mothers suffer greatly when politics are overthrown. When superior and lesser power brokers compete in war, the implications of that conflict both guide and confuse society. In other words, conflict shatters the norms necessary for identity identification and valuing viewpoints. Khan's *Noor* demonstrates that a conflict not only alters the borders but also alters the community's vital components. The book supports the argument that mothers have been demoted to a lower position as a result of the war. This level of anger and hostility is a sign of post-trauma trauma; the female personality is obliterated as a "despised identity or curse." Trauma thus tends to affect the community's habits of behaviour as well as the society's physical characteristics. Furthermore, it is undeniable that women are the ones who suffer from it the most, and parental figures in the community contribute to the trauma's spread.

The horrific violation and sexual abuse of a Bengali mother by Ali's commander is another deplorable picture in *Noor* that highlights the treacheries committed against mothers throughout the conflict:

"I couldn't take my eyes off the girl. She lay on the desk, naked and limp. One knee bent, the roundness of it shocking against the sharp angles in which her body lay. Head to one side, hips to another, chin upward, elbows pointed outward, hands folded on her chest, knuckles sharp and quivering in peaks of their own. Milk flowed from her breasts. There were teeth marks in between. (Khan 154)"

This image chains all humanitarian norms and principles. This white milk droplet is an indication that the young mother gave birth to a child, an infant whose rights were violated by a soldier during a time of war: "She was ripped and pried open, the implements used to do this, the scissors, pens, a metal ruler, speckled with blood, lying to her side. (Khan 155)" This blatant and primitive sexual torture shows that mothers were forced to submit to cruelty and abandon their nursing infants to the whims of warlords. A sign of maternal purity and sacredness, milk, on the other hand, becomes the source of pain that leaves scars on human life's socio-communal and domestic facets. Rape brings to light the disparaging condition that mothers were exposed to. It is undeniable that mothers end up being "double victims" because they are both easy targets for abuse and mistreatment by society at large and also have to deal with the traumatic bonds of familial ties. In other words, mothers are primarily affected by infant trauma. In addition to disrupting maternal security, the war also injures by devastating mother figures, including battered chests, consumed bodies, and scarred wombs. Other social groups in the community are also harmed by this common trauma in addition to the mothers. Mothers undeniably create the next lineage, thus trauma that robs them of their "new flesh" (baby) and chastity exacerbates their psychological pain. It unintentionally leads to a severe psychic sickness in which every activity has an impact on other society components and serves as a reminder of the painful revocation.

Additionally, Ali's nightmares and flashbacks represent mother's pain and how it affects other people in society. He was drowned by her round, fleshy breast, he took her kid and dropped him in a corner of the room. His friend then rapes the mother, grabs her child, and leaves him on a dirt heap. He pulled on her breast till milk began to pour out. Remorsefully, the deed represents the pain that was imposed on mothers throughout the war in terms of physical abuse as they were made easy targets for manipulation and abuse. Similar patterns are revealed in another representation of parental trauma. A Bengali mother is raped and murdered by one of Ali's companions. Ali saves one unknown 'auntie' from the platform and she ends up as a victim—another poor mother. The same betrayal was implied by the way she looked. Every witness is emotionally and mentally impacted by the lost mothers, which calls into question the integrity of the perception of human solidarity. It is important to note that women, who are negatively affected throughout every social disaster, have never been made aware of or even recognised in the neighbourhood as the main sufferers. Therefore, a country with traumatised women is like a mental hospital with patients who are being treated for PTSD, and it takes decades for them to heal (Ataria 22). In this way, a mother's trauma produces further traumas that plague society.

As a result, trauma can be aptly described as a "mute memory" because it generally impacts every victim throughout the course of their lives, regardless of the shape it might assume (Caruth 2016). Political afflictions first affect and alter communal patterns in the maternal segment of society. Political ideologies with feeble foundations and unclear principles lead to national and worldwide catastrophes. More significant is the fact that women have historically been exposed to severe traumatic events despite being the true forerunners of cultural standards, civilization, and common conduct. *Noor*, who was born as a result of the transmission of trauma to the next generation, can be said to be a depiction of psychological pain, horrifying atrocities, and sexual harassment of mothers during the years of war.



With its spreading character and abnormalities, maternal trauma swallows interpersonal and social systems. In Noor, when a pattern emerges among the children in connection to their ancestors, the ability of trauma to be passed down from a mother to the following generation is clearly evident. Noor suffers emotionally as a result of Sajida's suffering because she internalises it. This chapter details her personal and family life, as well as her relationships with her children and other members of her family. A young mother named Sajida had endured trauma and hardships throughout her childhood. These life-altering experiences left a lasting effect on her, which was eventually passed on to her daughter Noor owing to the collective shared unconscious.

### **Transmissibility of Trauma**

The human body serves as the only place where one can fully comprehend the external world; it is both a thing and a source of knowledge. Awareness is intertwined with our bodily consciousness. This creates a complex pattern that permeates a person's preconscious state. Even before Sajida gives birth to her third child, she has a premonition that Noor will be exceptional, and over time, she learns that Noor bears memories of her mother's history. In her early years, Sajida, the person who witnessed it, implicitly experienced both the trauma of a natural calamity and the trauma of war. Her daughter received her possible outlook on the horrible occurrences in the shape of post-traumatic severe anxiety and concerns (Ataria, 2016). According to Merleau-Ponty's (2007) theory of expressivity, perception is always sustained in the mental flow of time. Therefore, Noor's paintings serve as proof that through the use of art, a new generation connects to its mother's passage and becomes creative in some way (Caruth 2016). A mother who has undergone severe stress over a prolonged period often administers disorders of severe stress to her child and a range of disturbances.

When Noor's drawings grow more analytical in their thought process, the resemblance of memories and concepts is apparent. The drawing she made of the dead fish in the silver nets that her mother observed in a past life creates a conduit for the mother's emotions and feelings to be transmitted to the daughter. Maternal transference is frequently linked to the repressed and unresolved psychological conflicts that the mother has previously experienced, according to the theory put out by Sigmund Freud in his book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Every dream is a link to a previous reality. Humankind was broken by the terrible consequences of war and its repercussions. Many people lost their lives during that time, and those who were fortunate enough to survive were forever plagued by memories (Ataria 31). Trauma constantly creeps in recollections and flashbacks from their past lives. Most impacted by them were mothers, and this in turn had an impact on their young.

### **Conclusions**

This study article has effectively demonstrated that Khan's Noor paints a realistic portrait of the effects of war, traumatic events, murderous acts, and horrors committed throughout wars. The book focuses on how maternal trauma can disorient many aspects of human life, eventually leading mothers to give birth to traumatised progenies. In addition, Khan's writing raises concerns about the necessity of wars, which tend to be carried out to further arbitrary political beliefs. In the end, Noor also proves that fiction has evolved into a technique of generally addressing what goes unstated.

Political issues, viewpoints, standards, and notably political constraints significantly impact community life as a whole. Any change in the political landscape could result in illnesses that have an equal impact on human existence. Conflicts, whether they be national or worldwide, primarily intended to demonstrate the power of thought, and hurt successive generations, particularly mothers. Most significantly, because wombs serve as an organ for reproduction, this painful experience is passed down through congenital sources. For example, recollections, and nightmares gradually get embedded in our daily behaviour, passive comprehension of society, and most importantly, expulsion, repressed memories, and mental nervousness are all examples of post-stress trauma behaviours and practices that become normalized. Wars are the cause of all these conditions. Khan's Noor skillfully expresses the vastness of traumatic exposures that shape the sufferers' reality. In particular, moms serve as transmitters of traumatic events to receptors (children or generations). Therefore, it is not shocking that this essay deals with the deadly realities of wars and the flimsy foundations of political opinions that shift human existence as a whole. Additionally, it brings up fresh angles and perspectives for the literary investigation of war and the pain it produces. This research paper also identifies the primary war victims, illustrates the effects of war, and demonstrates how mothers, in particular, the transmission of trauma, affects not just family and community existence in broad but also national life.

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