



A Psychoanalytical Study of Sorayya Khan's *Noor* With Reference to Freud's Traumatic Neurosis

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Abstract

This study examines the horrors of war and its impact on the major characters in Sorayya Khan's *Noor* by applying Freud's concept of traumatic neuroses, in which she states that in traumatic war neuroses, the ego defends itself against outer dangers, whereas in transference neuroses, the ego has its libido as its enemy. In this novel, she explores the history, anxiety, rape, violence, panic situations, mutilation, and repressed memories, all of which are unsettling and even painful for the characters. Those who were traumatized during the war sustained permanent injuries, which contributed to their postwar depression. This paper is also noteworthy because it demonstrates how depression transforms a man into an aberration. Not only that, but it has looked at what causes PTSD and other post-traumatic reactions, particularly some that have just recently been identified as psychosomatic diseases brought on by conflict. Using psychiatric intervention and neurotic anxiety brought on by certain traumatic situations, this article also assesses the characteristics of the chosen work, Sorayya Khan's *Noor*.

Key Words: traumatic neuroses, post-war Depression, anxiety, encounters

1. Introduction

This paper is based on the novel written by Sorayya Khan, a writer with Pakistani roots whose work is based on her experiences and recollections of Pakistan's sociopolitical confusions. Those with a vested interest are thus reminded of history. Khan, who weaves together the history of Pakistan's partition, demonstrates the numerous ways in which the people recall the past. The historical facts are accurate and based on the author's direct experience, but the author's imagination and exaggeration are evident in the details. Memories facilitate the transmission of history. There are hints of magical realism in Sorayya Khan's *Noor*, and *Noor*'s abnormality transports the reader into a world of imagination where he or she can imagine the incidents and feel the mutilation of the characters that were present during the partition of east and West Pakistan. Her paintings demonstrated her hidden talent. She portrays suppressed characters, such as Sajida and Ali, by utilizing her concealed abilities. Typically, *Noor*'s paintings evoke memories by illuminating the mysteries of war through her drawings. *Noor* was the secret of Sajida. She reveals the secret of the cyclone's bright light flashes and the death of Sorayya's parents and siblings as a result of the cyclone's eruption.

The novel begins with a discussion of violence, rape, destruction, and loss during wartime. Sorayya Khan's novel *Noor* contains rape scenes to illustrate the subjugation and deprivation of East Pakistani women during the War. During wartime, rape is easily comprehended and acknowledged as neither inevitable nor malleable. Instead, rape is viewed as a socially created and politically established involvement. By analyzing the rape and carnal assault of Bengali women as a significant military strategy, "*Noor*" demonstrates how rape during the East Pakistan war period was thoroughly experienced in order to eradicate a particular moral collection designed to motivate women for sexual pleasure. *Noor*'s drawing reveals the mysteries of Ali's wartime experiences, about which he never spoke and for which he repeatedly bathed in scalding water. Ali's behavior in the novel is indicative of his depression as a result of the war.

1.1. Research Gap

The novel *Noor* by Sorayya Khan has been analyzed by various critics from a variety of perspectives; however, this paper is analyzed from the perspective of Freud's post-traumatic stress disorder. Freud conceptualized a conflict between the peace ego and the war ego. Ali was changed when he returned from the war, and after nine months he contracted typhoid. Destruction, violence, death, and illness psychologically tormented him. Ali also described the beauty and fertility of East Pakistan's pre-war landscape, which was destroyed by the war.

1.2. Research Questions

- How did death, destruction, hunger, and poverty distort the memories of the novel's characters?
- How does *Noor* express repressed memories of traumatic war experiences?

2. Literature Review

The word 'trauma', like many other terms or ideas used in psychiatry and psychoanalysis, has a wide meaning when it comes to its application to psychic phenomena. An investigation of psychic trauma was one of Freud's primary concerns throughout his whole career as a psychoanalyst, from the time of his initial work in the field until the time of his last publications. Additional contributions were made by authors who came later. If the term

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“trauma” is used carelessly in modern times, as it is regularly used by everyone, then it may be synonymous with a wide range of descriptors, ranging from “upsetting” to “shattering.” When it is used in a more restricted meaning, it may be used to refer to an occurrence that has been important in the sense that it has altered the path that development has taken. Last but not least, the use of the word might be limited to the description of a particular psychological phenomenon. It is useful to provide some historical context in order to shed light on the particulars of this phenomenon. Freud’s first focus was in the genesis of hysteria, which led him to describe some occurrences as “psychical traumas” in his later work. As one definition puts it, a traumatic experience is “any experience that calls up distressing affects - such as those of fear, anxiety, shame, or physical pain.” This is a basic and comprehensive definition. Hysteria, he theorized, was brought on by “a number of partial traumas, part components of a single story of suffering” (Freud, & Breuer, 1893). Traumatic neurosis, he said, was brought on by a single major occurrence. Several “partial traumas,” he said, “part components of a single story of suffering,” were to blame for the hysteria.

When “...within a short period of time the mind is presented with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way” (Freud, 1917), he elaborated on his original idea that trauma occurred. The spirited language of libido theory was used to describe this. Freud developed the concept of the libido. He classified as traumatic any stimulation, internal or external, that was powerful enough to penetrate this barrier (Freud, 1920). This idea was defined with the central concept of the “stimulus barrier.” Therefore, the severity of a traumatic experience was no longer the only factor taken into account; other factors like the individual’s constitution, the developmental status of the psychic apparatus, and the prevailing desires and conflicts were also taken into account. Freud described trauma shortly afterwards as a “state of psychic helplessness,” which is a condition of helplessness that has been really experienced (as opposed to an expectation of danger or “signal anxiety”) (Freud, 1926). Freud further differentiated this kind of helplessness from what he called “signal anxiety.” Finally, he summarized the characteristics shared by most traumatic experiences, including the fact that they occur within the first five years of a person’s life, that they are forgotten entirely, and that they contain sexual or violent content. It was emphasized that there are two types of repercussions that might result from traumatic experiences: good and negative. The positive aspects were represented by things like efforts to recall or gain mastery, both of which developed into aspects of ego function and were seen as character logical tendencies. According to Freud (1939), unpleasant emotions were seen as protective avoidances that had the potential to develop into inhibitions and phobias with further exposure.

Later authors provided even more nuanced explanations of the concept of trauma. Furst (1967) came up with the concept of “strain trauma” to characterize the traumatic impact that might be brought on by the slow and steady buildup of irritating tensions over time. He compared “strain trauma” with “shock trauma,” in which the effect was the consequence of a single encounter and occurred when the child’s life was abruptly and forcefully impacted by reality (Kris, E., 1956). A notion that is analogous to strain trauma was referred to as “cumulative trauma” by Khan, (1963), who introduced the phrase.

This paper analyses Sorayya Khan’s ‘Noor’ through the lens of Freud’s concept of post-traumatic stress disorder. The novel opens with a discussion of destruction, mutilation, afflictions, pains, agony, and suffering. During East and West Pakistan’s wartime, Noor’s novel depicts how characters endure starvation, destruction, and rape. Both Sajida and Ali are unable to erase their memories. Noor, the daughter of Sajida, creates the paintings using colors and sketches that resemble and recall war situations.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a notion that has been used by other researchers. In their work “Harold Pinter: Traumatic Neuroses and Nervous Shock in *Ashes to Ashes*,” Vafa Nadernia, Ruzy Suliza Hashim, and Noraini Md. Yusof of Malaysia’s National University of Malaysia, Bangi, employed Freud’s concept of post-traumatic stress disorder. Researchers used Freud’s theory of PTSD to Harold Pinter’s play *Ashes to Ashes*. Pinter used interruptions between characters, both literal and metaphorical, for dramatic effect. Characters in his play are either physically or emotionally damaged, leading them to become despondent. The central drama here is *Ashes to Ashes*. While “an injured or outer physical wound” is the most common definition of trauma, it has also been narrowed down to include “Bodily piercing and cutting; morbid nervous conditions; mental distress; traumatic neuroses; nervous shock; death anxiety; and diseases of memory” (Waugh, 2006, p.498). According to Lenore Terr (“psychic trauma arises when a sudden, unexpected, devastating strong emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside”) (Terr & Kernberg, 1990), trauma is defined as a severe, emotional, and external storm. There are a number of traumatic experiences shown in the play, thus incorporating this idea is helpful.

Toyomi Goto and John P. Willson of Cleveland State University conducted a review of the evolution of the study of traumatic stress in Japan, from traumatic neuroses to post-traumatic stress disorder. The author of this report looked at research on PTSD conducted between the late 19th century and the current day. Traumatic stress disorders experienced by victims of war, bombings, and related events. How this tragedy has affected Japanese disaster victims emotionally in terms of their willingness to reach out to others for help and the strength of their social networks. Psychogenic causes of traumatic neuroses were more common among

Japanese troops who served in World War I (1915–1917). During this time, psychiatrists in Japan became more open to the idea that neurosis could have psychogenic roots and be treated through intrapsychic means. According to Laub and Podell (1995), one of the effects of trauma is a breakdown of trust within an external empathic dyad. According to these researchers, “the feeling of absence, of rapture, and of the loss of representation that essentially constitutes the traumatic experience all emerge from the real failure of the empathic dyad at the time of traumatization and the resulting failure to preserve an empathic tie even oneself” (Nader, 1999).

Freud distinguished between anxiety, fear (of something), and fright, and demonstrated that trauma is a form of fright in response to a risk, that the experience produces an embryonic anxiety state, automatic anxiety, and that understandings that are tolerated without the appropriate affect cannot be managed and will return in interferences and traumatic dreams, etc. (Ferenczi, Balint, & Mosbacher, 2018).

Asian scholar Bandana Chakraborty of Rajasthan School of Art, Jaipur, India, in his article titled “Topography of Loss: Homeland, History and Memory in Sorayya Khan’s Fiction,” analyzed three of Sorayya Khan’s novels—*Noor* (2003), *Five Queen’s Road* (2009), and *City of Spies* (2015)—in terms of the history and memory that Noor contracts with Bangladesh. After Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was deposed in a military coup led by General Zia ul Haque in 1977, the events chronicled in “Liberation War of 1971” and “The City of Spies” focus on what happened next in Pakistan. Examples of violent disruptions to the usual flow of life include the liberation of India, the Division, and the Bangladesh war, all of which must be followed by a “return” to normalcy before things can return to “normal.” The heroine of *Five Queen’s Road*, Dina Lal, is a Hindu woman living in India at the time of the 1947 Partition. It’s hard for Dina Lal to even consider taking a trip at this time (Chakraborty, 2017).

On a psychological level, *Sadia Sehole*, who analyzed *Noor* from the perspective of *Landscape: Psychology, Geographical, and Cultural Nexuses*, concludes that the abnormal daughter of Sajida brought Sajida and Ali’s past to light. Ali describes the geographical landscape as he comments on the beauty and fertility of a destroyed landscape (Sadia, 2014).

3. Research Methodology

This typically qualitative dissertation is based on Freud’s post-traumatic stress disorder critique. Freud distinguished between anxiety, fear (of something), and fright, and demonstrated that trauma is a condition of fright in response to a threat, that the understanding creates an embryonic anxiety state, automatic anxiety, and that experiences that are tolerated without the appropriate distress cannot be managed and will return in impositions and traumatic dreams, etc. An in-depth analysis or evaluation of the novel *Noor* by Sorayya Khan is based on the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971. In this novel, she examines the psychological effects of traumatic character disorder on the minds of the characters. *Noor*, the abnormal daughter of Sajida, revealed the traumatic effects through her drawings depicting war scenes. *Noor*’s crayon drawings of her father’s fishing boat crashing into the sand dunes and of fishing lines swimming and bending under *Noor*’s eyes bring Sajida’s history back to life. Khan’s narration utilizes the flashback technique. Ali built a home for his family that reflects Nanijan’s accusation of men’s enigmas; the bathroom has its back to Margalla Hill, and the bathroom window’s view of the mountain is encased in iron cages. For Nanijan Mountain, hills are appealing, but Ali associates hills with war.

4. Textual Analysis

There is no room for debate on the unfavorable nature of war. It is the most disastrous thing that could possibly happen to humanity. Death and devastation are left in its wake, along with murder and butchery, sickness and starvation, poverty and ruin. War has been a recurring phenomenon in the history of countries, as may be seen from even the most basic investigation into the annals of global history. There has never been a period in the history of the planet that has been untouched by the destruction caused by conflict. There were a variety of battles that took place, but the focus of this article is going to be on the civil war that took place in Pakistan and the consequences it had on the country. On March 25, 1971, the beginning of the civil war that pitted East Pakistan against West Pakistan took place. During a period of hostilities that began on December 3, 1971, India launched an invasion into East Pakistan. On December 16, 1971, West Pakistan capitulated and handed control of the country over to East Pakistan. The name Bangladesh was given to a brand new state that was added to the map of the world. During this conflict, approximately 3 million people lost their lives, 10 million people were forced to seek refuge, and 200,000 women were sexually assaulted. To paraphrase what Russell had to say about it: “War does not determine who is right; it only determines who is left.” War is war, and it has wreaked havoc on society. The effects of war are devastating and permeate every aspect of life, including the social, economic, and environmental spheres. Loss of human life and the psychological trauma of civilians are also significant aspects of war. Bangladesh was the first nation to secede from a post-colonial state because of cultural and linguistic pluralism-related conflicts. The prevailing notion in official Pakistani discourse was that Muslims in Bengal were not sufficiently pure due to their association with Hindus. This implies that Hindu influence, as

well as impure Muslims, must be eradicated. This conception of Bengal as a non-Muslim or Hindu-like other justifies the Pakistani army's use of violence. The people of East Pakistan were made to seem as if they were not really Pakistani or Muslim. The logic behind this portrayal was that if Bengalis were truly Pakistani and Muslim, they would have no cause to demand their own nation.

In order to investigate how the Bangladeshi independence struggle impacted Pakistan, the researcher looked into Sorayya Khan's book *Noor*. The story of *Noor* revolves on a family living in Islamabad. The family consists of a father named Ali, a mother named Nanijan, an adopted daughter named Sajida and her husband Hussein, and three children, the youngest of who is named Noor. During the battle for Bangladesh's independence in 1971, Ali served his country in the Pakistani military. Sajida, then five years old and abandoned, was found by him when he was serving in Bangladesh, and he decided to adopt her as his own daughter. Noor suffers from an impairment that has yet to be identified, despite her frequent trips to the doctor for evaluation. The family came to the conclusion that sketching is the activity in which Noor enjoys the greatest peace and quiet. She conjures up pictures of Sajida's youth as well as Ali's time spent serving as a soldier in East Pakistan when she first starts to draw her fantasies. Because she was brought to Pakistan when she was only five or six years old, Sajida does not remember her entire past in its entirety. Ali, on the other hand, has never spoken about his time in the war and has made an effort to forget about it in order to put some distance between himself and his past. The effort to make East Pakistan "Pakistani" by using force did not succeed in promoting unity; rather, it increased the desire of East Pakistan to break away from Pakistan. This irony is not lost on the reader throughout the story and is brought up in a frank exchange between Ali and his grandson Adel:

"What did you do there?"

"Oh, lots of things. We tried to keep the enemy behind our lines."

"The area we occupied, I mean."

"How can you occupy your own country?" Adel asked.

"What were you doing there, anyway?"

"Serving our country."

"But they didn't want your help."

"Right," Ali said quietly." (200).

Adel is unaware of the tone of defeat in Ali's voice, which is in a state of turmoil. Not only characters like Ali who have gone to war and observed or perpetrated horrible things themselves must carry the awful weight of the unsaid in order to do so. Sajida still suffers from the traumatic experience of having her little brother torn from her arms during the storm that occurred in 1970, which resulted in her being an orphan prior to the civil war. All of the characters in the novel are affected by war. The only thing that war has ever brought is pain and suffering. It left a mark on each individual's memory. Children lost their parents and homes, and men and women were brutally murdered and raped, respectively. And throughout their entire lives, they experience the same pain and misery of war. She reveals her mother's and grandfather's pasts. Though Noor did not participate in the war, she reveals its secrets through her instincts and biological memory. Ali believed that his past, which he had locked away in his mind's cabinet, had arrived when Noor began to draw a war scene in different colors. She reminded him of the traumatic circumstances he encountered during the war.

In the novel, Ali's memories are presented in various ways. Ali not only refused to recall anything, but also, following his return from the war, he locked himself in the shower and repeatedly submerged his body in searing hot water. He did this to rid himself of the memories he had during the war and to distance himself from the past. When he immerses his body in water, he erases and stores memories in a different part of his brain.

"[H]e considered the order he'd made inside his head. He imagined his story, the sum of horrible details, so neatly stored away, he'd done away with any reason to retrieve it. Ever.

And that was how Ali planned to return to life". (77)

Ali must draw a line between what he has done and seen and his current self to return to life. As he distances himself from the past and what he has witnessed, it appears that he is not engaging with the instances in which he may be more negatively implicated. Ali is prompted by Noor's photographs to recognize the futility of his attempts to separate himself from the past. Ali realizes that Noor's paintings can reveal the past and that many family secrets will be revealed as a result. The narratives are more explicit and horrifying than what he recalls from the novel's beginning.

"We washed her wounds, I picked maggots from them, first with my fingers and then with tweezers. [...] Even after she died, her wounds oozed" (154), and "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. [...] I straddled her. She was warm and wet" (183).

These recollections of Ali demonstrate the horrors of war. The scene of women being raped reveals their helplessness and the brutality of war. Noor's drawings depict both the horrors of war and Ali and Sajida's past secrets. Nanijan echoed Ali's sentiments, "War is War," when she and Sajida speculated about Ali's war experiences as:

"People die. That's what happens in war." (161)

It is as if declaring that war is war can provide cover from what occurred, or how Ali contributed to the 1971 violence. His attempted justification for his part in the war is articulated to Nanijan with

"I don't do anything to them that they didn't do to us first" (176), and then "[W]e were fighting for our lives. Not for you. Or this country. For ourselves" (177).

In his justifications, Ali invokes survival and retaliation, two of the official Pakistani government's justifications for the war. Noor's drawing challenges these attempts at deferral, justification, and understatement of the war's violence, as it depicts moments that Ali has omitted from his narrative.

Sajida started to dig up her memories in order to figure out how she ended up in Islamabad. Her recollections are sketchy, but she does remember that her family was killed in a cyclone in 1970, that she was transported to a relief camp by charity workers, and that she was discovered by Ali in East Pakistan. When Sajida and Ali eventually get down to talking about Ali's time in the military, he talks about a period that neither of them had any prior knowledge of until this point in the conversation. According to this new scenario, Ali and other troops opened fire on a gathering of Bengali villagers near a body pit when a mud storm was raging. Sajida was among those who were targeted by the gunfire. Finally, after hearing Ali's story, she realizes that the

"story of her beginning [...] was different from the one she'd carried with her since she was the girl of five and six" (254).

Held within this realization is another, that even if Ali had not found her by the side of the road, they "would have been forever joined by a pit of mud [...] Ali, her father, might once have lifted his rifle and blindly aimed in a torrent of rain and rising waves of heated fog- and shot her dead"(254-5).

As a result, when Sajida recognizes herself in Ali's account of opening fire on civilians, the novel presents a narrative in which victim stories and perpetrator stories intersect for the first time. This moment occurs at the moment when the novel's protagonist, Ali, opens fire on civilians. Ali's desire to abandon the past caused Sajida to have a knowledge gap, which might show the painful nature of that event; as a result, we observe the discrepancy between Ali and Sajida's attitude to the conflict. Gabriele Schwab has argued in favor of trauma discourses by pointing out that:

"Look at the dynamic between victims and perpetrators and see that both of them are suffering from the psychic deformations of violent histories, albeit in different ways and with different responsibilities"

His relationship is introduced in the insightful dialogue that takes place between Ali and Sajida, which also illustrates the different ways in which both characters reacted to the terrible events in their history. In Sajida, there is a void that can only be explained by the war. Ali, on the other hand, has made an effort to forget about the conflict and go on with his life. When Ali talks about conflict, his chin begins to shake. On the other side, Sajida comes to the realization that her story is not what she had been led to think, and Ali comes to terms with the gravity of what he had done and of what he had been a part of. During the month of November in 1970, a storm that hit East Pakistan was responsible for the deaths of millions of people. In the water storm that struck East Pakistan, Sajida's family and millions of other people lost their lives. Sajida's family and millions of other people also lost their lives in this disaster. The "Water Wall" established a physical barrier between Sajida and her family. Ali was a soldier for the west Pakistani army. He mercilessly murdered men and raped numerous women, although he has no idea how many people he killed or injured. Sajida and Ali's romance was born in the middle of the terrible war conditions. Ali was a soldier for the west Pakistani army.

"But exposing it to Sajida made it clear: what he had done, what he had seen, what had, in fact, been the war, would go on happening inside him for as long as he lived". (251)

Ali accepts that the history of violence continues to exist within the perpetrators of violence; he gets at this conclusion by narrating his personal experiences and emotions of guilt; Ali acknowledges that the past of violence continues to exist within the perpetrators of violence. Violence may be found all around the globe when there is conflict. The connection between Ali and Sajida, who are, respectively, a perpetrator and a victim, reveals that the impacts of war are personal and experienced within the context of the family. The war between Pakistan and Bangladesh is not only mirrored inside the family, but its impacts are also felt within the family. Both of these things are connected to one another.

5. Conclusion

Briefly, war is always ugly. It only generated violence and eroded the happiness of every individual. On account of the war, nations separated, but these divisions left a mark on the hearts of individuals. Children and men were brutally murdered, while women were raped, tortured, and abused. War is never the answer to a problem. Even though we cannot undo the past, most intimate relationships are entangled with violent pasts and futures. Instead than focusing on what was lost and reinterpreting it as acts of heroism, the book encourages the reader to come to grips with the brutal origins of the nation. The logic of split clearly had a role in the violence in Bangladesh. This is yet another example of how violence has been used to bring Pakistan into being.

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