

Unpacking Trauma: An Analysis of Dastaan's Portrayal of Trauma, Resilience and Gendered Violence

* Dr Sheeba Parveen

Assistant Professor

Department of English

RBD Mahila Mahavidyalaya Bijnor

Abstract: *Pakistani television drama Dastaan, (2010), is based on Razia Butt's novel Bano and it has been successful in providing a very heart-rending depiction of the Indian Partition (1947). Dastaan focuses on the effects of Indian Partition on individuals, particularly women. This research paper is an attempt to examine and analyse the drama through the lens of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory and postcolonial theory. This study helps to explore how historical and structural violence, trauma, displacement, memory, and gendered suffering are represented. The protagonist of the drama is Bano who becomes an epitome of physical and psychological scars left on human psyche by the Indian Partition, embodying the existential crisis and fragmented identity of a postcolonial subject. By analysing and examining the narrative structure, character development and cinematic techniques, this paper investigates trauma as an "unclaimed experience". Additionally, this paper also helps to interrogate how the drama Dastaan represents memory and collective trauma. It also reflects upon the long-lasting and deep impact of colonial violence on national and personal identities. Ultimately, this study challenges dominant historical discourses on the Indian Partition and reconstructs silenced narratives. This paper also investigated how shift from text to screen results in narrative restructuring and provide new perspectives on Partition trauma through visuals non-linear storytelling and dialogues highlighting how reinterpretation of fictionalized and historical accounts of Partition by showrunners and filmmakers often modify character arcs, visual aesthetics, and emotional depth to suit cinematic storytelling.*

Keywords: *Memory, Trauma, Violence, History, Gender, Identity, visual aesthetics.*

Introduction

The television drama *Daastaan* stands as a landmark in the television history, not only for its emotional impact and compelling narrative but also for its representation and bold engagement with the harrowing and traumatic history of the Indian Partition. It is based on Razia Butt's novel *Bano*, the drama was directed by Haissam Hussain

and adapted for the screen by writer Samira Fazal. With its thematic complexity, powerful performances and evocative direction, *Daastaan* carved a niche in contemporary South Asian media by revisiting the traumatic events of Indian Partition through a personal and gendered lens.

Dastaan is set against the backdrop of British India's final years, and traces the life of Bano, a young Muslim woman from Ludhiana, whose dreams of nationhood, love, and belonging are shattered by the disillusionment and violence of the Indian Partition. The drama portrays the physical and psychological suffering faced by women during the historical rupture through Bano's journey—from her idyllic pre-Partition experience to her brutal experiences during her migration, and ultimately her traumatic life in the newly formed Pakistan. Her story becomes a microcosm of fractured identity and nation's harrowing experience and exposes the gendered nature of collective violence by challenging sanitized nationalist narratives.

What makes Dastaan different from conventional historical dramas is its deliberate focus on memory, trauma and the human cost of political upheaval. The drama not only recounts historical events but evokes their lingering effect on individual lives, especially those women, who have often been neglected and marginalized in official histories. Bano's journey from an idealistic girl envisioning a free Pakistan to a disillusioned survivor of its violent consequences is emblematic of the complex aftermath of harrowing independence, where promises of liberation drowned in bloodshed, chaos, betrayal, and deafening silence. The narrative and visual techniques in the drama such as symbolic imagery, flashbacks, and emotional realism, enhances its

historical authenticity and psychological depth. *Daastaan* makes viewers to re-examine and critically re-evaluate the foundational trauma of South Asia with critical insight and empathy by dramatizing the trauma and pain of Indian holocaust through a personal narrative. Dastaan merges visual representation with, literary storytelling. Razia Butt's novel *Bano* has successfully been transformed into a potent cultural text that continues to engage contemporary audiences. The drama is relevant not merely as a great piece of entertainment but also as a powerful critique and commentary on identity, nationalism and the enduring silences that persist in postcolonial memory.

Razia Butt (1924–2012) Stands as a seminal figure in the literary canon of twentieth-century Urdu literature. She is recognized for her significant contribution in shaping popular fiction and the realistic portrayal of women's lives in South Asian culture. She was born in British India and later settled in Pakistan after Partition. She launched her literary journey as a writer in the 1940s and soon rose to prominence for her emotional depth, accessible storytelling, and thematic resonance with a broad audience. She was successful in connecting a wide range of readers with the themes of her literary works. Over the decades, she wrote over fifty novels and numerous short stories, several of her works were adapted for film, radio and television, which indicates her mass appeal, versatility of her storytelling and narrative

adaptability. Razia Butt's fiction works are often situated at the crossroads of national and personal upheavals. While her narratives often center on romantic and domestic themes, they also subtly weave in broader socio-political contexts, including issues of Partition trauma, gender disparity and class division. In her novels such as *Bano*, *Saiqa* and *Naila*, Butt has crafted emotionally nuanced and complex female protagonists who boldly negotiate societal constraints and often embodying resilience and showcasing rebellion in the face of oppression. Her portrayal of women characters as both victims and catalysts for change has led critics to recognise her as a trailblazing voice in fostering and shaping feminist consciousness within the popular literary landscape of Pakistan.

Though she is labelled as a popular novelist, Razia Butt's literary works warrant critical engagement for their representation of shifting gender norms, subtle reflection of cultural values, and the construction national identity. Her storytelling and narrative style, often marked by emotional intensity and melodrama, not only entertains but also offer a mirror to the transformations within Pakistani society during post-independence era. In recent scholarly discourse, Butt's literary works have been successful in gaining renewed attention and resurgence in academic interest particularly for its intersection with feminist critique, trauma studies and postcolonial theory that reflects upon

her relevance beyond the domain of popular literature.

The Indian Partition in 1947 stands as one of the most harrowing, violent and traumatic events in the history of South Asia, marking not merely a geopolitical division of land, but also the rupture of communities, identities and historical communities. With over a million lives lost and millions displaced, the psychological and emotional aftermath of this cataclysm continues to reverberate across successive generations. The intersection of memory, trauma, and gender is central to the discourse on Indian Partition. It is a triadic framework that showcases the deep wounds left on both the individual psyches and collective consciousness. Partition memory extends beyond the mere recounting of historical facts but it is shaped by cultural representations, personal storytelling and oral histories that serve to address the gaps left by official historical narratives. These memories and recollections are often non-linear and fragmented marked by erasures and silences. Scholars such as Ritu Menon and Urvashi Butalia have written on how women's issues and voices were systematically marginalised even though they bore the brunt of partition violence in deeply gendered ways. Women's bodies turned into battlegrounds of nationalistic and communal ideologies and rape, forced conversions, abduction and honor killings were employed as instruments of taking revenge and communal retaliation.

Theoretical framework of trauma particularly as articulated by Cathy Caruth, offers a powerful lens to examine the psychological ramifications and aftershocks of violence. According to Caruth trauma is not fully experienced or comprehended at the moment but recurs through repetitive and often involuntary ways, that disrupts one's sense of self perception, time, and narrative coherence. In the context of Partition, trauma is manifested and evidenced not merely in the survivors' fractured identities but also in the transgenerational transmission of unresolved grief, pain, dislocation and silence. The inability to fully express or articulate the traumatic experience of Partition results in a persistent state of haunting, where memory plays a dual role as it becomes a source of identity and a site of ongoing psychic distress.

The traumatic experiences of Partition, when examined through a gendered lens, reveal additional layers of complexity. women were victims of the holocaust but they were not merely passive culprits of trauma but became active bearers of trauma who were expected to be silent about whatever they suffered, to maintain family honor or even sacrifice themselves for the nation. Menon and Bhasin in their book *Border and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* remarks about women, "We saw many who had been raped and disfigured, their faces and breasts scarred, and then abandoned They had tooth marks all over them. Their families said, 'How can we keep them

now? Better that they are dead.' Many of them were so young-18, 15, 14 years old- what remained of them now? Their character was now spoilt. One had been raped by ten or more men- her father burnt her." (Menon and Bhasin, 2004). Under the guise of national rehabilitation, the state reinforced patriarchal norms in the name of 'recovering' abducted women, often without giving any importance to their desires or agency. Through literature and visual media, such as the drama 'Dastaan' female characters have become embodiment of the contradictions of resistance, victimhood and freedom.

Waris Shah, I call out to you today rise from your grave

.....
A million daughters weep today and look at you for solace

Rise O beloved of the aggrieved just look at your Punjab

Today corps haunts the woods, Chenab overflows with blood

....."

-Amrita Pritam

---Translated from the Punjabi by Nirupama Dutt (Dutt, Scroll.in. 14 August 2017)

As a cultural and psychological phenomenon, trauma has always been the topic of extensive theoretical investigation and exploration across various disciplines such as history, psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology and literary studies. Trauma theories often revolve around how

communities and individuals process, remember, and narrate such experiences that are disturbing or overwhelming to the psyche. This analysis focuses on major thinkers and their key contributions in giving shape to our understanding of psychological mechanism, trauma and memory, underlying their interrelation.....

Theorist	Key Terms/Concepts	Theory Summary
Sigmund Freud	—	Psychoanalytic Theory of Trauma: Sigmund Freud's work laid the foundation for understanding trauma. It suggested that traumatic and harrowing experiences, especially sexual assault, can often be repressed but later surface as symptoms. He emphasized upon the significant role of the "protective shield" against the concept of "intrusive past".
Cathy Caruth	—	Unclaimed Experience: Cathy Caruth has defined trauma as an overwhelming experience, not fully integrated into consciousness, that leads to repetitive or delayed effects like hallucinations. She has reflected upon the paradoxical nature of trauma, where the event is both registered and bypassed by human consciousness.
Judith Herman	—	Complex Trauma: Herman emphasizes on the impact of long term and interpersonal trauma, such as childhood abuse, where individuals feel unable to escape from the traumatic situation. She reflects upon the inadequacy of PTSD criteria to capture the depth of complex trauma and introduces a new term for the constellation and description of symptoms.
Pierre Janet	—	Dissociation: Pierre Janet, a contemporary of Sigmund Freud, introduced the concept of dissociation as a response to trauma, where traumatic memories are separated from conscious awareness.
Dominick LaCapra	—	History, Trauma, and Representation: LaCapra explores the relationship between trauma, historical events, and how trauma is represented in culture and literature.

Ruth Leys	—	Genealogy of Trauma: Leys has reflected upon the historical development of trauma theory, tracking its origins in the study of hysteria and how it expanded into a broader field of study.
Michael Rothberg	—	Multidirectional Memory: Rothberg investigates how the memory of the Holocaust and traumatic events is shaped by social context and historical events .
Kali Tal	—	Trauma and Literature: Tal has reflected upon how literature can be used and help to understand and represent the experiences of trauma.
Bessel van der Kolk & Onno van der Hart	—	Intrusive Past and Flexibility of Memory: Van der Kolk and van der Hart has introduced the concept of the "intrusive past" and how traumatic events and memories can disrupt the normal adaptability and flexibility of memory.
Ankersmit	—	Historical Trauma: Ankersmit's theory investigates the role of historical consciousness in giving shape to collective trauma, arguing that only those events can be considered traumatic which are capable of stimulating historical consciousness.

Through the exploration of his ideas on *the unconscious*, *repression* and *the return of the repressed* Sigmund Freud influenced ideas and significantly contributed to the development of modern trauma theory. In texts such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud argues that traumatic experiences disturb the normal functioning of the psyche that leads to the compulsion of repetition—where individuals re-enact and relive the experiences of the trauma unconsciously. He tried to examine how trauma can not be recalled directly instead it is manifested through symptoms, dreams or disrupted narratives. Freud's theories and ideas helped in providing a

psychoanalytic lens for understanding trauma as something that is not easily integrated into the conscious awareness.

Cathy Caruth, who is considered as one of the most influential voices in the field of trauma studies, has drawn upon literary theory and Freud to conceptualize trauma as an event that resist narration and escapes full comprehension. In her renowned work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is something that is experienced belatedly and it is not fully comprehended at the time of occurrence. But according to Caruth trauma recurs later in the form of flashbacks or

haunting memories. Caruth argues that trauma pauses challenges to the very possibility of linear storytelling and makes it very difficult for survivors of trauma to revive or construct a coherent account of whatever they suffered from or went through. Caruth does not consider trauma as merely a personal affliction but as a rupture that also impacts culture, history and language.

While Cathy Caruth has reflected upon the inexpressibility of trauma, Dominick LaCapra has offered a more historically grounded approach towards the concept of trauma. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), LaCapra has distinguished between *historical trauma* and *structural trauma*. According to him *structural trauma* is inherent in the human condition, and *historical trauma*, is tied to specific circumstances and events such as colonial violence or the Holocaust. LaCapra has introduced the concepts of *working through* or *acting out* as two different ways of dealing with trauma. He argues that though Acting out is the compulsive recurrence of trauma, working through involves a critical engagement with the past, resulting in ethical understanding and healing. Ethical responsibility and the significance of contextualization in trauma narratives have been emphasised by the works of LaCapra.

Bessel van der Kolk has explored trauma from a neuroscientific and clinical perspective in *The Body Keeps the Score* (2014). He argues that trauma affects the brain, body, and nervous system

and trauma is stored not merely in the brain but also in the body, where it manifests itself in dissociation, physical symptoms and heightened stress responses. Van der Kolk's research findings helps to understand that traditional talk therapy is often not sufficient and trauma healing may also require some body-oriented interventions like somatic therapies, yoga and EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing). His research focuses on bridging the gap between clinical practice and psychological theory giving importance to trauma's physiological imprint.

Earlier than Freud, French psychologist Pierre Janet investigated trauma from a scientific perspective and proposed one of the first scientific theories of trauma. He proposed that traumatic experiences lead to dissociation—a splitting of the self and make an individual unable to integrate the event into normal memory. According to Janet, trauma results in the fragmented consciousness of the individual, resulting in a state where individuals fail to access parts of the traumatic memory to conscious recall. The concept of *subconscious fixed ideas*, given by Janet laid the foundation for the better understanding of post-traumatic stress as a disorder of memory integration.

Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) focuses on the political and social perspectives of trauma, particularly in cases of war, domestic abuse and sexual violence. She has outlined a three-stage structure of trauma recovery: **safety**,

remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life. According to Herman trauma is a concept that cannot be understood in isolation from social relationships and power structures. Her research explores how systems of oppression such as war, patriarchy, and authoritarianism compound the effects of individual trauma.

Thinking beyond the boundaries individual psychology, Aleida and Jan Assmann's research on cultural memory investigates how communities remember and transmit traumatic histories. They have differentiated between *cultural memory*, maintained through text, rituals and monuments and *communicative memory*, maintained through personal and oral transmission. The framework given by Aleida and Jan Assmann enhances understanding of how historical traumas such as Partition, genocide or colonization are embedded in the collective consciousness, shaping group identities.

Through different theories of trauma and memory, theorists have been successful in offering various perspectives on how societies and individuals respond to overwhelming experiences. These perspectives are diverse but interconnected with each other. From Sigmund Freud's unconscious recurrence and Cathy Caruth's literary reframing of trauma to Herman's feminist views and van der Kolk's neuroscientific research, these theorists have collectively investigated that trauma does not simply mean an event of the past, but it is an enduring presence that distorts identity, memory

and language. All such theories of trauma and memory allow clinicians, scholars, and cultural critics to have better understanding of the complexities of trauma, suffering and the possibilities of representation and healing. Simplistic nationalist histories are challenged by the complex relationship and entanglement of trauma, memory and gendered violence in the context of Partition. Critical engagement with these silenced testimonies and their narratives, help to recover hidden histories and make individuals to confront the enduring impact of collective trauma in giving shape to gender politics and cultural memory.

In *Daastaan*, memory is not simply the recollection of past events but appears in the form of disjointed and involuntary flashes that reflects traumatic memory. Bano's altered sense of self and fragmented recollections reflects her traumatic experiences. The complex traumatic experiences and dislocation are presented through narrative structure, avoiding chronological order. Bano's memories fail to fully assimilate into her consciousness, but haunts her present, revealing how traumatic experiences distorts temporal sense of continuity and identity. The drama has offered the deep psychological impact of communal violence on women, particularly through the perspective of sexual violence. Bano's abduction and repeated assaults work as defining markers of her post-traumatic situation. The state that she once idealized, her estrangement from the same

state and her community shows the enduring mental displacement followed by physical violence. Her trauma is further compounded by the lack of support systems echoing theories that focus on how traumatic experiences isolate the victim from recognition and communal empathy.

The drama presents how women's bodies were violated and politicised during Partition times. Bano's suffering become the testimony of how women were used as tools in the name of communal vendettas, their bodies had to bear the burden of national and masculine pride. Bano's social rejection after her return underscores the patriarchal structure that punish the victim but not the perpetrator. Her story represents the silence of thousands of women who endured trauma and similar fates but couldn't give voice to that and remained invisible in the dominant historical record.

If analysed from a postcolonial perspective, *Daastaan* critiques the idealism that is associated with the creation of Pakistan. Bano, once so zealous in her nationalist beliefs, feels betrayed and becomes disillusioned because all the promises of freedom collapse under the weight of violence and betrayal. This aligns with the postcolonial critiques that question the morality and legitimacy of national projects born from trauma and traumatic experiences. Bano's realization that the creation of new nation is not what she imagined offers a powerful commentary on the failures of postcolonial governance in

giving protection and inclusion to all its citizens. The recurring motifs and drama's non-linear narrative presents the structure of traumatic experience, as given in trauma studies. *Daastaan* does not present a straightforward plot and often circles back to traumatic events, for suggesting the compulsion to recur and re-experience. The audience is intentionally drawn into Bano's disillusioned and distorted world, where the past invades the present and leaves no room for closure. This style of narration reinforces the enduring nature of psychological wounds which are inflicted by historical violence. Analyzing *Daastaan* through the theoretical perspective of psychology, trauma and memory given by theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Bessel van der Kolk and Judith Herman reflects upon how the drama transcends its historical setting and presents a profound analysis of the human psyche under extreme suffering and distress.

Caruth's theory of trauma, specially its belated nature and the failure of direct representation, plays key role in understanding Bano's psychological situation and fragmentation. In *Daastaan*, Bano fails to grasp the magnitude of trauma, suffering and violence she endures. She faces abduction, sexual assault, and betrayal by the nation, she once idealized so much that it was beyond her imagination to witness such misery and traumatic experiences. According to Caruthian concept of trauma Bano's trauma recurs

and resurfaces later through her disoriented behaviour, flashbacks and emotional breakdowns that suggests the return of the repressed or unconscious. Compulsive repetition of trauma is reflected through patriotic slogans, uttered repeatedly by Bano long after the state has abandoned her. The disjunction between reality and Bano's memories underscores Caruthian notion of trauma that it is not fully realised at the moment of occurrence but recurs in haunting and fragmented forms.

Bano's post-trauma behaviors represent Sigmund Freud's idea of *repetition compulsion*, when trauma victims unconsciously relive haunting and fragmented aspects of their trauma. When Bano returns Pakistan after being freed from her captivity, she finds herself emotionally displaced, alienated and stigmatized. Bano's continued devotion to a nationalist ideal and its failure reflects Freud's concept that with the aspirations of mastering trauma, the traumatized subject replays it. In *Daastaan*'s later episodes the obsessive and erratic speech patterns, adopted by Bano offers an insight into how she is caught in a loop where the repressed and unconscious, doesn't allow the individual to assimilate the traumatic past, echoing Freud's idea that ego's narrative coherence is disrupted by trauma.

Van der Kolk's neurobiological approach to the concept of trauma plays significant role in the field of trauma theories. The assertion given by Van der Kolk that "the body keeps the score," provides a

very important framework for assessing Bano's post traumatic emotional and physical responses. Bano's trauma is expressed through her bodily expressions: anxiety, trembling, dissociation and failure to engage in normal social behaviour and interactions. Even though Bano is physically safe, her body still continues to register fear and danger, that reflects van der Kolk's concept that trauma and stigma are stored somatically. Bano's withdrawal from social engagement and relationships can be analysed as the result of an overactive stress response system, which reinforce the idea that trauma is embedded in the nervous system.

Through the concept of *Trauma and Recovery*, Judith Herman has emphasized the gendered and political aspects of trauma, particularly in the context of patriarchal violence and war. *Daastaan* starkly illustrates all such themes through Bano's journey as a victim whose body becomes a site of national vendetta and violence during Partition. Sexual assault and abduction, faced by Bano are not random acts of violence but politically charged assaults to shame and conquer the opposing community. Trauma recovery model given by Judith including reconnection, safety and remembrance is disrupted in the case of Bano as she fails to find any safe space or community that allows her to recover. Religious communities, state and even families fail to understand her suffering and trauma, reflecting Herman's idea that trauma is compounded by societal denial.

To understand Bano's Psychological state, LaCapra's distinction between "working through" and "acting out" offers another insight through which her psychological state can be analysed. Throughout her journey, Bano remains trapped in a cycle of *acting out* and fails to come out of her trauma or form a coherent narrative of recovery or healing. Her identity as a victim of trauma is not transformed but preserved, suggesting that the socio-political situation does not allow her "*working through*". The trauma of Partition, as presented in the drama, is not merely a part of history but a lingering force that gives shape to Bano's fractured identity even after the violence has subsided.

Bano's character can also be investigated through the lens of Pierre Janet's early work on dissociation and trauma. She remains psychologically disconnected from her identity, emotions and surroundings that exhibits dissociation. When she confronts her past, she either reacts with intense distress or shuts down emotionally. This represents Janet's idea that the psyche's capacity for integration is overwhelmed by trauma that leads to fragmented identity and memory. In *Daastaan*, Bano exists between two selves: the optimistic person who believed in the idea of creating Pakistan, and the disillusioned survivor who failed to find a home in the very nation she once dreamt and longed for.....

Daastaan cannot just be called a historical drama but a narrative which is textured and narrates existential crisis and psychological ruin deeply rooted in one of the most tumultuous events of the twentieth century. By the application of theoretical perspectives from Caruth, Freud, Herman, van der Kolk, LaCapra, and Janet, *Daastaan* emerges as a layered study of how trauma can distort identity, time and memory, specially in case of women. Through Bano's character the author has successfully illustrated that trauma is not merely a closed chapter but an unresolved, ongoing process that impacts not only the mind but also body, and soul. *Daastaan* has become a powerful cultural text in making viewers feel the enduring wounds of history and witness history. In the aftermath of collective trauma *Daastaan* is a nuanced portrayal of the human psyche. Gendered trauma has often been sidelined by dominant narratives but this drama challenges such narratives by focusing on a woman's trauma and experiences. *Daastaan* offers a compelling critique of contemporary and historical silence through its narration of disillusionment with the concept of nationhood, fragmented memory, and a stark depiction of gender-based violence. This drama compels viewers to ponder over the cost of national identities, forged in blood and the need of acknowledging the deep scars which are left on individual lives.

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*Corresponding Author: Dr Sheeba Parveen

E-mail: speliterature@gmail.com

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