



## Depiction of Colonial Trauma in Shahnaz Bashir's collection of short stories *Scattered Souls*

Masab Zeb Khattak <sup>1</sup>, Hamza Khattak <sup>2\*</sup>

### Abstract

This research article aims to analyze "Scattered Souls," a collection of short stories by Shahnaz Bashir, through the lens of Frantz Omar Fanon's theory of colonial trauma as presented in his book "The Wretched of the Earth." The paper's primary objective is to explore the portrayal of trauma within the short stories of the book "Scattered Souls." Additionally, the article delves into how colonial violence profoundly impacts the lives of innocent Kashmiri individuals and serves as a catalyst for trauma. Notably, characters like Sakeena, who exhibit symptoms resembling post-traumatic stress disorder, are highlighted to illustrate the consequences of colonial violence on the Kashmiri population. Furthermore, the paper examines the broader context of the short story collection and other literary works that echo the struggles experienced by Kashmiris. Ultimately, the research concludes that trauma is an inevitable outcome of the colonial violence inflicted by the colonizers upon the colonized. Addressing and healing colonial trauma necessitates the decolonization of Kashmir, as the region remains under colonization. The lingering effects of the trauma above are evident among native Kashmiris. The research follows a qualitative approach, specifically employing a naturalistic inquiry methodology that seeks to investigate social phenomena within their natural settings deeply.

**Keywords:** Colonial trauma, Kashmir, decolonization, trauma necessitates, post-traumatic stress disorder.

### Introduction

This study aims to analyze the portrayal of colonial trauma in "Scattered Souls" by Shahnaz Bashir, which endeavors to give a voice to the marginalized inhabitants of Kashmir living under the prolonged constraints of curfews, violence, and occupation since the 1990s.

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer in English at Degree College KDA Kohat HED KPK

<sup>2</sup> Lecturer in English Edwards College Peshawar

\*Corresponding author's E-mail: hamxakt4@gmail.com

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Employing the framework of literary trauma theory, the research seeks to identify "Trauma texts," which are characterized by intertextuality, fragmentation, and language manipulation to convey meanings shaped by profound traumatic stress.

Trauma theories, encompassing the experiences and consequences of trauma, gained prominence in the mid-nineteenth century through the studies of notable theorists like Sigmund Freud, Breuer, Pierre Janet, and Oppenheim et al. Trauma is delineated as the emotional response to calamities, catastrophes, accidents, or natural disasters. The repercussions of trauma typically manifest after the event itself, often characterized by shock and denial.

Frantz Omar Fanon, renowned for works like "Black Skin, White Masks" (1952) and "The Wretched of the Earth" (1961), offers a sociological perspective on trauma, contending that colonization affected not just individuals, but the collective psyche of the colonized, leading to what he terms "colonial trauma." He examines trauma from a sociological lens and posits that it is an outcome of colonial violence, with 'colonial aggression' reverberating within the natives as terror. Hailing from a colonized state, Fanon conveys the peripheral or marginalized viewpoint of the colonized, highlighting how colonialism instills a sense of evil and subhuman status, causing constant questioning of reality and precipitating 'psychoses,' including depression and anxiety disorders. Fanon contends that addressing the issue of "psychic trauma" in colonies necessitates an exploration of the experience of colonization itself. His theory integrates the effects of violent oppression, and he suggests that true healing of this trauma requires a comprehensive 'decolonization of the colonized.'

In the fifth chapter of "The Wretched of the Earth," Fanon underscores that violence becomes the means to reclaim precolonial history and identity for the colonized, asserting its indispensability for effective decolonization. These themes of violent oppression and trauma are intricately woven into Kashmiri literature, particularly in the interconnected stories of native Kashmiris depicted in "Scattered Souls." The research adopts a qualitative approach, relying on meticulous textual analysis. The central text is scrutinized through the lens of Frantz Fanon's theory of colonial trauma as elucidated in his work "The Wretched of the Earth."

The region of Kashmir has remained a contentious subject of dispute between India and Pakistan since 1947. This prolonged conflict has resulted in the tragic loss of innocent lives among the Kashmiri populace. The people of Kashmir have borne significant suffering due to this ongoing

occupation. The oppressive forces operating in the region have engaged in distressing activities, including the abduction of Kashmiri residents from their homes, instances of women being subjected to sexual violence, and even the shelling of funerals by armed forces. These harrowing experiences find vivid depiction in "Scattered Souls," a collection of short stories penned by Shahnaz Bashir. Bashir, an accomplished author, has garnered critical acclaim for his notable works, such as "The Half Mother" (Hachette, 2014), which has been translated into various languages, including Marathi and French. Through his stories, Bashir effectively conveys the profound sense of voicelessness, pain, and trauma experienced by the Kashmiri people.

Kashmiri literature boasts a rich history that spans over 2500 years. This literary tradition has evolved over time, transitioning from an oral form to a written one. Among the languages in the Jammu and Kashmir region and parts of Pakistan like Sialkot, Zaffarwal, and Shakargarh, Dogri stands as one of the oldest yet contemporary languages. Dogri holds a wealth of oral literature, encompassing folk songs, folk tales, and folk ballads. The absence of printing facilities during its early days has contributed to Dogri maintaining its intrinsic purity in both form and language. The renowned Urdu and Persian poet Amir Khusro referred to Dogri as 'Duger,' occasionally written as 'Duggar.' Dogri folktales encompass a range of themes, including mythologies, mystery tales, parables, and humor. Similarly, Dogri folk songs cater to various occasions, celebrating events like childbirth, weddings, and commemorating the passing of individuals.

These themes of violent oppression and trauma find significant resonance within Kashmiri literature, particularly in the extensive narratives of "Scattered Souls." The roots of Kashmiri literature extend back centuries, originating within an oral tradition. It has been transcribed in diverse languages, with the oldest texts found in Sanskrit. During the Mughal era, it was recorded in Persian, and subsequently, literature emerged in Urdu. More recently, Kashmiri writers have adopted English as a means of expression. This shift towards writing in English can be attributed to the influence of Basharat Peer, who recognized the need to communicate the ongoing conflict in Kashmir on a global scale, using a language that is widely read and comprehended. This movement was further propagated by emerging writers who chose to express their narratives in English, supplementing the existing Kashmiri literature that primarily catered to the local population. Despite this, Kashmiri writers felt compelled to employ the English language to bring the Kashmiri voice to the global stage, as

articulated by Mirza Waheed, who believes that writing is the primary conduit to share the Kashmiri 'voice' with the broader world, particularly through writing in English (The Hindu).

In a similar vein, a notable cohort of writers from Kashmir, including figures like Basharat Peer, Mirza Waheed, and Feroz Rather, have taken up the English language to convey the plight of Kashmiri people and the injustices they endure. Through their works, these Kashmiri writers have raised poignant questions about the occupation of Kashmir and the tragic loss of lives at the hands of Indian occupying forces. Among these compelling voices, Shahnaz Bashir stands out, his writing vividly illustrating the pervasive violation of human rights in Kashmir. His narratives delve into the daily ordeal of living under the constant threat of curfews, nocturnal raids, and abductions by occupying forces.

Bashir, a fiction writer and academic hailing from Srinagar, Kashmir, has garnered numerous accolades, including the Research and Leadership (REAL) Summer Fellowship by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the prestigious Muse India Young Writer Award in 2015. Currently a doctoral fellow, Bashir imparts his knowledge at the University of Massachusetts UMass in Communication, having also served at the Central University of Kashmir. Beyond his widely acclaimed novels, Bashir has curated a compelling anthology of short stories titled 'Scattered Souls' (Bashir, 2016), which remains the bestselling work of fiction in Kashmir to date.

'Scattered Souls' unflinchingly portrays the grim realities of violence, trauma, forced occupation, abductions, rape, and coerced migration. Moreover, it starkly highlights the harrowing consequences of colonization on the lives of indigenous people. Anchored by the lens of Frantz Fanon's theory of colonial trauma, the text delves into themes of violence, oppression, and trauma within the context of native Kashmiris' lives, especially women, following the traumatic events of the 1988 Indian occupation. Each short story within Bashir's 'Scattered Souls' intricately explores themes of trauma, violence, growing up amid curfews, displacement, the fracturing of identity, and alienation within one's homeland. Through these poignant narratives, the collection serves as a resounding voice for the marginalized and voiceless indigenous people of Kashmir.

## Research questions

The current study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does the collection "Scattered Souls" by Shahnaz Bashir depict the experience of colonial trauma?
2. What observable impacts can be identified on the lives of the characters in "Scattered Souls" by Shahnaz Bashir as a result of the colonial violence they have encountered?
3. To what extent do the characters in "Scattered Souls" by Shahnaz Bashir display indications of post-traumatic stress disorder, and how are these manifestations depicted in the narratives?

## Literature Review

Kashmiri fiction delves into the lives of the native inhabitants amidst challenging circumstances, shedding light on the psychological aftermath of violence, oppression, and subjugation. Das (2018) explores these themes in his paper titled 'Voice from the Margin - A Universal Tale of Loss, Pain, Trauma, and Voicelessness', where he emphasizes that Shahnaz Bashir's stories serve as a conduit for the unheard voices of pain and trauma experienced by the Kashmiri people, bridging the gap between their experiences and the wider world. Das (2018) notes that 'Scattered Souls' powerfully documents the agonizing saga of human subordination and marginalization against the backdrop of repressive power, authority, and militarization.

Similarly, instances of oppressive authority exploiting its power to humiliate the occupied population are evident. The Indian armed forces have been repeatedly implicated in instances of raping Kashmiri women, resulting in enduring trauma for the victims. In her research paper 'Effect of Conflict Upon Women: A Study of Shahnaz Bashir's Fiction', Jan (2017) underscores that the conflict has left women not only physically but also psychologically distressed. She highlights that violence against Kashmiri women takes various forms, ranging from bruises, maiming, and beatings to torture, mutilation, molestation, and rape.

Ghosh's (2018) analysis centers on two literary works set in Kashmir: 'The Collaborator' (2011) by Mirza Waheed and 'Curfewed Night' (2010) by Basharat Peer. These works focus primarily on examining power dynamics and the spectrum of violence, both overt and covert. The study commences by contextualizing recent events in Kashmir spanning the past three years,

revealing the myriad forms of violence that Kashmiris confront daily. Subsequently, the essay situates the selected literary works within the broader collection of English-language publications addressing Kashmir, all while tracing the conflict's historical roots. The core contention of this paper is that these chosen literary works depict Kashmir as a distinct postcolonial conflict zone that defies facile categorization when grappling with its intricate violence and diverse manifestations of power.

Through textual analysis, a distinct amalgamation of biopolitics and necropolitics comes to light. Characters are constructed as 'living dead' entities within the confines of this state of emergency. To elucidate this concept, the essay traces the theoretical evolution from Foucault and Agamben's ideas of biopolitics to Mbembe's notion of necropolitics (Ghosh, 2018). This exploration provides a deeper understanding of the multifaceted dynamics at play within the portrayed conflict zone.

Kumar and Ghazanfar (2021) explore the works of contemporary authors Shahnaz Bashir and Toni Morrison through the lens of trauma theory. The central theme is that both authors utilize fiction as a medium to portray the tragic history of their marginalized communities: the Kashmiri and African American people. The analysis centers on a single novel from each author, namely "The Half Mother" (2014) and "Beloved" (1987). Drawing upon Cathy Caruth's conceptual framework, this study delves into how the characters, Haleema and Sethe, grapple with the overwhelming impact of their harrowing histories. Additionally, it argues that both novels effectively encompass key aspects of trauma theory, as the authors compellingly convey their protagonists' haunting legacies and psychological anguish. The inquiry begins by defining trauma and subsequently delves into its fundamental components. Furthermore, the study investigates the role of memory and history within the chosen works. Despite their distinct geographical origins, both authors employ fiction to articulate historically agonizing situations. Employing a multidisciplinary approach that integrates literature, history, and literary theory, this study offers insights into the role of literature in addressing previously unnoticed instances of trauma (Ghazanfar et al., 2018).

Shahzadi et al. assert that "Scattered Souls," authored by Shahnaz Bashir, vividly and authentically illustrates this notion. The somber and oppressive atmosphere of Kashmir has inflicted profound psychological wounds upon its inhabitants, with the prevailing despotism leading to widespread Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among Kashmiris. This study illuminates the power dynamics between Kashmiris and Indians and the manifold ways in which it impacts lives through the lens of trauma theory within selected

Kashmiri fiction. The author presents the ongoing anguish, bewilderment, defiance, and degradation in Kashmir as a consequence of the overarching panorama, as evidenced in numerous narratives. Drawing on trauma theories by Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth, Shahnaz Bashir's narrative dissects how individuals scarred by trauma vividly articulate the depredations and brutal environment of an authoritarian region (Shahzadi et al., 2021).

Moreover, it has been noted that the acts of rape committed by Indian forces are not isolated incidents of individual soldiers but rather a deliberate strategy employed by the oppressive forces to shame the Kashmiri populace. Baker (1994) asserts that "Rape in Kashmir was not the result of a few undisciplined soldiers but an active strategy of the security forces to humiliate and intimidate the occupied Kashmiri population" (p.23).

Kashmiri writers have assumed the role of bearing witness to the suffering of the Kashmiri people, revealing how the traumatic memories of Kashmiris persist. Hanif and Ullah (2018) express in their paper that fictional narratives, rooted in memories, unveil stories of suffering. Furthermore, censorship imposed by the Indian occupying forces has silenced the voices and suppressed the sufferings of the Kashmiri people. Most of the literature written and read on this topic comes from expatriate authors who, while residing in other countries, have documented the suffering of Kashmiris. Masood (2022), writes in her research titled "Tracing Cultural Trauma: A Study of Selected Kashmiri Fictional Narratives" that the trauma endured by the Kashmiri people remains inadequately acknowledged due to the occupiers' efforts to whitewash their transgressions.

## **Theoretical framework**

Colonial Trauma is a multifaceted and ongoing impact resulting from the imposition of colonial policies and practices, which continue to estrange Indigenous Peoples from their land, languages, cultural traditions, and each other, often leading to their dehumanization (PUNCTA, 2018, pg. 38).

Historically, the issue of trauma has been examined by notable figures such as Sigmund Freud, Joseph Breuer, Pierre Janet, and Hermann Oppenheim, among others. Octave Manoni, a French psychoanalyst and trauma

theorist, presents a Eurocentric approach to trauma and links it to neuroscience, dismissing its sociological cause: colonization. In his essay "Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization," he characterizes the 'colonized' as brutish, violent, and rebellious. Manoni categorizes the mental disorders resulting from psychic trauma in the colonized as incurable.

The theoretical framework commences by contextualizing the analysis within the historical backdrop of colonial dominance. It employs specific examples and case studies to illustrate how colonial systems were structured to exploit and oppress indigenous populations. This framework underscores the establishment of racial hierarchies, cultural erasure, and economic exploitation as the underpinnings of colonial trauma. It delves into the psychopathology of colonial trauma, exploring its various manifestations, including depression, anxiety, dissociation, and personality disorders, as observed by Fanon. The framework further investigates the intergenerational transmission of trauma and its impact on individuals' self-perception, historical understanding, and capacity for resistance.

Frantz Omar Fanon, a Francophone Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist, political thinker, and Marxist, originating from the French colony of Martinique, has wielded substantial influence in realms such as Marxism, critical theory, and post-colonial studies. As a critic of hegemonic values, Fanon challenges Manoni's view of trauma as rooted in a 'pseudoscientific approach,' colored by 'racial hierarchies.' He emphasizes trauma from a sociological standpoint and contends that colonization impacted not just individuals but the collective psyche of the colonized, yielding colonial trauma. In Chapter 5 of his book "The Wretched of the Earth," Fanon draws upon his psychiatric research in 1950s Algeria to describe the psychological disorders engendered by colonialism in both the colonizers and the colonized.

Building upon Fanon's concept of colonial trauma, the proposed theoretical framework offers a comprehensive comprehension of how colonialism profoundly influences the psychological and social well-being of the colonized. This framework serves as a basis for formulating effective strategies to address and recover from the enduring legacy of colonialism in post-colonial societies. By illuminating the intricate connections between trauma, identity, resistance, and decolonization, this framework paves the way for meaningful pathways forward.



## **Analysis and Discussion**

Kashmir, a land of beauty and scars, bears witness to the bloodshed of innocent Kashmiris living under an oppressive regime. The historical and political conflict between Pakistan and India finds one of its roots in this disputed land. Despite intermittent attempts by both nations to resolve the Kashmir issue, each meeting concludes without meaningful progress.

"Scattered Soul" is a collection of short stories that delves into the lives of Kashmiri individuals enduring an unlawful foreign occupation. Interlinked narratives unveil the growth of characters and unveil shocking incidents shaping their lives. Among these stories, Ghulam Mohiuddeen's journey stands out – once an active participant in armed rebellions against Indian occupation, he disassociates from the militant group due to personal conflicts. Despite his withdrawal, the haunting echoes of his past lead to his abduction and torture by Indian forces, casting a shadow of perpetual surveillance.

Mohiuddin's disappearance cascades into the life of Sakeena in the interconnected story "Psychosis," interwoven with "The Ex-Militant." Sakeena grapples with severe mental disorder, living as a widow in a humble dwelling where she raises her daughter Insha singlehandedly. Tragically, she becomes a victim of rape by five Indian soldiers, leaving her pregnant. The birth of her son, Bilal, labeled a bastard by society, compounds her trauma. Sakeena's PTSD symptoms are unmistakable.

The story "A Photo with Barak Obama" introduces Bilal's life, renowned as both Sakeena's "bastard" child and the "youngest stone pelter of Batamaloo," Srinagar. Additionally, narratives like "The Gravestone" and "The Woman Who Became Her Husband" portray the aftermath of the loss of loved ones on the remaining Kashmiris.

Collectively, these short stories shed light on the trauma experienced by Kashmiri characters subjected to violence by Indian-occupied forces due to colonization. This leads to the agonized existence of the characters within "Scattered Souls." The narratives echo Fanon's assertion that colonial rule injects violence into the minds of the native population (1963, pg. 38).

Shahnaz Bashir's stories grapple with themes of exile, abandonment, and forced settlement. "Transistor" features Mohammad Yousaf, a former

militant branded a spy due to his transistor, who is ultimately killed on mere suspicions. This resonates with Fanon's observation that "colonial aggression turns inward in a current of terror among the natives" (pg. 18, 1961).

Similarly, "The Gravestone," beginning with Thomas Mann's quote, "A man's dying is more the survivor's affair than his own" (pg. 13), portrays the traumatic life of Mohammad Sultan, a skilled carpenter whose injury leads to unemployment and later the loss of his son at the hands of the Indian army. The epitaph "Shaheed" on his son's grave prevents him from seeking compensation from the Indian government (pg. 16).

The characters in "Scattered Souls" embody the devastating impact of colonial violence on indigenous lives. Mohammad Yousaf's death at the hands of natives' suspicion, Mushtaq Ahmed's killing by the Indian army, and Ghulam Mohiduddeen's abduction, lack of fair trial, and subsequent illegal detention underline these effects. Similarly, the characters Gul Bhagwan and his wife in "Oil and Roses" live with the trauma of their foster son's brutal killing, which shatters their aspirations for prosperity. Gul's ensuing isolation and erratic behavior reflect the anguish imposed by the colonizer. This trauma mirrors Fanon's assertion that colonial "violence" is the "natural state of colonial rule" (1963, pg. 61).

The central themes of violence, torture, and trauma are powerfully portrayed in the short story "Psychosis." The story follows the protagonist Sakeena, who suffers from Psychosis as a result of a deeply traumatic incident – her rape by Indian soldiers. Shockingly, the entire neighborhood witnesses this horrific event, yet they choose to remain silent, compounding her agony. On that same fateful day, her husband Ghulam Moiduddeen, an ex-militant, is abducted by occupying forces.

The aftermath of the rape leaves Sakeena with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), prompting her to seek mental treatment from an institution she has been attending for the past six years. Through this treatment, she manages to alleviate many of the symptoms of PTSD, such as overcoming the aversion to a "smelly shalwar." However, one haunting aspect persists – the indelible memory of the "smell of sperm." Despite medical intervention, this sensory reminder remains. Sakeena's doctor recommends that she consider remarriage, a suggestion she consistently rejects. Her steadfast refusal to remarry, the enduring trauma stemming from the violence she endured, and the presence of her "bastard son" collectively serve as ongoing reminders of her distressing past. This trauma has been inflicted by the colonial violence, rape, and torture she

experienced at the hands of the colonizers. Importantly, she remains ensnared by the continued colonial rule, preventing her from moving beyond her traumatic history.

The viewpoint presented by Fanon contends that the ultimate remedy for colonial trauma involves a comprehensive "decolonization of the colonized." Fanon's assertion (pg. 69, 1961) asserts that true healing emerges through this profound process. In the short story "The Ex-Militant," we observe marchers passionately chanting slogans like "Hum kya Chahtay, Azadi; What do we want, Freedom" (pg. 20, 21). This stirring display occurs despite their ongoing confrontation with occupation, violence, and trauma. It is noteworthy that they remain hesitant to fully embrace the pursuit of freedom, which, according to Fanon, signifies the organic path toward decolonization and represents a therapeutic response to the colonial trauma they have endured.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, by utilizing Frantz Fanon's theory as a lens, the analysis of Shahnaz Bashir's "Scattered Souls" vividly illustrates the profound and devastating impact of colonial trauma on the lives of Kashmiris. The narratives within the collection skillfully portray the deep psychological scars left by instances of violence, rape, and oppression, rendering these experiences in vivid and heart-wrenching detail. Notably, characters like Sakeena serve as poignant examples, displaying symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that underscore the enduring toll on mental well-being. The stories effectively reinforce Fanon's impassioned plea for decolonization as the pathway to healing. This emphasis underscores the notion that as long as the oppressive occupation persists, so too does the traumatic legacy. Through the collection's poignant narratives, the significance of confronting the tragic aftermath of colonialism in Kashmir is powerfully communicated. Bashir's narrative underscores the agency of Kashmiris in their struggle against the colonizer. The stories illuminate the capacity of Kashmiris to articulate their voices and to challenge the mechanisms of power and militarization that enforce oppression. This resistance, in turn, paves the way toward liberation and the eventual liberation from the yoke of colonization, thus facilitating the restoration of their pre-colonial identity and history.

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