

FROM CATHARSIS TO NARRATIVE EXPOSURE: A TRANS-HISTORICAL ARCHITECTURE OF TRAUMA, MEMORY, AND POST-TRAUMATIC GROWTH IN PAKISTANI LITERATURE

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Abstract

This study investigates the representation and transformation of trauma in Pakistani Urdu and English literature through a comparative dialogue among Aristotle's concept of catharsis, Bharata's Rasa theory, the concept of An-Nafs and contemporary Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET). It argues that literary responses to trauma cannot be understood exclusively through modern psychological frameworks because Pakistani fiction repeatedly demonstrates older and culturally distinct ways of converting suffering into emotional recognition, aesthetic experience, self-reflection and historical understanding. A purposively selected corpus representing colonial rupture, Partition, post-Partition memory, the 1971 conflict, colonial historical recovery, postcolonial displacement, post-9/11 trauma, contemporary political violence, gendered trauma and spiritual transformation is examined through close textual and thematic analysis. Texts including Udaas Naslain, Aangan, Aag Ka Darya, Manto's Partition fiction, Cracking India, Basti, Noor, The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali, The Reluctant Fundamentalist, Burnt Shadows, Home Fire, Alakh Nagri and Raja Gidh demonstrate recurring narrative processes through which traumatic experience is remembered, articulated, contextualized and reinterpreted. The analysis establishes that catharsis foregrounds emotional recognition, Rasa transforms affect into aesthetic experience, An-Nafs directs attention toward inner struggle and self-knowledge, while NET provides a contemporary model for organizing traumatic memories within an autobiographical framework. The study further finds that post-traumatic growth should not be treated as an automatic consequence of narrative exposure. Pakistani literary texts instead present varied outcomes ranging from unresolved rupture and repetition to historical consciousness, accommodation, identity reconstruction, moral agency and spiritual reorientation. The study concludes that narrative can alter the relationship between trauma, memory and selfhood even when it cannot erase the original wound.

Keywords: *Pakistani literature; trauma and memory; Catharsis; Rasa theory; An-Nafs; Narrative Exposure Therapy; post-traumatic growth*

1.Introduction

Trauma is simultaneously an event, a disturbance of memory, a crisis of meaning, and a disruption of the stories through which individuals and communities understand themselves. Contemporary trauma scholarship increasingly recognizes that traumatic experience cannot be adequately understood through symptoms alone because trauma may alter autobiographical memory, identity, temporal continuity, interpersonal relationships, and the capacity to assign meaning to experience. Narrative therefore occupies an important position in contemporary approaches to trauma because the reconstruction of experience into an intelligible life story may provide a means of connecting otherwise fragmented memories with a broader sense of personal continuity. Research on narrative identity similarly suggests that autobiographical narration is implicated in the construction of an integrated sense of self across time and contexts, although recent psychological scholarship cautions against treating narrative coherence as a simple or universally predictive indicator of wellbeing (Bruner, 1990; Adler et al., 2015; McLean et al., 2023). Within trauma-focused psychology, this relationship between traumatic memory and narrative reconstruction has become particularly significant in Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), a structured intervention developed for individuals exposed to multiple or complex traumatic experiences. NET involves the contextualized reconstruction of an individual's life history, including traumatic experiences, rather than isolating a single traumatic event from the person's wider biography. Empirical research has demonstrated the effectiveness of NET for reducing post-traumatic stress symptoms, although the precise mechanisms through which narrative reconstruction, emotional exposure, autobiographical memory and therapeutic change interact remain incompletely understood (Lely et al., 2019; Raeder et al., 2023). The emergence of narrative-based trauma interventions raises a larger cultural and historical question: is the therapeutic use of narrative an entirely modern phenomenon, or does contemporary Narrative Exposure Therapy participate in a much older human concern with transforming suffering through representation, emotional engagement, self-reflection and meaning-making? This question requires considerable historical caution. Aristotle's concept of catharsis in *Poetics* belongs to the philosophical and aesthetic context of ancient Greek tragedy; Bharata's *rasa* theory belongs to the classical Indian tradition of dramaturgy and aesthetics; Ibn Arabi's conceptualization of the *nafs* emerges from Islamic mystical and philosophical traditions concerned with the nature and transformation of the self; and Japanese concepts associated with impermanence and aesthetic awareness belong to very different religious and cultural formations. None of these traditions should therefore be presented as an earlier version of psychotherapy, nor should NET be retroactively imposed upon them. Such a reading would constitute anachronism by attributing modern psychological categories to historical systems that operated according to different assumptions about emotion, selfhood, art, suffering and transformation. Rather, the present study adopts a trans-historical comparative approach, using historically distinct traditions as conceptual interlocutors. Its proposition is not that Aristotle, Bharata, Ibn Arabi or Japanese aesthetics anticipated NET, but that these traditions offer culturally differentiated ways of thinking about a recurring human problem: what happens when suffering is represented, experienced, narrated, witnessed, interpreted, and incorporated into a larger understanding of the self. This distinction between historical equivalence and conceptual dialogue is particularly important when catharsis and Narrative Exposure Therapy are placed in the same analytical frame. Aristotelian catharsis concerns the effect of tragic representation and the emotional experience generated through dramatic mimesis, whereas NET is a contemporary clinical intervention directed toward traumatic memories and post-traumatic symptoms. The two therefore operate at different levels and pursue different objectives. Nevertheless, a productive analytical analogy can be established around the movement from suffering and representation toward emotional processing. Bharata's *rasa*

provides another, substantially different model in which represented emotional states are aesthetically transformed into a relishable experience for the spectator. Recent scholarship continues to demonstrate the usefulness of *rasa* for analysing emotional experience in modern narrative, while also emphasizing its distinct aesthetic foundations (Sharma & Sharma, 2024). Ibn Arabi's discourse on the *nafs* provides yet another conceptual vocabulary, particularly because *nafs* can refer to selfhood, desire, appetite, reflexivity, and the subject requiring transformation. Scholarship on Sufi traditions emphasizes that the transformation of the self is central to this intellectual field, although the concept should not be reduced to a modern psychological equivalent (Sviri, 2002; Lipton, 2018). These distinctions permit a more careful proposition: catharsis, *rasa*, *nafs*-oriented self-transformation and NET are not identical mechanisms, but they can be comparatively examined as historically situated responses to the problem of suffering and its transformation.

1.1 Background of the Study

The relationship between trauma and narrative has particular significance in South Asian literary cultures because the modern history of the region contains forms of collective violence whose psychological and cultural consequences exceed the boundaries of the original historical event. The Partition of British India in 1947, the political violence surrounding the formation of Pakistan, the 1971 war and subsequent dismemberment of Pakistan, migration, displacement, gendered violence, authoritarianism, terrorism, and continuing political and social instability have generated extensive literary representations of memory, loss, identity and historical rupture. Pakistani Urdu and English literature has consequently provided a sustained imaginative record of how individuals and communities remember violence and negotiate its aftermath. Recent research on Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, for example, examines the relationship among violence, Partition and memory, while contemporary scholarship on Sorayya Khan's *Five Queen's Road* similarly identifies memory, migration, identity and psychological trauma as central to Pakistani Anglophone Partition fiction (Rabani & Mishra, 2024; Shahid & Shaheen, 2025). Recent Urdu literary scholarship has gone further by questioning the dominance of Eurocentric models of trauma that primarily conceptualize traumatic experience through rupture, fragmentation and psychological breakdown. It argues that Urdu literature can provide alternative epistemologies in which trauma is also connected to historical consciousness, ethical reflection, identity, cultural memory and aesthetic reconfiguration (Sadaf, 2026). This emerging intervention is particularly relevant to the present study because it makes Pakistani literature more than an illustrative corpus for applying an already established Western trauma model. Instead, Pakistani literature can be approached as a theoretical site in which different understandings of suffering, memory and transformation become visible. Manto's Partition narratives, for instance, do not merely reproduce psychological damage; their abrupt endings, grotesque irony, fractured identities and ethical provocations compel readers to confront the inadequacy of conventional narratives of historical violence. Similarly, later Pakistani narratives frequently relocate historical trauma from the immediate event into memory, family history, intergenerational transmission and identity formation. Such literary processes suggest that the representation of trauma is not necessarily identical to clinical exposure, yet literary form may nevertheless simulate, dramatize or symbolically organize processes that contemporary trauma research identifies as important to memory processing and meaning-making. The distinction is essential: a literary text does not become a therapeutic intervention simply because it represents trauma, and a reader's emotional response cannot automatically be equated with clinical recovery. Rather, literary narrative provides a cultural and aesthetic environment in which experiences of rupture can be represented, revisited, witnessed, interpreted and given alternative forms of meaning. The contemporary concept of post-traumatic growth (PTG) provides a further dimension to this investigation. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) conceptualize PTG as positive psychological change arising through the struggle with

highly challenging life circumstances, including changes in self-perception, relationships, priorities, possibilities, and existential or spiritual understanding. Significantly for the present study, their model connects growth with cognitive processing and the development of a life narrative rather than presenting growth as an automatic consequence of suffering. They also caution against assuming that all trauma survivors experience growth. Contemporary narrative research similarly associates autobiographical narration with meaning-making and the integration of experience into conceptions of the self, while also demonstrating that the relationship between narrative identity, emotional experience and wellbeing is complex rather than linear (Janowicz et al., 2022; Berntsen & Rubin, 2023). This caution is central to the present study. The argument is not that Pakistani literary characters necessarily achieve psychological recovery or that literature inevitably produces growth. Instead, the study investigates how selected narratives construct, resist, postpone, or complicate the possibility of transformation after trauma.

1.2 Rationale of the Study

The rationale for bringing classical poetics, Islamic mystical thought, East Asian aesthetics, contemporary trauma studies, NET and PTG into one analytical framework derives from a significant conceptual gap. Trauma studies have generated an extensive body of scholarship on memory, testimony, fragmentation, witnessing, historical violence and representation, while psychological research has increasingly examined narrative-based interventions for traumatic stress. Yet the historical and cross-cultural relationship between aesthetic transformation, narrative exposure, self-reconfiguration and post-traumatic meaning-making remains insufficiently theorized. The 2023 meta-analysis of narrative-based autobiographical memory interventions is particularly revealing in this regard: although narrative interventions demonstrate therapeutic potential, the mechanisms linking narrative coherence, meaning-making, autobiographical memory and therapeutic change remain an active area of investigation (Raeder et al., 2023). The present study enters this unresolved space from literary studies rather than clinical psychology. It enquires whether literary narratives can reveal historically persistent forms of engagement with suffering that contemporary psychological terminology describes through concepts such as exposure, memory integration, meaning-making and growth. The study therefore proposes the concept of a Trans-historical Architecture of Narrative Transformation. The term "architecture" refers not to a linear historical progression in which ancient theories are assumed to culminate naturally in modern psychotherapy, but to an analytical structure composed of related yet irreducibly different concepts. Within this architecture, Aristotelian catharsis represents one historically specific account of emotional response to tragic representation; Bharata's *rasa* represents another account of aesthetically mediated affect; Ibn Arabi's *nafs* provides a framework for thinking about selfhood and transformation; selected Japanese concepts of impermanence and aesthetic apprehension provide an alternative orientation toward loss and transience; trauma theory foregrounds rupture, memory and testimony; NET operationalizes narrative reconstruction and exposure within a clinical context; and PTG provides a contemporary psychological vocabulary for possible transformation following adversity. The analytical value lies precisely in the differences among these traditions. Rather than collapsing them into a universal theory of healing, the study places them in dialogue to investigate how different cultures and historical periods have conceptualized the movement from suffering to representation, representation to reflection, reflection to reorganization, and reorganization to altered understandings of self and experience.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do selected Pakistani Urdu and English literary texts represent traumatic memory through fragmentation, silence, repetition, testimony, narration, and historical reconstruction?
2. How can Aristotelian catharsis, Bharata's *rasa*, Ibn Arabi's conceptualization of the *nafs*, and selected East Asian perspectives on suffering and impermanence illuminate different modes of

emotional, aesthetic, and self-transformative responses to trauma without collapsing their historical and cultural differences?

3. In what ways do the narrative processes of remembering, witnessing, exposure, reconstruction, and meaning-making in selected Pakistani literary texts correspond with, complicate, or challenge contemporary concepts associated with Narrative Exposure Therapy and Post-Traumatic Growth?

1.4 Literary significance of the Study

The literary significance of the study lies in repositioning Pakistani Urdu and English literature from a corpus that merely represents trauma to a body of literature capable of interrogating how trauma becomes narratable, memorable, culturally meaningful and potentially transformative. Existing studies have productively examined Partition and Pakistani literature through trauma theory, memory studies, psychoanalysis and postcolonial approaches, but the proposed framework shifts the analytical emphasis from the representation of the wound alone toward the narrative processes through which the wound is organized and reinterpreted. Recent scholarship on Pakistani and Urdu literature already indicates the need to move beyond trauma models that treat rupture and psychological breakdown as the only meaningful consequences of historical violence (Sadaf, 2026). The present study extends that intervention by bringing aesthetic theory and contemporary trauma psychology into a controlled comparative dialogue. The study further examines narrative structures including fragmentation, repetition, temporal disruption, retrospective narration, testimony, silence, witnessing, memory reconstruction, symbolic return and changes in self-understanding. These formal features can then be interpreted alongside, but never equated with, mechanisms identified in trauma psychology. This allows literary criticism to retain its attention to form, language, focalization, temporality, and reader response while engaging productively with contemporary interdisciplinary research. The approach is particularly promising because NET research itself has increasingly focused on autobiographical memory, narrative organization and meaning-making, creating a productive point of contact between literary narratology and psychological research (Raeder et al., 2023). Finally, the study contributes to comparative literary theory by challenging a unidirectional model in which Western psychological theories are simply applied to non-Western literature. Instead, Pakistani literature becomes a meeting ground for Greek aesthetics, Indian poetics, Islamic mystical psychology, East Asian philosophical aesthetics and contemporary trauma research. The objective is not to establish that one tradition anticipated another, but to demonstrate that historically separated intellectual traditions may illuminate different dimensions of a shared human concern while retaining their cultural and epistemological specificity. Such an approach enables Pakistani literature to participate not only as an object of trauma research but also as a potential contributor to the broader theorization of narrative, memory, suffering and transformation.

1.5 Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework proposed in this study is termed the Trans-historical Architecture of Narrative Transformation (TANT). It conceptualizes trauma not as a predetermined linear journey toward recovery but as a dynamic process in which traumatic experience may move through several narrative and interpretive stages. The framework begins with traumatic rupture, understood as an experience that disrupts memory, identity, temporal continuity or established systems of meaning. This may lead to fragmented or intrusive memory, silence, repetition, displacement or other forms of narrative disturbance. The subsequent stage is representation, through which suffering becomes available to narration, artistic form, testimony or aesthetic mediation. Here Aristotle and Bharata provide historically distinct aesthetic models of what representation can do to emotion, while Ibn Arabi provides a different conceptual vocabulary for the transformation of the self. The contemporary clinical framework of NET then introduces a specific form of autobiographical exposure and chronological reconstruction in which

traumatic memories are situated within the broader life narrative. Contemporary research suggests that such narrative-based interventions can reduce PTSD symptoms, although the precise relationship among exposure, autobiographical memory, narrative coherence and therapeutic change remains contested and requires further investigation (Lely et al., 2019; Raeder et al., 2023).

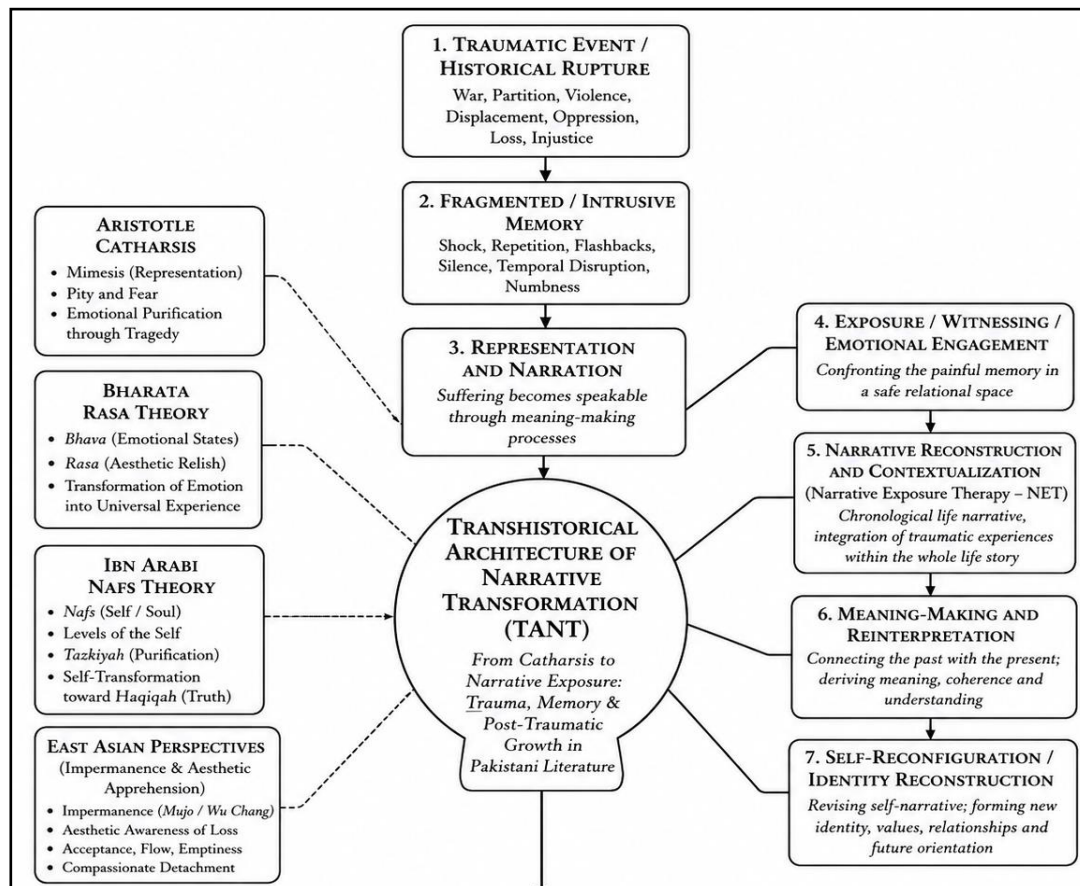


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2. Review of the Related Literature

2.1 Comparative Theoretical Foundations of Catharsis, Rasa and An-Nafs

The comparative table establishes a trans-historical line of inquiry in which catharsis, rasa, an-nafs and Narrative Exposure Therapy address different dimensions of what occurs when human suffering is brought into representation and consciously encountered. Aristotle's catharsis begins with the representation of suffering and its evocation of pity and fear, making emotional confrontation and subsequent reorientation central to the tragic experience. Bharata's rasa develops a different but related logic. It is not concerned with emotional discharge but with the aesthetic transformation of emotion, whereby represented states such as grief, fear, anger or compassion are organized through dramatic form and become experientially apprehensible as rasa. Ibn Arabi's concept of an-nafs shifts the focus inward. Here, disturbance becomes significant because it exposes the condition of the self, its desires, attachments and conflicts, creating the possibility of self-recognition, purification and a more stable mode of being. NET introduces a distinctly modern therapeutic procedure into this long conceptual history. It does not merely encourage a survivor to remember a traumatic event. It places traumatic memories within a structured autobiographical narrative, allowing isolated or overwhelming experiences to be located within

the broader sequence of the person's life. In this respect, NET provides the clearest contemporary connection between trauma, memory and narration. Its relevance to catharsis lies in the deliberate encounter with distressing experience rather than continued avoidance; its connection with *rasa* lies in the transformation of raw emotional experience into an articulated and organized form; and its conceptual proximity to *an-nafs* lies in the possibility that confronting one's experience may alter one's understanding of the self. These are correspondences rather than historical continuities, since none of the classical traditions constitutes an early form of NET. The connection becomes more significant when post-traumatic stability and growth are brought into the framework. Catharsis provides a model of emotional reorientation, *rasa* provides a model of affective and aesthetic transformation, and *an-nafs* provides a model of inner transformation. NET supplies a contemporary process through which traumatic memory can be narrated, contextualized and integrated, while post-traumatic growth concerns the possible consequences of such reorganization, including changed self-perception, renewed meaning and altered relationships with life and others. Pakistani literature offers a particularly productive textual field for examining these relationships because its representations of Partition, war, displacement, colonial violence and inherited memory repeatedly move between wounding and remembering, remembering and narrating, and narrating and reinterpreting.

Table 1: Foundational concepts of Trauma and Narrative philosophy

Dimensions	Aristotle's Catharsis	Bharata's Rasa Theory	Ibn Arabi's An-Nafs
Origin	Originates in classical Greek philosophy and poetics, principally Aristotle's Poetics, where tragedy is defined through the imitation of serious and complete action and its capacity to arouse pity and fear and bring about catharsis of such emotions.	Originates in classical Indian aesthetic theory, principally Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra. The theory explains how dramatic representation generates <i>rasa</i> , the aesthetic experience or "relish" of an emotional state.	Originates in the Islamic mystical and metaphysical tradition. Ibn Arabi develops the concept of <i>nafs</i> across his writings, particularly in <i>Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya</i> and <i>Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam</i> , within a broader account of human selfhood, purification and realization.
Basic meaning	Catharsis refers to the consequence of tragic representation involving pity and fear. Its precise interpretation has remained debated, with traditions of interpretation associating it with purgation, purification, clarification or emotional reorientation.	<i>Rasa</i> literally carries the sense of flavour, essence or relish. In aesthetics it denotes the distinctive experience generated when represented emotional states are transformed into an aesthetic experience for the responsive spectator.	<i>Nafs</i> refers to the self, soul or psychophysical self. In Ibn Arabi's thought it is closely connected with desire, individuality, self-awareness and the process through which the human being moves from domination by lower tendencies toward greater realization.
Types / categories	Aristotle does not present catharsis as a system of multiple named types. The principal emotions explicitly	The Nāṭyaśāstra develops a systematic classification of <i>rasas</i> , traditionally beginning	The <i>nafs</i> is described in different states or levels within Islamic mystical discourse. The Qur'anic

	associated with tragedy are pity and fear. His broader tragic structure also includes reversal (peripeteia), recognition (anagnorisis) and suffering (pathos).	with eight and later expanded to nine. Major forms include śṛṅgāra (love), hāsyā (laughter), karuṇa (pathos/compassion), raudra (fury), vīra (heroism), bhayānaka (fear), bībhatsa (disgust), adbhuta (wonder) and later śānta (tranquility).	categories commonly associated with spiritual development include an-nafs al-ammārah (the commanding self), an-nafs al-lawwāmah (the self-reproaching self) and an-nafs al-muṭma'innah (the tranquil self).
Relation to suffering	Suffering (pathos) forms part of tragic action and produces an emotional response in the spectator. Suffering becomes meaningful through its placement within a coherent dramatic action.	Suffering may become the basis of karuṇa rasa, while other traumatic emotions may participate in different aesthetic configurations. Suffering is transformed through representation rather than simply reproduced.	Suffering and inner conflict can expose attachment, desire and limitations of the self. The encounter with suffering can therefore become part of a process of self-recognition and purification.
Relation to trauma	Provides a conceptual basis for examining how representations of violence, loss, fear and suffering generate intense emotional responses and subsequent reorientation.	Provides a conceptual basis for examining how traumatic emotions such as grief, fear, anger, horror and compassion are aesthetically organized and experienced.	Provides a conceptual basis for examining how traumatic experience disturbs the self, exposes inner conflict and can initiate self-questioning, purification and altered self-understanding.
Trauma as represented experience	Trauma can be examined through pathos, reversal, recognition, fear, pity and the consequences of human suffering within the tragic structure.	Trauma can be examined through the determinants, expressions and emotional states through which suffering becomes aesthetically apprehensible, particularly through karuṇa, bhayānaka and related emotional formations.	Trauma can be examined through disturbed desire, grief, guilt, fear, attachment, self-reproach and the subsequent confrontation with the self.
Narrative / representation	Narrative structure is fundamental. Plot organizes action, causation, reversal,	Representation is fundamental because rasa arises through the	Narrative representation is not the primary mechanism. The central movement is

	recognition and suffering so that emotional experience acquires intelligibility.	artistic organization of emotional determinants, expressions and accompanying states.	inward, involving reflection, recognition and transformation of the self. Literary narrative can nevertheless represent this inner movement.
Relation to narrative exposure	The representation of painful events creates an encounter with suffering and emotion.	Narrative exposure can be related to the movement from represented emotional experience toward consciously apprehended emotional experience.	Narrative exposure can be related to the process of bringing previously disturbing or concealed aspects of experience into conscious confrontation, allowing the self to recognize its attachments, conflicts and responses.
Stability after transformation	Stability may be understood in terms of renewed emotional and cognitive orientation following tragic experience, although Aristotle does not formulate a modern theory of psychological stability.	Stability is associated less with psychological recovery than with the aesthetic realization of an emotional state through <i>rasa</i> .	The concept most closely associated with a stabilized transformed self is <i>an-nafs al-muṭma'innah</i> , the tranquil self, representing a condition of inner composure and spiritual assurance.
Growth / development	Recognition (<i>anagnorisis</i>) can transform understanding of oneself, others and circumstances. Growth is therefore connected with knowledge emerging from confrontation with suffering.	The spectator's aesthetic experience can deepen emotional understanding by transforming particular experience into an aesthetically apprehensible universalized emotional state.	Development is explicitly transformational, moving from lower forms of selfhood toward self-awareness, purification, tranquility and fuller human realization.
Meaning-making	Tragic structure connects events through action, causation, reversal and recognition, allowing suffering to acquire intelligibility.	Aesthetic form transforms emotional experience into <i>rasa</i> , giving emotion an organized and contemplative mode of apprehension.	Meaning emerges through recognition of the self, its desires, limitations and relationship with the Divine.
Relation to Post-Traumatic Growth	The movement from suffering through recognition toward changed understanding provides a conceptual parallel with the possibility of post-traumatic growth, particularly altered perspectives and self-understanding.	The transformation of painful emotion into an aesthetically apprehended experience provides a parallel with the reorganization of emotional meaning following trauma.	The relationship is especially close at the level of self-transformation, where confrontation with suffering may lead toward altered self-understanding, inner stability and a transformed orientation to life.

2.2 Critical Reviews of the previous studies

Recent research on trauma has increasingly moved away from viewing traumatic experience only as a psychological wound and toward examining the ways in which traumatic memories are narrated, reorganized and given meaning. Raeder, Clayton, and Boeckle (2023), in their meta-analysis of narrative-based autobiographical memory interventions, found that narrative interventions, particularly Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), could reduce PTSD symptoms across a substantial body of empirical research. Their findings are important because they place narration itself within the process of trauma treatment rather than treating narrative as merely a record of an already processed experience. Yet their study remains primarily clinical: narrative is examined for its therapeutic consequences rather than for its aesthetic, historical or cultural dimensions. A related emphasis appears in Yatsenko and Darvishov's (2023) discussion of post-traumatic growth through narrative identity, where agency, redemption and meaning-making emerge through the reconstruction of personal life stories. Blackie et al. (2023), however, introduce an important qualification by showing that narratives of growth do not necessarily correspond directly with conventional measures of psychological wellbeing. Taken together, these studies suggest that telling a traumatic story and transforming psychologically through that story are related but not identical processes. This distinction is particularly important for literary interpretation, where a character may reconstruct the past without achieving complete psychological resolution. The relationship between trauma and memory has also become increasingly complicated in recent research. Borrelli et al. (2024) demonstrate that childhood trauma does not produce one predictable pattern of autobiographical memory disruption; rather, memory responses vary according to the nature and circumstances of traumatic experience. This finding challenges a frequent tendency in literary criticism to equate fragmented chronology, silence or disrupted narration automatically with a fragmented traumatic mind. Such a correspondence may sometimes be persuasive, but it cannot simply be assumed. Kau et al. (2024) move the discussion from remembering toward meaning-making, arguing that individuals may attempt to understand traumatic experience through processes of interpretation and reconstruction. Purc-Stephenson and Edwards (2024) similarly associate meaning-making with positive affect and perceived post-traumatic growth, although their findings also show that people construct very different explanations for suffering. The combined evidence therefore suggests a gradual movement from memory as repository toward memory as an active interpretive process. For literary texts, this distinction opens a productive space for examining not only what characters remember, but how they arrange, suppress, revisit and reinterpret what has happened to them.

Table 2: Critical reviews of the previous studies

Authors	Year	Topic	Major Findings	Literary Contribution
Raeder, Clayton & Boeckle	2023	Narrative memory interventions for PTSD	Narrative based interventions significantly reduced PTSD symptoms, with NET showing substantial therapeutic effects.	Establishes the relationship between trauma, autobiographical memory and narrative reconstruction.
Yatsenko & Darvishov	2023	Narrative identity and post-traumatic growth	Agency, redemption and meaning-making emerged	Connects life narrative, identity

			as important narrative dimensions of PTG.	and psychological growth.
Blackie, Weststrate, Turner, Adler & McLean	2023	Narrative expressions of adversarial growth	Narratives revealed distinctive forms of growth, although narrative growth did not independently predict wellbeing beyond conventional measures.	Demonstrates how growth is articulated through personal narratives.
Smaik, Simmons, Abdulhaq & Dardas	2023	NET among Syrian refugees	NET reduced PTSD, anxiety and depression symptoms and proved feasible among traumatized refugees.	Extends narrative exposure research into a non-Western refugee context.
Borrelli et al.	2024	Childhood trauma and autobiographical memory	Childhood trauma was associated with complex changes in autobiographical memory rather than one uniform pattern of disruption.	Complicates assumptions about trauma, memory fragmentation and recall.
Kau, Lusher & Pipkin	2024	Meaning-making after trauma	Meaning-making emerged as an important process in psychological adjustment following traumatic experience.	Strengthens the connection between trauma, interpretation and meaning.
Purc-Stephenson & Edwards	2024	Meaning-making and psychological growth	Meaning-making was associated with positive affect and perceived post-traumatic growth; participants used diverse explanations for their experiences.	Highlights meaning, personal narrative and transformation.
Hoeboer et al.	2024	NET following childhood trauma	NET produced promising outcomes for PTSD associated with childhood trauma.	Extends narrative exposure from war trauma toward developmental and personal trauma.
Rabani & Mishra	2024	Partition and memory in Ice-Candy-Man	Multiple voices reveal the violence, displacement and continuing memory of Partition.	Develops the study of polyphony, historical memory and Partition trauma.
Ghilzai, Shahnaz & Suleman	2024	Gendered trauma in Ice-Candy-Man	Partition violence silences women while simultaneously creating spaces for female agency and identity reconstruction.	Connects gender, bodily trauma, silence and agency.

Dandapat & Tripathi	2024	Childhood trauma in Noor	Childhood memories of the 1971 war become connected with collective and intergenerational memory.	Extends trauma studies toward postmemory and intergenerational transmission.
Jamshed	2024	History and identity in “Toba Tek Singh”	Manto's story represents Partition through displacement, identity crisis, political absurdity and dark humour.	Reframes Manto through history, identity and political trauma.
Shahid & Shaheen	2025	Partition memory in Five Queen's Road	Partition continues to shape displacement, belonging, memory and psychological identity.	Extends Pakistani trauma criticism toward post-Partition identity and memory.
Shabbir, Cheema & Waheed	2025	Historical trauma in Nomi Ali	Colonial violence, gender, marginality and historical memory produce continuing and intergenerational trauma.	Expands Pakistani trauma literature beyond Partition toward colonial and intergenerational trauma.
Sarwar	2025	Historical memory in Noor	Literary narration confronts suppressed histories, victimization and denial surrounding the 1971 conflict.	Links literature with historical reconstruction, testimony and collective memory.
Gensichen et al.	2025	Narrative exposure after intensive care	Brief narrative exposure produced reductions in PTSD symptoms, although effects varied across follow-up periods.	Demonstrates the contemporary expansion of narrative exposure as trauma intervention.
Strijk et al.	2025	Intensive NET for chronic PTSD	Intensive NET showed promising preliminary effects for severe chronic PTSD when combined with other therapeutic approaches.	Brings together narrative exposure and artistic/experiential approaches.
Haktanir & Kurnaz	2025	NET and earthquake-related PTSD	NET was identified as a useful intervention within the treatment literature for disaster-related PTSD.	Extends narrative exposure research to natural-disaster trauma.

The development of NET gives this discussion a more concrete contemporary form. Smaik et al. (2023), working with Syrian refugees, found NET to be feasible and associated with reductions in PTSD, anxiety and depression, while Hoeboer et al. (2024) extended the approach to adults with childhood trauma and reported promising outcomes. These studies demonstrate that narrative exposure is not confined to one historical category of suffering such as war or forced migration. At the same time, the two studies reveal

an important feature of NET: traumatic experience is approached through the reconstruction of a life narrative, rather than through the isolated recollection of a single painful event. Later research continues this movement. Gensichen et al. (2025), in a large randomized controlled trial involving post-intensive-care trauma, examined brief narrative exposure in a very different traumatic setting, while Haktanir and Kurnaz (2025) considered NET within the treatment of earthquake-related PTSD. Strijk et al. (2025) further placed intensive NET alongside art therapy and trauma-sensitive yoga for severe chronic PTSD. The expanding range of these studies suggests that narrative exposure has become a flexible contemporary means of approaching traumatic memory. Nevertheless, these clinical studies generally ask whether structured narrative exposure can alleviate psychological distress; they do not ask how literary narratives themselves have historically performed acts resembling remembrance, witnessing, emotional release and reconstruction. This distinction becomes particularly significant when the discussion turns to Pakistani literature. Recent studies of Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* demonstrate that Partition trauma is not represented through a single consciousness or a single version of history. Rabani and Mishra (2024) examine the novel's multiple voices in relation to violence, Partition and memory, while Ghilzai, Shahnaz, and Suleman (2024) concentrate on women's silencing, bodily violence and female agency. The narrative does not simply reproduce the historical violence of Partition; it reorganizes that violence through competing perspectives and forms of remembering. This makes Sidhwa's novel particularly significant in relation to the present study because its narrative form complicates any simple movement from trauma toward resolution. Silence may coexist with agency, memory with repression, and suffering with attempts to reconstruct identity (Ghilzai et al., 2024; Rabani & Mishra, 2024). The same movement from individual experience toward collective and inherited memory can be seen in recent readings of Sorayya Khan's *Noor*. Dandapat and Tripathi (2024) examine childhood memory and the Bangladesh Liberation War through the concept of postmemory, showing how an event experienced by one generation can become part of the imaginative and emotional world of another. Sarwar (2025), approaching *Noor* from a post-conflict perspective, shifts attention toward suppressed history, victimization and the literary recovery of a contested past. These two studies complement one another but also reveal a significant difference: whereas Dandapat and Tripathi concentrate on the transmission of traumatic memory, Sarwar gives greater attention to the act of narrating a suppressed history. The distinction matters because transmission and reconstruction are not the same. A traumatic memory may be inherited, repeated or silently carried without being critically reinterpreted. Literary narration can, however, place that inherited memory into a new sequence of relationships, voices and meanings. In this sense, *Noor* demonstrates how personal memory can become a vehicle through which a buried historical experience is brought back into narrative consciousness. Recent work on other Pakistani texts further broadens this trajectory beyond Partition. Shahid and Shaheen (2025), in their reading of Sorayya Khan's *Five Queen's Road*, connect Partition with displacement, belonging, memory and post-Partition identity. Shabbir, Cheema, and Waheed (2025), meanwhile, examine Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* through colonial violence, gender, marginality and historical memory. These studies demonstrate that Pakistani literary trauma cannot be reduced to the 1947 Partition alone. Colonial violence, the 1971 conflict, gendered suffering and inherited historical memories continue to shape literary representations of the past. Jamshed's (2024) reading of Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" similarly places displacement, identity crisis, political absurdity and dark humour at the centre of Partition representation. Manto is particularly important here because his narratives rarely offer the reassuring closure associated with conventional recovery narratives. His irony and absurdity frequently leave the reader confronted with a wound that has been narrated but not neatly healed. Such texts therefore complicate any straightforward assumption that narration necessarily leads to psychological restoration. Consequently, the reviewed studies reveal a

conceptual movement from suffering to memory, memory to narration, narration to interpretation, and interpretation to the possibility of changed self-understanding. Yet these movements have generally been examined in separate fields. Clinical research asks whether narrative exposure can assist people in processing traumatic experience; psychological research asks how meaning and narrative identity relate to post-traumatic growth; and literary criticism examines how Pakistani writers represent violence, memory, displacement and historical suffering. What remains less fully explored is the point where these three conversations meet: the literary act of narrating suffering as a process of remembering, witnessing, emotional engagement and reinterpretation. This provides the appropriate space for bringing classical theories of emotional transformation into conversation with contemporary Narrative Exposure Therapy and Post-Traumatic Growth, not by claiming that Aristotle, Bharata or Ibn Arabi anticipated modern psychotherapy, but by asking whether their different conceptions of emotional experience, aesthetic response and transformation can offer historically responsible interpretive lenses for understanding how Pakistani literature turns traumatic memory into narrative form.

3. Theoretical Foundations of the Study

The study employs a qualitative, interpretive and comparative textual analysis of selected Pakistani Urdu and English literary works representing successive configurations of trauma, memory and transformation. The corpus includes Manto's selected Partition stories, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man*, Sorayya Khan's *Noor* and *Five Queen's Road*, and Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*, with selected Urdu texts incorporated to maintain linguistic and cultural breadth. The texts are comparatively examined through recurring analytical patterns of traumatic experience, emotional representation, memory formation, narrative exposure, meaning-making and transformation. At the textual level, passages are coded and interpreted according to their dominant manifestations of catharsis, *rasa* and *nafs*. Catharsis is examined through representations of pity, fear, emotional intensification, release and subsequent affective reorientation; *rasa* through the evocation, development and aesthetic transformation of emotional states, including *karuna* and other relevant *rasas*; and *nafs* through representations of inner conflict, desire, moral struggle, self-recognition, purification and movement toward an altered self. These patterns are then compared with the narrative processes associated with NET, particularly the articulation, sequencing, contextualization and re-narration of traumatic memories, and with Post-Traumatic Growth, particularly changed self-perception, meaning-making, relational reorientation and renewed understanding of experience. The analysis therefore moves systematically from textual evidence to emotional/narrative pattern, theoretical category, and lastly to comparative interpretation, while maintaining the historical distinctions between the classical, philosophical and contemporary psychological frameworks.

4. Analysis and Discussions

Table 3: Critical analysis of the Pakistani literature

Historical / literary movement	Representative Text	Dominant Trauma represented	Modes of addressing trauma	Stability, or continuing rupture
Colonial / pre-Partition rupture	Abdullah Hussain, Udaas Naslain; Khadija Mastur, Aangan; Qurratulain Hyder, Aag Ka	Colonial domination, war, political uncertainty, communal tension,	Trauma is embedded within individual lives rather than isolated as a single catastrophic event.	These works generally move toward historical consciousness rather than

	Darya; Ahmad Nadeem Qasmi, <i>The End of the Night</i> ; Bapsi Sidhwa, <i>The Crow Eaters</i>	generational disillusionment and the gradual destruction of established social worlds.	Family histories, political awakening, changing social relations and retrospective narration turn private experience into historical memory.	psychological closure. The individual learns to understand the self through historical change, but the wounds produced by colonial rupture remain embedded in collective memory.
Partition catastrophe	Saadat Hasan Manto, Toba Tek Singh ; Manto, “Khol Do”; Manto, “Thanda Gosht”; Bapsi Sidhwa, Cracking India / Ice-Candy-Man ; Khadija Mastur, Aangan	Mass killing, displacement, rape, abduction, separation, loss of homeland, communal violence and fractured identity.	The texts use testimony, silence, bodily signs, fragmented recollection, witnessing and irony to represent experiences that resist ordinary narration. Manto frequently compresses trauma into a final revelation,	The outcome ranges from unresolved rupture to altered consciousness. Manto often refuses consolatory closure, whereas Sidhwa allows traumatic witnessing to produce greater historical and moral awareness.
Post-Partition memory	Intizar Husain, Basti ; Qurratulain Hyder, Aag Ka Darya ; Altaf Fatima, Dastak Na Do ; Abdullah Hussain, Baagh ; Sorayya Khan, Five Queen's Road	Displacement, nostalgia, loss of homeland, migration, familial separation and the persistence of Partition within subsequent generations.	Memory becomes the principal means of engaging with the past. Recollection, repetition, historical reconstruction, family stories and displaced identities allow characters to revisit experiences that cannot simply be left behind.	The dominant movement is toward accommodation and reconstruction of identity. The past is not erased. Rather, individuals learn to situate themselves within a history that continues to shape their present.

1971 and inherited national trauma	Sorayya Khan, Noor ; Tahmima Anam, A Golden Age ; Kamila Shamsie, Kartography ; Nadeem Aslam, The Golden Legend ; Mohsin Hamid, Exit West	War, separation, political violence, national silence, displacement, family loss and inherited historical memory.	The second generation encounters trauma through silence, family testimony, photographs, stories, geographical traces and incomplete historical knowledge. Noor is particularly significant because the protagonist's personal identity becomes inseparable from the recovery of a suppressed history of 1971.	The texts generally move toward historical recognition rather than restoration. Recovering the past does not undo violence, but it can alter the individual's understanding of family, nation and self. Noor is especially valuable for the transition from silence toward testimony.
Colonial historical recovery	Uzma Aslam Khan, The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali ; Bapsi Sidhwa, The Crow Eaters ; Qurratulain Hyder, Aag Ka Darya ; Abdullah Hussain, Udaas Naslain ; Mumtaz Mufti, Alakh Nagri	Colonial imprisonment, institutional violence, cultural dislocation, marginalization, suppressed histories and the psychological consequences of colonial power.	Historical fiction and autobiographical recollection recover experiences that official historical narratives leave incomplete. Nomi Ali is particularly important because later generations inherit the traces of colonial violence through post memory.	Recovery of suppressed history produces historical agency and altered self-understanding. The central movement is not simply remembering the past but understanding how inherited histories continue to inhabit the present.
Postcolonial border and tribal trauma	Jamil Ahmad, The Wandering Falcon ; Uzma Aslam Khan, Trespassing ; Nadeem Aslam, The Blind Man's Garden ; Mohammed	Displacement, border violence, state intervention, tribal marginality, religious conflict, poverty and social exclusion.	These narratives frequently use episodic structures, multiple perspectives and displaced characters rather than a single linear trauma narrative.	The movement tends toward endurance, adaptation and identity negotiation rather than therapeutic recovery.

	Hanif, Our Lady of Alice Bhatti ; Aamer Hussein, Insomnia			Survival itself becomes a form of psychological and ethical persistence.
Post-9/11 trauma	Mohsin Hamid, The Reluctant Fundamentalist ; Kamila Shamsie, Burnt Shadows ; Kamila Shamsie, Home Fire ; Nadeem Aslam, The Blind Man's Garden ; Mohsin Hamid, Exit West	9/11, Islamophobia, racial profiling, surveillance, war, migration, political suspicion, forced displacement and cultural alienation.	These novels increasingly employ retrospective narration, polyphony, fragmented chronology, transnational memory and encounters between competing versions of history.	The movement is toward self-definition under pressure, although the texts frequently resist complete resolution. Burnt Shadows extends trauma across generations and geographical locations.
Contemporary political trauma	Mohammed Hanif, A Case of Exploding Mangoes ; Nadeem Aslam, The Blind Man's Garden ; Mohsin Hamid, Moth Smoke ; Mohsin Hamid, Exit West ; Kamila Shamsie, Home Fire	Military dictatorship, terrorism, war, sectarian violence, political repression, social inequality and the instability of contemporary Pakistan.	Satire, irony, fragmented narration, retrospective testimony, competing perspectives and intimate family narratives transform political catastrophe into lived experience. Hanif's satire is particularly useful.	Outcomes range from moral recognition and endurance to alienation and unresolved grief. The texts frequently substitute cognitive or ethical transformation for conventional psychological recovery.
Inner and spiritual transformation	Mumtaz Mufti, Alakh Nagri ; Bano Qudsia, Raja Gidh ; Ashfaq Ahmed, Man Chalay Ka Sauda ; Mumtaz Mufti, Ali Pur Ka Aeili ; Qurratulain Hyder, Aakhir-	Existential conflict, guilt, desire, moral anxiety, psychological instability, alienation and spiritual crisis.	The narrative turns inward. Autobiographical recollection, confession, dialogue, self-questioning and spiritual reflection transform external experience into an inquiry into the self. This is the most productive	The movement is toward self-recognition, moral reorientation, spiritual stability or continuing inner conflict. Alakh Nagri is especially important

	e-Shab Ke Humsafar		section for bringing An-Nafs into direct conversation with literary representations of psychological disturbance and transformation.	because its autobiographical mode makes recollection itself a form of sustained self-examination.
Transgenerational and postmemory trauma	Uzma Aslam Khan, The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali ; Sorayya Khan, Noor ; Sorayya Khan, Five Queen's Road ; Kamila Shamsie, Burnt Shadows ; Kamila Shamsie, Kartography	Trauma transmitted through parents, grandparents, family narratives, national silences, inherited displacement and memories of violence not directly experienced by the younger generation.	The younger generation reconstructs earlier trauma through fragments, family stories, photographs, silence, geographical spaces and historical investigation.	These texts most clearly approach reconciliation, identity reconstruction and post-traumatic reorientation . The past remains present, but its meaning can change when it is narrated, and contextualized.
Gendered trauma and female reconstruction	Bapsi Sidhwa, Cracking India / Ice-Candy-Man ; Bapsi Sidhwa, The Pakistani Bride ; Khadija Mastur, Aangan ; Sara Suleri, Meatless Days ; Kamila Shamsie, Home Fire	Sexual violence, forced marriage, displacement, patriarchal control, political violence, silencing and the loss or reconstruction of female identity.	Female characters address trauma through witnessing, silence, testimony, resistance, memory and redefinition of familial or social roles. Ice-Candy-Man is especially important because recent research connects Partition violence with the silencing and subsequent agency of women's bodies and identities.	The texts produce different forms of agency, resilience and identity reconstruction. Growth does not necessarily mean emotional recovery. In several narratives it means acquiring the ability to name, interpret or resist the structures that produced the wound.
Diasporic and transnational memory	Kamila Shamsie, Burnt Shadows ; Kamila Shamsie, Kartography ; Mohsin Hamid,	Migration, exile, racial alienation, Partition memory, war, cultural dislocation and	Trauma travels with the displaced subject. Memory becomes transnational, with characters carrying	The dominant movement is identity negotiation and adaptive

	The Reluctant Fundamentalist; Mohsin Hamid, Exit West; Bapsi Sidhwa, An American Brat	competing national identities.	earlier violence into new geographical and cultural environments.	reconstruction. Stability becomes provisional rather than absolute.
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Pakistani literature presents trauma not as a fixed psychological condition but as an evolving relationship between historical rupture, memory, emotion, selfhood and narration. Read through Aristotle's concept of catharsis, Bharata's Rasa theory, the concept of An-Nafs and the contemporary framework of Narrative Exposure Therapy (NET), the selected texts reveal different ways in which traumatic experience is represented, remembered and transformed. These traditions should not be treated as historically equivalent. Rather, they provide distinct conceptual vocabularies for examining a recurring literary question, namely how overwhelming experience is brought into consciousness, language and a meaningful understanding of the self. The colonial and pre-Partition texts, particularly Abdullah Hussain's *Udaas Naslain*, Khadija Mastur's *Aangan* and Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag Ka Darya*, establish the historical conditions from which later literary trauma emerges. In *Udaas Naslain*, individual suffering is inseparable from colonial domination, war and political uncertainty. The Aristotelian notion of catharsis becomes relevant because private suffering is transformed into an experience of pity, fear and recognition through narrative representation. *Aag Ka Darya*, however, complicates catharsis by extending historical experience across generations and civilizations. Its recurrent treatment of loss, displacement and cultural uncertainty is more productively understood through Rasa, since emotional states are not simply discharged but transformed into an enduring aesthetic experience. *Aangan* brings these historical pressures into domestic life, allowing the consequences of political rupture to enter family relationships and individual consciousness. In this respect, An-Nafs provides a useful lens for examining how external historical conditions become internal struggles involving desire, loyalty, identity and moral choice. The Partition corpus makes the relationship between trauma and narrative particularly visible. Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*, "Khol Do" and "Thanda Gosht," together with Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Mastur's *Aangan*, represent violence, displacement, sexual violation, loss and fractured identity through sharply different narrative forms. Manto is especially important because his fiction demonstrates that catharsis does not necessarily produce emotional closure. *Toba Tek Singh* creates pity, absurdity and recognition but ends with an unresolved image of displacement. "Khol Do" transforms an individual act of violence into an overwhelming aesthetic experience in which fear, grief and bodily trauma become communicable through minimal narrative detail. Rasa therefore helps explain how the reader encounters the emotional dimensions of trauma rather than merely receiving historical information. In *Cracking India*, Lenny's witnessing consciousness gradually converts bewildering experience into historical understanding. This movement has a conceptual affinity with NET because traumatic events become intelligible when situated within a larger sequence of personal and historical experience, although the novel itself should never be presented as a therapeutic application of NET. Post-Partition fiction shifts the emphasis from the traumatic event to its persistence in memory. Intizar Husain's *Basti*, Hyder's *Aag Ka Darya*, Altaf Fatima's *Dastak Na Do* and Sorayya Khan's *Five Queen's Road* demonstrate that historical catastrophe continues to inhabit later consciousness through nostalgia, displacement, family memory and questions of belonging. In *Basti*, Zakir repeatedly returns to lost places and earlier experiences, making memory itself a condition of identity. From a NET perspective, this repeated return is significant because the remembered event acquires meaning through its relationship with other experiences. From the perspective of An-Nafs, however, the issue is deeper than recollection. The individual must understand what the remembered past

has made of the self. Rasa becomes equally relevant because nostalgia, grief and longing are transformed into sustained aesthetic states. The resulting stability is therefore not forgetting. It is accommodation, in which the individual learns to inhabit an altered relationship with the past. The literature surrounding 1971 extends this process into inherited trauma. Sorayya Khan's *Noor*, Tahmima Anam's *A Golden Age* and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* represent war, separation, silence and historical memory through family relationships and subsequent generations. *Noor* is particularly significant because the protagonist encounters a history that has been partially suppressed. The discovery of that history changes her understanding of family and identity. Here the connection with NET lies in the movement from fragmented or withheld experience toward narrative articulation and contextual understanding. *An-Nafs* becomes relevant at the point where historical knowledge becomes self-knowledge. Catharsis operates through recognition, while Rasa explains the transformation of grief, fear and loss into an aesthetic experience through which the reader encounters the emotional consequences of historical violence. The movement toward growth is consequently not the restoration of an undamaged self but the development of a more historically conscious one. Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* expands the argument beyond Partition by recovering colonial violence, institutional oppression and marginalized histories. The novel demonstrates that traumatic memory can survive through generations even when the original event is no longer directly experienced. Its narrative recovery can be related to NET at the level of contextualization, because isolated suffering acquires meaning when reconstructed within a larger historical sequence. Rasa allows the reader to encounter the emotional dimensions of suppressed histories, while *An-Nafs* draws attention to the relationship between inherited experience and individual identity. The movement toward growth therefore involves historical recognition as much as psychological transformation. Remembering becomes a means of restoring continuity between the present self and a suppressed past. The border and postcolonial texts, including Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon*, Uzma Aslam Khan's *Trespassing* and Nadeem Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden*, complicate any simple recovery model. Their characters encounter displacement, political violence, marginality and social exclusion, but their narratives frequently remain episodic and unresolved. Rasa is particularly useful here because suffering accumulates through repeated emotional experiences rather than a single climactic event. *An-Nafs* illuminates the struggle to maintain a sense of self within unstable social and political conditions. NET offers a contemporary parallel in its emphasis on placing individual traumatic experience within a broader life context, but these literary works remind us that narrative integration does not necessarily produce complete stability. Endurance and continued negotiation of identity may be the more appropriate outcomes. Post 9/11 Pakistani fiction, particularly Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* and *Home Fire*, and Hamid's *Exit West*, makes narrative reconstruction increasingly transnational. In *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, Changez reconstructs his transformation through retrospective address, making narration itself the central mechanism through which personal and political experience is interpreted. *Burnt Shadows* carries trauma across Hiroshima, Partition, Afghanistan and post-9/11 America, demonstrating how historical wounds can accumulate across generations and geographical boundaries. Rasa explains the continuity of fear, grief, displacement and alienation as aesthetic experience, while *An-Nafs* illuminates the protagonist's changing relationship with cultural and political identity. NET becomes particularly relevant because these novels repeatedly place traumatic experiences within larger chronological and autobiographical contexts. Yet their endings remain important because identity reconstruction does not necessarily produce psychological closure. Contemporary political fiction such as Mohammed Hanif's *A Case of Exploding Mangoes*, *The Blind Man's Garden* and *Home Fire* further demonstrates that trauma can be narrated through irony, satire, competing perspectives and family conflict. Hanif's satire is particularly significant for Rasa because it

transforms political violence into a complex mixture of fear, absurdity and dark humour. Catharsis here cannot be reduced to solemn emotional release. Recognition may occur through irony as much as grief. An-Nafs becomes visible through the conflict between political circumstances and individual moral identity, while NET provides a useful conceptual comparison for the narrative reconstruction of experiences that remain psychologically and politically disruptive. The Urdu tradition of inner and spiritual transformation, particularly Mumtaz Mufti's *Alakh Nagri*, Bano Qudsia's *Raja Gidh*, Ashfaq Ahmed's *Man Chalay Ka Sauda* and Mufti's *Ali Pur Ka Aeili*, allows the concept of An-Nafs to assume a more central position. These works move from historical or external trauma toward guilt, desire, existential uncertainty, moral conflict and spiritual searching. In *Alakh Nagri*, autobiographical recollection becomes sustained self-examination. The significance of narration lies not simply in recovering what happened but in confronting the person who experienced it. *Raja Gidh* similarly turns emotional and moral conflict into an inquiry into the consequences of desire and ethical choice. Catharsis can be understood here through recognition of inner conflict, *Rasa* through the transformation of emotional states into contemplative aesthetic experience, and An-Nafs through the movement from disturbance toward self-awareness. NET provides a contemporary point of comparison because both approaches recognize the importance of articulating experience, although the spiritual texts extend beyond clinical narration toward moral and metaphysical interpretation. Across these texts, therefore, catharsis, *Rasa*, An-Nafs and NET illuminate different dimensions of the same broad literary process without becoming interchangeable theories. Catharsis foregrounds emotional recognition and the consequences of confronting suffering. *Rasa* explains how suffering becomes aesthetically communicable through organized emotional experience. An-Nafs shifts attention toward the transformation of the self through inner struggle, recognition and moral or spiritual reorientation. NET provides a contemporary framework for understanding how traumatic memories may be narrated, sequenced and contextualized within an individual's life history. Post-traumatic growth represents a possible subsequent condition in which such confrontation produces changed meaning, identity, agency, relationships or spiritual orientation. The Pakistani literature consequently resists a linear movement from trauma to recovery. Manto frequently leaves trauma unresolved, Husain shows its persistence through memory, Sidhwa transforms witnessing into historical consciousness, Khan reconstructs inherited histories, Shamsie and Hamid explore transnational identity, while Mufti and Qudsia turn narrative inward toward self-examination. The literary evidence therefore suggests that narration does not automatically heal trauma. What it can do is alter the relationship between experience, memory and selfhood. In some texts this produces cathartic recognition, in others an aesthetic transformation of emotion, in others self-knowledge or spiritual reorientation, and in still others continued rupture. It is precisely within this range of outcomes that the dialogue between classical poetics, An-Nafs, contemporary Narrative Exposure Therapy and post-traumatic growth becomes theoretically productive.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined Pakistani Urdu and English literature as a sustained record of how traumatic experience is remembered, narrated, emotionally transformed and incorporated into changing constructions of the self. By bringing Aristotle's concept of catharsis, Bharata's *Rasa* theory, the concept of An-Nafs and the contemporary framework of Narrative Exposure Therapy into dialogue, the study has demonstrated that the relationship between trauma and narrative has a much longer intellectual history than contemporary trauma discourse alone suggests. The comparison does not claim historical equivalence among these traditions. Rather, it reveals distinct ways of understanding what happens when disturbing experience is represented, emotionally apprehended, narrated and interpreted. The data demonstrates a movement from colonial and Partition violence toward post-Partition memory, 1971, inherited trauma,

postcolonial displacement, post-9/11 experience and inward spiritual struggle. Texts such as *Udaas Naslain*, *Aangan*, *Aag Ka Darya*, Manto's Partition fiction, *Cracking India*, *Basti*, *Noor*, *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, *Burnt Shadows*, *Home Fire*, *Alakh Nagri* and *Raja Gidh* reveal that trauma does not remain confined to the moment in which it occurs. It enters memory, family histories, cultural identities and subsequent generations. Their different narrative strategies demonstrate that traumatic experience may be confronted through witnessing, recollection, testimony, irony, confession, historical reconstruction and spiritual self-examination. The study further establishes meaningful conceptual correspondences among the selected frameworks. Catharsis helps illuminate the movement from disturbing experience toward emotional recognition, while *Rasa* explains how suffering is transformed into an aesthetically communicable emotional experience. *An-Nafs* shifts the inquiry toward the inner self, particularly the struggle through which experience may produce self-recognition, moral reflection or spiritual reorientation. Narrative Exposure Therapy provides a contemporary framework for understanding the significance of narrating and contextualizing traumatic memories within a coherent life history. Post-traumatic growth emerges not as an inevitable consequence of narration but as one possible outcome of sustained engagement with adversity. The central finding is therefore that narrative does not necessarily erase trauma; it can change the individual's relationship with trauma. Pakistani literature repeatedly demonstrates this distinction. Some characters remain caught within repetition, silence and unresolved grief, while others achieve historical recognition, identity reconstruction, agency, moral insight or spiritual stability. Such variation prevents the study from reducing literary trauma to a linear recovery model. Instead, the texts reveal a spectrum extending from traumatic rupture and repetition to recognition, accommodation, reconstruction and possible growth. The dialogue between classical poetics, *An-Nafs* and NET consequently offers a historically conscious framework for understanding how literature transforms traumatic memory into emotional, aesthetic, psychological and existential knowledge. Pakistani literature, viewed through this framework, becomes not merely a representation of historical suffering but a record of the many ways human beings attempt to give form, meaning and continuity to experiences that have disrupted the self.

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