

Resistance from the Periphery: A Power Structured Traumatic Study of *Aakhri Station* by Sarmad Khoosat (2018)

Khadija Aamir¹, Atifa Binte Zia², Sundus Amjad³

¹University of Management and Technology, Lahore

²University of Management and Technology, Lahore

³University of Management and Technology, Lahore

Correspondence: atifa.zia@umt.edu.pk²

ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This research aims to explore the trauma of women with Foucauldian power structures represented in Sarmad Khoosat's *Aakhri Station* (2018) written by Amna Mufti and produced by Kashf Foundation Production and Sarmad Khoosat. It describes the lives of seven marginalized women of different background and classes living in multiple regions of Pakistan. This study tends to examine free will and feminine power in the light of 'memory' and 'resistance' in Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory.

Methodology: By applying the notion of fragmented consciousness by Cathy Caruth with Michel Foucault's power structure to *Aakhri Station*'s post-colonial land, this study contends that women are bound within certain traumatic spaces.

Findings: By considering resistance as a tool against power structure of patriarchy, this qualitative study defines the notion of a woman standing against violence in public and domestic life space towards a new feminine narrative in Pakistani cinema.

Conclusion: The work focus on social hierarchies, prevalent patriarchal norms and culture and hegemonic discourses which eventually becomes the root-cause of acts of violence. Hence, patriarchy unleashes violence on women and considers it as their fundamental right. By building upon the notion of Foucault's disciplinary power, this study also highlights that women in *Aakhri Station* are yearning for empowerment in a global space where power positions are shifted and importance of female sanity are emerging.

Keywords: Resistance; Rights; Memory; Trauma; Female Narratives; Marginalization; Pakistani Drama; Power Structures.

Introduction

Aakhri Station, the portrayal of the chauvinistic society of Pakistan, sheds light upon the sufferings of women and the battle of power between the two genders. Penned down by Amna Mufti, directed by the renowned director Sarmad Khoosat and sponsored by Kashf Foundation, *Aakhri Station* revolves around the sufferings and troubled lives of seven women and their coping mechanisms to survive. The OST of the drama represents the case of these women:

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“Kitni sadyun sey mei dhondti hun usey, Aik who basti jahan mjhsy insaaf ho
Be-basi aur tashaddud sey ayksar alag, Aik aesi faza jo k shafaf ho
Ainy ko mery ab chamak chahye, Mjhy apny jeeny ka haq chahye
Woh zameen jismie mery qadam tik skei, Aur sar per kushada falak chahye”

[For centuries I have been seeking, a place where I get justice.
Often separated from helplessness and violence, I seek a happy atmosphere
I seek shine in the mirror of my life, I seek the right to live, now
I seek my feet to stick to the ground now, And I seek the airy sky over my head.]

The mini-series has been awarded appreciation and a great fan base from the audience. It went on-air on February 13th on ARY Digital. The show consisted of seven episodes discussing various social issues and especially the oppression being done on the female gender. It not only highlights the struggle of women but also inspires so many out there to break the stereotypes and take a stand for one's gender. The realism depicted in the show outstands it from any typical show and the women of the country can relate to the never-ending sacrifices made by women. The drama is entirely based upon real-life stories and narratives, and constructs bold, audacious female characters who are shown as the epitome of strength and inspiration. All the female protagonists fulfill the notion of women being their heroes.

The leading protagonist, Tehmina, the role played by Sanam Saeed, is presented as the beacon of light in the darkness. Although she is still struggling with mental health issues she becomes concrete support of all other traumatized women. She has been shown as a patient of depression. Highlighting the mental health issues on television made it quite relatable to the audience and it couldn't help people applaud such a strong story. All the misinterpreted social issues that are considered as norms have been broken and the slavish chains are torn to give life a new turn.

All the taboos are left open in front of the audience and the OST is a voice of every woman who has been caged in slavery and societal norms.

Shumaila, beautiful by looks but unfortunate by luck, is married to an older person who disrupts her life by throwing acid on her because of his insecurities. Her story resonates with all the female acid attack victims in Pakistan and her journey to the rehabilitation center is an inspiration for all those sufferings. HIV Aids is one of the lethal diseases that has destroyed the lives of many in Pakistan. The misconceptions carried by it have been cleared through the character of Rafia. She is shown as the wife of a drug addict who is diagnosed with HIV. Her family and society shun her, due to which she is supposed to leave her home and fight the battle of disease on her own. The awareness about the disease and the way it was transmitted depicts the double standards of the society that only doubts the chastity of women but never the honor of men.

Domestic violence, whether be in any shape; verbal, physical, or mental has been treated with nonchalance in our society. Many of the women in Pakistan have been a victim of domestic violence. Farzana is the portrayal of such sufferings, belonging to a lower-middle-class family, a teacher by profession but subject to the emotional abuse by her narcissist husband.

Another character, Yasmin, has been considered as mere property by her chauvinist husband. Addicted to gambling, he forces his wife into prostitution. She is left with no choice but to elope with her only daughter as she could foresee her child's life as bait to prostitution as well. She boards the train and struggles to provide a secure future for her girl.

Restriction to job opportunities for women in Pakistan is another topic the drama has shed light upon. Shabana is stuck with economic hardships as her husband loses all the assets and frauds a bank. Hardly making both ends meet, she burns the sweat all day and night in the fields due to which she acquires skin diseases and breathing issues. Her whole life is a constant struggle, undoubtedly a ray of hope for all the women suffering. Another character, Gul Meena becomes a victim of displacement because of the military operation against terrorists.

Fortunately, the seven heroes of the series board on the same train without knowing each other but there is one thing depicted as the mutual one; their constant fight for life. Each character takes the charge of their lives and coincides with the journey of empowerment as a way to make their lives better and secure for their children. Sarmad Khoosat, the director of the show has always tried his best to highlight the social issues in the country, he writes, “What I’m striving to achieve with this series is an honest, socially relevant, hard-hitting story that provokes thought and reaches a wider audience,” the director noted in a press statement. “Even if it impacts one person, I will feel that the drama has accomplished its goal” (Daily Times Monitor, 2017).

The writer, Amna Mufti expresses the journey of *Aakhri Station*, as “Writing *Aakhri Station* was a profoundly moving and emotional experience for me. These are not just seven stories but seven harsh realities that the society itself must face. Kashf Foundation and I are merely reflecting these sad realities in the hope that the aggressors may someday realize the damage they have caused. If not today, then someday” (Daily Times Monitor, 2017).

Sigmund Freud constructed this theory based on the events occurring in people’s lives. He got the urge to express this theory more thoroughly when he was treating the combat veterans of World War I. “Psychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities are the central concerns that define the field of trauma studies... Trauma studies explore the impact of trauma in literature and society by analyzing its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance” (Mambrol, 2020).

Later in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, Cathy Caruth expanded Freud’s idea of trauma. “In the traditional trauma model pioneered by Cathy Caruth, trauma is viewed as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation. The model draws attention to the severity of suffering by suggesting the traumatic experience irrevocably damages the psyche” (Mambrol, 2020). Caruth’s approach to trauma is linguistic and she focuses on “speechless terror” (Mambrol, 2020) of the victim, yet on another hand

Freud introduced the idea of resistance in his early work on hysteria [today’s chronic complex dissociative disorder] to describe a phenomenon he had observed during the treatment of a 24-year-old patient... He proposed that the resistance in his dissociative client was the same psychic force that had created the symptom in the first place (Ozturk, 2016, p. 1).

Thus, with trauma comes resistance. Whether trauma continues or the victim resists every event becomes a memory, and hence, the pain remains forever. Trauma is often forced by the one who is in power. Foucault claimed, with knowledge comes power, and it is vibrantly seen in *Aakhri Station*. Albeit of the class division in Pakistani society, the power is exercised by the men. Hence, each of the women faces trauma because of both society and men.

Objectives of Study

1. To examine wrong practice of power through patriarchal norms and stereotypes and their effect on the lives of women in Pakistan.
2. To analyze the voices from the periphery by demonstrating the feminine narratives by analyzing their traumatic experiences triggered by power structures of a post-colonial land.

Research Questions

- Whether or not the socio-cultural influence (power structure) is responsible for marginalization and smothered voices of women in Pakistan.
- What kind of power structure triggers trauma of these women? How are their traumatic experiences related to each other's, and how do they resisted albeit the power of society?

Significance of Study

This study is hitherto a novel study as power structures in comparison with trauma theory with regard to Pakistani cinema is a neglected and overlooked domain. This research will provide the researchers with a psychoanalytic perspective to analyze women voices living on the fringes. The voices of these women are unheard until each of them narrates their story to each other, hence, this study will discuss the peripheral phase of these women in public and private gendered space, new dimensions are open for future researchers to look in and investigate the other spatial inquiries.

Literature Review

Drama *Aakhri Station* (2018) represents the story of seven peripheral yet strong women who stand against the power structure of patriarchy, and despite their traumatic firsthand experience with life, they opt for resistance. Sarmad Khoosat's drama serves as a voice for women who seeks the emergence of woman empowerment nowhere but in her home as,

Woman Empowerment is not [always] about showing women as victims, women are already strong, it's about showing women as the heroes of their own story. This mini-series 'Aakhri Station' touches on important social issues plaguing our society. This series follows the stories of seven separate women who are brought together coincidentally when they ride in the same train compartment (Nadeem, n.d., para. 1).

Plenty of research is conducted on the emergence of powerful women in Pakistani Television and Cinema, but most of them tend to apply feminism solely to show this representation. However, this paper contends to not highlight the revolt of these seven women through the lens of feminism. The paper will first discuss the traumatic experience of these women triggered by Foucault's power structure embedded in a post-colonial society. Then it will ponder upon the resistance of these igniting seven women because the drama itself has shown this progress by each passing episode. We will see

As their journey progresses, these seven women learn more about each other and come to realize that though they seem different at first, they are very similar. All of them are on a journey of empowerment as an ignition to change their circumstances and each of their stories illustrates important, yet often misunderstood, social issues (Nadeem, n.d., para. 2).

Thus, the notion of 'resistance' in Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory plays a vital role as Foucault's Power.

Liberating art and literature have been a long run especially for one who is already living on the fringes. Samia Manzoor, Sarwat Jabeen, and Arfa Haneef in their paper, *Depiction of Liberalism in Pakistani Urdu Drama: A Cultivation and Feminist Analysis* discusses that "the content developers of Pakistani Urdu drama must focus on the culture and norms of a Muslim society and must not follow the traditions set by the drama industry of the neighboring countries blindly" (Manzoor, 2018, p. 95). Thus, Sarmad Khoosat is one of the pioneer producers and writers who has struggled to touch upon the sensitivities of multifaceted archetypes and brought a revolt in them. Syed Omer Nadeem in his article,

'Akhri Station'-Women as Heroes of their Own Stories praises Khoosat, "for his unconventional and marvelous contribution to the media industry [he further adds that this art,] this piece of work is his another accomplishment and effort for women empowerment and the betterment of our society (Nadeem, n.d., para. 3).

Khoosat has not mimicked any storyline set by neighboring industries but has generally discussed the sufferings of women belonging from third-world countries. Hence, he has voiced the unheard part of any second society. He has selected the platform of both Television and Cinema to impregnate the minds of those women who accept their struggles as their fate and do not resist the trauma.

Sarmad Khoosat liberates Television but he does not force his viewers to cultivate the revolt he has projected in his mini-series, *Aakhri Station*. He has used this platform to spread awareness against such violence because as per Cultivation Theory, “with the help of television people start adopting new trends and thus form a new enriched culture” (Manzoor, 2018, p. 95). Khoosat on the other hand is not trying to “form a new enriched culture” (Manzoor, 2018, p. 95) rather he is trying to reshape this patriarchal society by giving hope and power to those women who have no end but to adopt their sufferings as the new normal. Thus, he opts for Mainstreaming and Resonance in the language of Cultivation Theory. Manzoor quotes Baron and Davis in her article, and states,

Mainstreaming happens when a similar kind of content is shown on different television channels. For viewers these television symbols and messages become more influential...[and] Resonance occurs when television depiction of reality is supported by the real world. Therefore, resonance is when what we see on television is reinforced by real-world experiences (Manzoor, 2018, p. 95).

Hence, Khoosat repeatedly in his career has mainstreamed and resonated against cruelty practiced largely on women. He then gives his female viewers a “double dose” to stand against the odds of society and to step in a journey of their own choice (Manzoor, 2018, p. 95).

South Asian women are forced to be the “carrier of family traditions” and “the way women are represented in different Pakistani dramas in last few years has affected the society in terms of creating a bad reputation for a woman. Dramas, during the last decade, focused on objectifying women’s role in society and have shown them as the carrier of family tradition” (Qamar, 2021). Khansa Qamar in her research, *Women Representation in Drama Serial Sabaat* highlights the bold decisions taken by the female protagonist of the drama, *Sabaat* (2020) against the odds of her society. Similarly, in 2018 Sarmad Khoosat acclaimed the traumatic story of seven different women and albeit of all the power structures they stood against the society and left everything behind to focus on their future. Khansa Qamar quotes Faiza Khanum who highlighted the dramas spreading awareness against certain social taboos. Faiza Khanum has emphasized this thought by naming the dramas made in the past decade. Qamar quotes her thought as,

Faiza Khanum (2018) wrote an article on incredible Pakistani dramas that are tackling social taboos. She appreciates the whole team includes writers who have taken this responsibility of creating a positive impact and spread awareness among our young youth. She discussed the plots of famous dramas on social taboos includes Udaari, Baaghi, Chewing gum, Aakhri station, Muqabil, Sammi, and Rehaai. These dramas are tackling social issues, raise awareness and break the silence on taboos. The content of these dramas explored socio-cultural taboos (Qamar, 2021, para. 6).

Thus, the paper aims to discuss the traumatic experience of these seven women; Tehmina, Yasmeen, Gul Meena, Shumaila, Rafiya, Shabana, and Farzana to acknowledge the resistance of these sensitive yet strong women to spread consciousness among the oppressed women residing on fringes of a post-colonial land.

James Berger in his article, *Trauma and Literary Theory* questions the need for trauma theory in “literature, historiography, and contemporary culture” (Berger, 1997, p. 570). He asks, “It is worth asking why, at this moment, trauma should attract such attention and become a pivotal subject connecting so many disciplines” (Berger, 1997, p. 570). Later he answers this question by “looking at contemporary American culture and the history of this century, one might well ask how trauma could not be a primary concern and why it has taken so long to elaborate the three suggestions for traumatic theory put forward by Freud” (Berger, 1997,

p. 570). Berger in his article first mentions Freud's three works: *Studies in Hysteria*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and *Moses and Monotheism*. In *Studies of Hysteria*, Freud opens up about trauma as,

The dynamics of trauma, repression, and symptom formation. Freud held that an overpowering event, unacceptable to consciousness, can be forgotten and yet return in the form of somatic symptoms or compulsive, repetitive behaviors. This initial theory of trauma and symptom became problematic for Freud when he concluded that neurotic symptoms were more often the result of repressed drives and desires than of traumatic events (Berger, 1997, p. 570).

In his second book, Freud discusses the concept of trauma once again regarding the sufferings of World War One while he was treating the combat veterans. He uses the term "death drive" to explain the physicality of events as a "comprehensive frame" that causes trauma (Berger, 1997, p. 570). Finally, in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, "Freud attempted a theory of trauma that would account for the historical development of entire cultures. Especially valuable in this work is his elaboration of the concept of "latency," of how the memory of a traumatic event can be lost over time but then regained in asymptomatic form when triggered by some similar event" (Berger, 1997, p. 570). Thus, the paper will not only explore traumas narrated by each of the seven-woman but will also shed light on their resistance against violence. The concept of resistance itself was coined by Freud in his book *Studies of Hysteria* while he was treating a twenty-four-year-old as mentioned in the previous section of the paper.

Memory is yet another aspect of trauma theory, which Caruth quotes as "historical memory" (Mambrol, 2020). Nasrullah Mambrol while explaining this theory directly quotes Cathy Caruth and says,

The turn in traumatic memory that precludes knowledge of the past for the individual also applies to the function of "historical memory" regarding a collective or cultural traumatic experience (15–16). Caruth writes in her interpretation of Freud's Moses and Monotheism that "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we were implicated in each other's traumas," emphasizing a universalist view of trauma that damages the psyche and evokes a shared response across time (Mambrol, 2020, para. 16).

Thus, the memory becomes an intriguing part of trauma and becomes "transhistorical" and its "intergenerational quality" is "transmitted across time", likewise, in Khoosat's mini-series, the memory plays an integral part (Mambrol, 2020). Each of the women narrating their stories and Tehmina's childhood flashbacks will be analyzed in this research. Then only the intensity of their resistance can be measured accurately.

Trauma studies itself is a vast theory in the field of medical, metaphysics, psychology, philosophy, art and literature. Trauma itself is shipped with both memory and resilience. However, most of the times it is weighed with the female gender. Shedding a light on feminism in general, it is noticed that women are repeatedly commodified, and over all this ruling over their psychology and body triggers trauma. Thus, memory and resilience becomes an important aftermath of it. Shahla Haeri, in her article, *Resilience and Post-Traumatic Recovery in Cultural and Political Context: Two Pakistani Women's Strategies for Survival* says, "violence against women has been conceptualized in terms of controlling female sexuality, restricting women's autonomy, humiliating and keeping women out of sight, maintaining male control and dominance, and dishonoring other [male] enemies" (Haeri, 2007, p. 287). Haeri's paper aimed to research on the "violation of women's bodies [which] becomes the site for political rivalries and thus incurring masculine/national honor" (Haeri, 2007, p. 287). While applying

ecological psychology and cultural anthropology, [her] paper highlights the resiliency shown by two Pakistani women in their efforts toward posttraumatic recovery as they situate their traumatic experiences within their immediate structural, political, and cultural contexts, which in turn influence their behavior and shape the specific choices they make. (Haeri, 2007, p. 287, 288)

Haeri explains that power structures are embedded in Pakistani society, yet the marginalized, traumatized women make their way to show resistance. This research too tends to highlight certain power structure and how seven women from *Aakhri Station* were chained to them. Yet they resisted and successfully unshackled all of the chains.

With knowledge comes power, which is a thought Michel Foucault talks about in his theory of Power. “In common use, the term power is a very broad concept that encompasses many different things including ability, agency, domination, and potential. Foucault’s analysis breaks the concept of power apart, and his theory explains differences in various modes of power” (Michel Foucault: *Modalities of Power*, 2013). Foucault declared that as most of the world is not under the influence of monarchy, thus, different sects and modes of power are now practiced by rulers. “He was interested in analyzing how power operates within a democratic system in which people are supposed to govern themselves” (Michel Foucault: *Modalities of Power*, 2013). While arguing about democracies and their power, Foucault presented four new modes of power: “Sovereign power, Disciplinary power, Pastoral power, and Bio-power” (Michel Foucault: *Modalities of Power*, 2013). Although these modes are primarily applicable to political literature they will be also applied to the characters of *Aakhri Station* while their sufferings will be analyzed. Shahla Haeri, in her research, *Resilience and Post-Traumatic Recovery in Cultural and Political Context: Two Pakistani Women’s Strategies for Survival* says, “the etching of political rivalries onto women’s bodies for national honor—or to inflict dishonor—has a long and shameful history and is not unique to any particular society” (Haeri, 2007, p. 288). Thus, this research too supports Haeri’s argument that women are seen as an object, a commodity living on the periphery because they are Power is exercised everywhere, albeit of class or gender it is practiced. Similarly, men rules in this drama, and if not men then society projects its power on some of the women present in Khoosat’s *Aakhri Station*.

In chapter seven of *Feminism/Postmodernism*, Nancy Hartsock associates “power and gender” and she declares, “Power is associated firmly with the male and masculinity” (Nicholson, 2013, p. 157). Nancy Hartsock, in her chapter, *Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?* Says, “To change the relations of domination which structure society and define our subordination, we must understand how power works, and thus we need a usable theory of power” (Nicholson, 2013, p. 157). As “gender relations require specific description” it is observed in *Aakhri Station* that all women are not self-defined, but are constantly defined by men around them. The “utility of power” is presented as typical as a chauvinistic society practices it (Nicholson, 2013, p. 157). Thus, the paper aims to highlight the wrong utilization of power practiced to marginalize women in *Aakhri Station*.

Each of the seven-woman has gone through a certain trauma, and as a resistance to normalizing this trauma, all of them stood against the power structures of chauvinistic Pakistani society and ended up on a train for their brighter future. Albeit being the powerless gender of their society all of them resisted securing their and their children’s future. These traumas will be discussed in the light of ‘historical memory, a concept discussed by Cathy Caruth. Thus, the approach of applying the mentioned modules of Cathy Caruth’s Trauma theory merging with Michel Foucault’s theory of Power research is completely new and aims to contribute to the field of literature.

Research Methodology

“Psychological trauma, its representation in language, and the role of memory in shaping individual and cultural identities are the central concerns that define the field of trauma studies” (Mambrol, 2020). Trauma and a psychoanalytic study have deplored that the concept of trauma is associated with other “theoretical frameworks such as post-structural, sociocultural, and postcolonial theory form the basis of criticism that interprets representations of an extreme experience and its effects upon identity and memory” (Mambrol, 2020). Thus, the paper aims to draw a critique by discussing the traumatic experiences of all seven women in *Aakhri Station*. These experiences will be discussed under the light of trauma theory’s module of ‘fragmented consciousness, memory and resistance.’ “Trauma studies explore the impact of trauma in literature and society by analyzing its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance” (Mambrol, 2020).

Aakhri Station portrays the trauma of these women as a representation of Pakistani problematic society. Amna Mufti, the writer, has drawn seven women who are frantically oppressed and belongs to a different class of society. However, being a woman the traumas they face are similar at some point. The powered structured traumatic study of Sarmad Khoosat's *Aakhri Station* highlights "the formal innovations of texts, both print, and media, that display insights into the ways that identity, the unconscious, and remembering are influenced by extreme events thus remain a significant focus of the field" (Mambrol, 2020). Thus, the paper will also Cathy Caruth's module of analyzing the emotional suffering of women in *Aakhri Station*, "as well as the language of loss, disruption, and fragmentation [of souls, minds, and hearts of these women]" (Mambrol, 2020).

Michel Foucault's theory of power focuses on the concept of power "that encompasses many different things including ability, agency, domination, and potential. Foucault's analysis breaks the concept of power apart, and his theory explains differences in various modes of power" (Michel Foucault: Modalities of Power, 2013). Foucault, in his theory, declared that society has gone through multiple changes from shifting "from feudalism, to monarchies, to democracies; but our political theories of power have not kept up with those changes" (Michel Foucault: Modalities of Power, 2013). That is why, Foucault "finely tuned theory of power that can help us understand the many different ways power operates when there are no dictators", likewise, this paper, also aims to foresee the different modules of power being practiced through different men from different class on these seven women of *Aakhri Station*. The research aims to analyze "how power operates within a democratic system in which people are supposed to govern themselves" with the help of Sarmad Khoosat's characters from *Aakhri Station*.

This research will focus on Foucault's four-module of power. "The sovereign mode of power operates in democracies when authorities (people or laws) try to control other people" (Michel Foucault: Modalities of Power, 2013). Disciplinary power is another module that focuses on the power a person practice on himself to fit in society properly. It is most likely based on the knowledge a person holds. Thus, the concept of gaze becomes an integral part of it. "Foucault used the metaphor of the pastor as a strategy to explain another mode of power that operates in democracies: pastoral power" (Michel Foucault: Modalities of Power, 2013). Pastoral power has a quite different approach to the concept of power. The 'pastor' over here takes care of the flock to nurture it, but in return operates his power on it. Finally, Biopower focuses on "modern people [who] have grown up in societies, so [they] govern [them]selves according to what [they] have come to understand about [them]selves in terms of race, class, gender, age, and so on" (Michel Foucault: Modalities of Power, 2013). Hence, the paper will apply Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma along with the mentioned modules of power by Foucault and will analyze each of the women's trauma triggered by the enrooted power structure built in the four walls of a home.

Data Analysis

Sarmad Khoosat's *Aakhri Station* opens up with a woman, Tehmina, draped in a saree is seen buying a ticket on Lahore's railway station. She then goes and sits in a compartment full of women. The women sitting in that compartment gives distressful expression of pain dropping on their faces. The first episode revolves around the character, Yasmin. She is accompanied by a little girl. When the train departs, Tehmina, the protagonist, starts noticing all of the women. She asks the names of three women sitting near her. One of them, Gul Meena tells her name, yet others hesitate.

Yasmin along with her daughter comes and sits next to her. Tehmina is noticing all women, and then her eye catches the sight of Yasmin sitting beside her scratching her nails painted blue. She then compliments, "Aj Kal kaisey naye naye rang agaye hain na nail polish mein? [What new colors are trending in nail polish, right?]" (Khoosat, 2018). Yasmin at first ignores her, and engulfed in her thoughts to forcefully get rid of the nail paint she blabbers, "Uter he nahi Rahi yeh manhoosni. Nafraat Hai Mujhe is Neeley rang se. [Damn this nail paint. I hate the color blue.]" (Khoosat, 2018). However, to communicate with her in a better way Tehmina offers her perfume and cotton so she could get rid of them. After a moment she asks Yasmin, "Kya Hua tumko? [What has happened to you?]" (Khoosat, 2018). Yasmin, still shock to understand what

happened with her replies, “pata he nahi. Kuch samjh he nahi ati. Jis Ghar ko Apna samjha, usi ki dewaarein mujh pe toot parri. [No idea. I don’t understand anything. The place, I considered my home shattered its walls on me.]” (Khoosat, 2018). And then the hail of a vegetable vendor is heard in the background, and flashbacks of Yasmin’s life draw in. It is seen that Yasmeen has been considered as mere property by her chauvinist husband. Addicted to gambling, he forces his wife into prostitution. She is left with no choice but to elope with her only daughter as she could foresee her child’s life as bait to prostitution as well. She boards the train and struggles to provide a secure future for her girl.

Although Yasmin and her family belonged to a lower class of Pakistani society, yet she is ruled by a man, her husband. Discussing power structures at large it can be seen that her husband too was living under the pressure of men winning gambling around him. Foucault’s module of sovereign power “is easy to recognize and understand because it most closely resembles forces of domination and control with which we are familiar” (Michel Foucault: *Modalities of Power*, 2013). Hence, Yasmin’s husband forces her into prostitution because he is in the power to operate everything and everyone in his home.

As the red light of the nearby billboard keeps blinking, and Yasmin’s husband forces her to sleep with another man from gambling, facing society to get milk for her daughter, food for her family, and taunts of her mother-in-law triggers her trauma. It is seen that a woman is not only led by a man’s mind but her body is also considered to be his property. But then comes her resistance. Freud claims this resistance to be the alarming charge of trauma, and Cathy Caruth too resonates with this idea. Numb with the horrors of the previous night, Yasmin is lost, and her consciousness is fragmented and torn. Later, Yasmin’s charge of resistance comes in when the husband tells her that he foresees their good future because their daughter will too be that part of his disgusting idea of prostitution. Hence, she elopes and winds up in that train compartment. Her victimization of being a prostitute triggers her trauma and that too which is led by her husband, one who was supposed to be her guardian, her caretaker, and the provider to that family, and not vice versa.

Aakhri Station is a mini-series that narrates the marginalization of women belonging to different geographical areas of Pakistan. The second episode revolves around a woman from Khyber Pakhtun Khwa, Gul Meena. “Pakistan has been a victim of terrorism for many years now and has seen thousands killed and even more displaced due to it” (Nadeem, n.d.). *Aakhri Station* aimed to raise a voice against such issues as well. Based on the true stories of Pakistani ordinary women. “A pregnant Gul Mina suffers the fate of a displaced woman due to a military operation against non-state actors in her village. Her story shows the impact of displacement on women and their families” (Nadeem, n.d.). A very different type of power structure is shown in this episode which triggers the trauma of not only a woman but a mother, and, thus, resilience is also a very bold one.

The innate power structure of ruling women is not only operated by men in Pakistan, but most of the time it is a woman who is objectifying another woman. Similarly, Gul Meena’s mother-in-law is depicted as the epitome of a stereotypical mother-in-law, although her husband is everything that Yasmin’s lacked. During the upheaval of the military operation, she and her husband are left behind because of Gul Meena’s pregnancy. Even during the nighttime in the tents, she requests her mother-in-law to call upon her husband, Yousaf, but she refuses. Upon seeing her condition, Yousaf asks Gul Meena if she is doing fine, and says that as soon the sun will rise he will try to arrange a doctor for her. Albeit of Gul Meena’s condition, her mother-in-law gets furious and says to her son, “Chal chup kar, aesi choti choti baton par doctor ko nahi bulatey. Mein ne aath bachey paida kiye hain. Agar aese biwi ki baatein suntan rahey gat toh tu kisi kaam ka nahi rahey ga. [There is no need to call a doctor on such false alarm, thus, stay quiet. If you will keep listening to your wife, you will not be able to progress in this world]” (Khoosat, 2018). This still does not trigger Gul Meena’s trauma because she feels safe when Yousaf is around. However, the next day because of all of the traveling and its chaos, Gul Meena’s health is distressed. Thus, to save her and his child, Yousaf goes against his mother and sets a journey to find a doctor. Unfortunately, Gul Meena could not hold her condition, and she delivers a boy in the home of the man who was riding the gharries for them. However, this happiness is short for them, because, first they are unable to track their family, and second Yousaf dies

leaving behind his wife and newborn child. This is the first stage of Gul Meena's trauma, and her consciousness is yet to be fragmented.

Foucault's model of disciplinary power sets in when she is taken under the supervision of her in-laws. The men of this Pakhtun family are far supportive when compared with the mother-in-law. Disciplinary power "is exercised through surveillance and knowledge. One surveillance mechanism is the gaze. The gaze is symbolized by the panopticon, a prison design that allows a supervisor to watch inmates" (Michel Foucault: *Modalities of Power*, 2013). Thus, the mother-in-law is the person who holds the most knowledge among all of the members easily rules over Gul Meena. She blames her with countless accusations, including the calamity of her son (because of Gul Meena's 'damned' identity), not being a good mother and the worst, being infidel to her dead husband with his younger brother.

Despite all false accusations her trauma is triggered when she is married off to an elderly person, and he dumps her son. He refuses to take care of her and Yousaf's son because he only wants her to concentrate on him and his children. She does everything to please the old man, but still, he refuses to take in her son. Gul Meena is then informed that her former in-laws have moved to Karachi, thus she elopes that old man's house to be united with her son. Gul Meena's consciousness is fragmented when she is separated from her son, and people repeatedly accuse her character. Hence, she resists all of the circumstances and takes the bold step to travel to Karachi with the hope of uniting with her son. She is the woman who goes against the grain.

Language plays a very important role in society. Language rules and is at loss at the same time. It is an intriguing part of both power and trauma. It can cause trauma and can help to heal it as well. Similarly, the third episode gives a visual representation of how a language operates in a post-colonial land. The episode opens up on the train where the ticket collector is collecting tickets. The ticket clerk might be a junior in his railways' association, but he still holds the power of collecting the ticket and keeping a check on those who do not own one. The power he is operating over here is the normal one, he lends money to Yasmin so she could travel with her daughter. However, on the other hand, another woman, a stranger, belittles her by saying, "maarta he toh tha. Konsa Mard nahi maarta apni aurat ko? [He only hit you, right. Who does not beat his woman?]" when Yasmin tells him that she has left her husband (Khoosat, 2018). Hence, it is the language that both triggers and cures the trauma. Cathy Caruth stated that trauma is the part of fragmented consciousness where language is a loss. Thus, the language helped Yasmin to regain a little bit of hope back in her life when the clerk offered her the ticket.

The second incident is followed by the third traveling woman, Farzana. She too is on that train with her infant daughter. Before the viewers are drawn into her flashbacks, a group of women is heard chanting a song, "hondey aye Mel mukadran de / Naseeban wich judai aye. Khushi da sawera hona aye / Ghama di raat chai aye. Na dilan nu chain honda aye / Te gham zindagi nu khanda aye. [It is all about fate / It is in the destiny to be parted. But the day is going to bring joy / For now it is just a sad evening. The heart is restless / And so the misery eats alive]" (Khoosat, 2018). It is this song that triggers the memory of Farzan's trauma. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory illustrates that memory is an important part of trauma itself because although the person moves on, his/her trauma can be triggered with a single voice, place, or incident. Likewise, the song also made Farzana revisit her trauma, and she narrates her story of the domestic violence she faced in her toxic marriage. She is the victim of,

Domestic violence, an issue that is often treated with indifference and nonchalance in our society. In the rare instance when it is acknowledged, abuse is often assumed to be only physical when in reality it can be emotional, verbal, and psychological. Farzana is a lower-middle-class teacher and is subjected to emotional abuse by her self-involved husband (Nadeem, n.d., para. 7).

Her self-obsessed husband harms her both emotionally and psychologically. Albeit of her parents' unwillingness, she married this man and considers it as her punishment for going against their will. "She, along with her daughter, leaves him when the abuse moves from emotional to physical. Her story is one of

strength and creates awareness of the different forms of abuse and how they affect victims (Nadeem, n.d.). She is a well-educated woman, who when falls in love forgets herself, and she “kept facing what was wrong, although being aware of it” (Khoosat, 2018). Similar to other victimized, marginalized women she too had to face the same kind of sovereign power that Yasmin goes through. The level of their violence might be considered differently, but torture will always be torture. Her trauma is triggered when her husband beats her and accuses her of infidelity just because he was so self-obsessed. “In the first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault explained that bio-power is a modality of power that is exercised through our relationship to demography” (Michel Foucault: *Modalities of Power*, 2013).

Being the other gender is not easy when the land itself is on the fringes. Women of Pakistan face violence because of their gender, their identity. The only explanation for this violence can be stated as, “We modern people have grown up in societies, so we govern ourselves according to what we have come to understand about ourselves in terms of race, class, gender, age, and so on” (Michel Foucault: *Modalities of Power*, 2013). The power structure of language governed by men perfectly fits here, as Farzana and all the other women are at a loss of language and cannot fathom their ‘fragmented consciousness’. Thus, she resisted the domestic violence and ends up on this train with other peripheral women. Women of our society are raised on the notion that they have to be part of someone else’s home. They are only suggested to get married as soon they grow up, without even thinking what trauma could inculcate their mind and body later on. Thus, Farzana takes this bold step to live with her daughter all alone and raise her the way she can without her narcissist husband’s mentality.

Rafia is another woman who becomes the victim of marginalization in this series. She, similar to the other majority of women present in the drama belonged to the lower class. Khoosat has discussed yet another social taboo through Rafia’s narrative. “HIV Aids is an incredibly lethal disease around which is a major stigma and misconception. Rafia is the wife of a drug addict who contracts HIV. Upon learning that she has HIV, her family shuns her and she is forced to leave her home and travel with only her daughter” (Nadeem, n.d.). Before she narrates her story, she tells Tehmina that, “konsi aurat beemar nahi hoti? [There are no women who do not face health issue, right?]” (Khoosat, 2018). And then she tells what happened to her and why she resisted. Michel Foucault’s model of disciplinary and sovereign power fits with her situation. In her home, both her husband and mother-in-law are in power. Belonging from the lower class he has no money at times to buy his stash, and thus he sells almost the entire home. And later when Rafia questions it and warns his in-laws that something is wrong with their son, no one supports her. Moreover, the mother-in-law only ridicules her.

Addicted to drugs, Rafia still works hard on him and takes him to get proper help. However, each time he can drift back from the right track. She has been subjected to both domestic and emotional violence at her home. Her trauma is yet to be triggered when she finds out that she is HIV positive when tries to give blood to her sister. “Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of ‘episodic’ or ‘sovereign’ acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. ‘Power is everywhere and ‘comes from everywhere so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure’” (Foucault: *Power is Everywhere*, n.d.). It is this innate power of ruling a daughter-in-law and wife which triggers Rafia’s instinct to resist all of the wrong exercises of power. It was the knowledge of being supreme in a house which led her mother-in-law to ridicule Rafia. She used all kinds of foul language to belittle her. Foucault says, “Instead it is a kind of ‘meta power or ‘regime of truth’ that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation. Foucault uses the term ‘power/knowledge’ to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding, and ‘truth’” (Foucault: *Power is Everywhere*, n.d.). Despite all odds going against him, and being homeless when her family finds out that she is HIV positive, her mother-in-law uses the word ‘Naish (whore)’ against her, and simply alleges her to be the reason behind her husband’s HIV too. “She is left to face societal critique and her disease alone, and though she preserves, her journey is one of struggle. Her story highlights many of the misconceptions about HIV, specifically regarding the way it is spread and creates awareness about the disease” (Nadeem, n.d.). Without considering that she had no one except for her husband’s family, her

mother-in-law throws her out of the house. Later, when in a newspaper Rafia finds out about her husband's death, she visits his nameless grave, and takes it as an awakening, and decides to go to Karachi so she could get the right treatment and live a peaceful life with her daughter. Thus, she resists not only against this typical society but this disease too.

The role of memory plays an important part in trauma studies. Likewise, Tehmina, the protagonist's story has been repeatedly shown in flashbacks in this series. Her trauma is the biggest one. Tehmina is mentally ill and is going through depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder since her childhood. Her mother committed suicide by jumping off the roof, right in front of her eyes. As per the Freudian concept of trauma studies, Tehmina's extreme experience of pain challenged the "limits of language and rupture[d] meaning altogether" (Mambrol, 2020). The flashbacks of her fragmented consciousness are too shown in fragmentation in several episodes, which represents the intensity of her broken conscious self. Tehmina's experience of trauma is different from other women present at that time in the train. All the rest of the women were facing the physical oppression of power structures, as it is everywhere, but

Tehmina [was] a woman battling depression who manage[d] to turn her life around with the support of her husband. She is an important character who not only supports all other women and encourages them to move forward, but also highlights the struggle of dealing with depression in Pakistan. In our society, depression is not considered a disease and is ignored to the point that many people who suffer from it take their lives due to a lack of medical attention. Tehmina's story is the reality of many people in Pakistan and provides insight for our society into the struggle of those dealing with depression (Nadeem, n.d., para 5).

Thus, being a Pakistani woman, she is living on the periphery, and this can be considered as one of the reasons behind her mother's suicide. The question which is still unanswered in the series is, why did her mother commit suicide, after all? What triggered her consciousness to be fragmented? However, not one reason can be considered true, as Tehmina herself was just a kid. Sarmad Khoosat has used colors to symbolize the trauma of these women. Blue nail polish, red dupatta, and lipstick symbolize the trauma of Yasmin. Similarly, brown, dried dead leaves are the symbolism of Tehmina's state of mind. It is highlighted in episode number five of the series where Tehmina's "trauma is thus defined concerning the process of remembering and as an event harbored within the unconscious that causes a splitting of the ego or dissociation" (Mambrol, 2020). After getting married the flashbacks of her childhood haunts her the most, but her husband helped her to speak about her trauma. The trauma hits her the most when she goes through Post Marital Depression after the birth of her first child. She almost abandons it just because she feared that she will too leave her baby behind, the way her mother did. Belonging from the upper class of society, her husband hired professional help for her. However, he forces her to take the proper medication, and therapies to recover from her Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and depression. The change in her dull life is again visualized through colors. The leaves which were dead, dried, and represented Autumn, were later turned green; showing the new life of Tehmina, full of hope.

Similar to her mother, Tehmina is shown as a literary person who has the talent to write quite well. However, because of her mental illness, she was unable to write. As per her judgment, she used to make no sense. "Traumatic neurosis is marked by the "compulsion to repeat" the memory of the painful event with the hopes of mastering the unpleasant feelings" (Mambrol, 2020). The moment she tried to write, all she could see was her mother's pale dead body, dead brown leaves, rose petals, pearl white bracelet, her mother's pale nose stuffed with cotton, her feet tied, and she resting lifelessly in the coffin. These images are just enough to embark on someone's trauma itself. Tehmina yet was a strong woman who after seeing all of this was still alive. Thus, memory plays an important role in trauma because it made her revisit her trauma every time she was on the verge of collapsing.

The second part of this episode is based on the story of another victim, Shabana. Her life is the reflection of those women "in a country where jobs are already scarce, women find their economic opportunities even

more restricted. Based in a rural area, Shabana is driven into economic hardships due to an alleged bank fraud by her husband who subsequently loses all interest in supporting his family” (Nadeem, n.d.). The power structure of feudalism is also a key feature of this episode. When her husband is unable to find work, or say any work which does not suit his man ego, she is, “forced to find work, she attempts partaking in domestic labor in her village. The long hours and harsh treatment of this occupation leave Shabana no choice but to work in the fields. Due to the nature of her fieldwork, she develops both a breathing problem and skin condition” (Nadeem, n.d.). The power structure built in this part of the episode is not just being marginalized by the man of her home, but her husband too is on a peripheral phase of economic power structures. The trauma she faces then gets double because on one hand she cannot bear the poverty of her husband, and later when she is trying to earn, her husband’s passing taunts that there is no prosperity in a woman’s income. As Foucault pointed out that it is the regime of how truth is held in society, or say how a lie is molded into truth establishes power. Similarly, Shabana’s husband also passes out these ridiculous taunts because for him the truth is that it is a men’s money that can only bring prosperity to a home. Thus,

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only under multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, how each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true’ (Foucault: *Power is Everywhere*, n.d., para. 4).

Then things get worse when she gets pregnant with the third child and worsens when she loses it. However, her brother supports her and encourages her to take this bold step of finding work in a city, Karachi. As a result of it and “struggling to support her family, she decides to go to the city for better economic opportunities. Shabana’s brother was supportive towards her decision and gives the viewers a life lesson by saying, “aurat, admi ka farq kya Hota hai? Ghar pe Kisi ko toh kaam Karna hai na? [There is no difference between a man and woman, after all, someone has to be a bread winner for home.]” (Khoosat, 2018). Her story highlights the hardship of economic struggle and exemplifies the strength of women in such dire situations” (Nadeem, n.d.). Hence, she is seen traveling with other victims of society.

“Shumaila is a beautiful woman who is married to a much older, not particularly attractive, “settled” man. Driven by his insecurities, he accuses her again and again of wanting more than him until finally, he throws acid at her to make her “pay” for her transgressions” (Nadeem, n.d.). Her trauma similar to other women present in the train is driven by the power structure, exercised by her insecure husband. Her part of the story starts when all of them are buying bangles and the seller forces her to wear some, as she too is allured by her beauty. While refusing, she unintentionally unveils her face, and everyone goes in awe, and nothing is yet to be explained because her trauma was transparent through her acid-ridden face. As discussed prior that power is everywhere, and is mostly exercised in the wrong way, similarly, her husband commodifies her and decided to throw acid on her face because he was too insecure towards her beauty. “After the acid attack, her mother-in-law supports Shumaila’s journey to a rehabilitation center which is her reason for being on the train. Shumaila’s story is one that many women in Pakistan are familiar with and it highlights major flaws in our society” (Nadeem, n.d.). Her mother-in-law is an ideal one in Aakhri Station, she takes full responsibility for her treatment and even makes her son pay for his wrongdoing. This is yet the correct use of what Foucault claims to be power. Shumaila, at first, is happy at her wedding and ignores what her husband feels because a woman is considered to be a good wife only when she tolerates all of his oppressions. She has to pay a price before resistance. However, she does.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be learned that trauma is an integral part of a woman’s life. Despite all of the hardships, it is seen that all seven women were able to resist their trauma. They are marginalized and victim of oppression yet, they are an inspiration for all women living on the periphery. Likewise, in the last episode

all these women are shown as happy and are leading a independent life. Khoosat highlights another important message, “aurat Kyun roti hai? Kab roti hai? Kisi ko kya data? Aurton k toh dukh bhi ajeeb hotay hain. Sukh bhi. [Why and where a woman cries? This is yet to be answered. Their sadness is weird and so is their happiness.]”, says Shabana (Khoosat, 2018). Khoosat does not highlight that these women are marginalized, but he has portrayed them as the strongest ones who can stand against all odds of power structures, and albeit of the trauma they go through, they can still take a decision resulting in prosperity and free life. Khoosat has presented a woman figure who can resist and challenge the power structures of a patriarchal society without any regret and self-denial.

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ORCID iDs

Khadija Aamir¹  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2043-9830>
 Atifa Binth e Zia²  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3948-1609>
 Sundus Amjad³  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7537-8054>

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