

DIMENSIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN SHAHNAZ BASHIR'S "THE HALF MOTHER"

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Abstract

Shahnaz Bashir's The Half Mother presents an agonizing narrative of a Kashmiri family devastated by armed suppression. The novel explores multiple dimensions of psychological trauma, particularly the marginalized status of women, injustice, violence, loneliness, and fear, and their profound effects on the Kashmiri psyche. Through the protagonist Haleema, Bashir portrays the emotional and psychological suffering of women who endure loss and displacement. Initially depicting a peaceful family life, the story turns tragic when Haleema's father is killed and her only son, Imran, is abducted by the Indian army. Her relentless search for him becomes a painful journey marked by despair, resilience, and unending trauma. Despite her determination, the quest leaves her physically weakened and psychologically broken, symbolizing the collective grief of Kashmiri mothers who suffer similar losses. Interpreted through Sandra Bloom's Trauma Theory, Haleema's struggle reflects the "fight" response to overwhelming trauma, representing endurance amid oppression and injustice.

Keywords: Psychological trauma, loss, resilience, Kashmir conflict, maternal suffering.

Introduction

Kashmir, a breathtaking valley surrounded by mountains, has long been recognized for its natural beauty and cultural richness. However, its geopolitical tensions have overshadowed its magnificence. Bordered by Himachal and Punjab in the south and Afghanistan in the north, Kashmir has been a contested territory for over sixty years, becoming a bone of contention between India and Pakistan (BBC News 2025; Britannica 2025; Wikipedia 2025). The ongoing conflict has deeply scarred the lives of its residents, replacing peace with fear, mistrust, and trauma. Families have lost loved ones, and psychological suffering has become a defining element of daily life, particularly for women who bear the greatest burden of the conflict (Nature 2024; Rana 2021). Kashmiri women, such as the protagonist Haleema in *The Half Mother*, represent the collective agony of a region torn apart by violence. Having lost their fathers, husbands, and sons, they suffer physically, emotionally, and economically. Their trauma and resilience have found expression in the literary works emerging from Kashmir. Writers like Shahnaz Bashir, Mirza Waheed, and

Basharat Peer have illuminated the region's painful realities through their creative works(Rana 2021; Nature2024).

Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother* portrays the harrowing story of Haleema, a mother who loses her son Imran to enforced disappearance amid military violence in the 1990s. Following the deaths of her husband and father, Haleema's desperate search for her missing son reflects the anguish of countless Kashmiri mothers. Her unending quest across torture camps and government offices symbolizes both the personal and collective suffering of Kashmir's people under military oppression. Despite losing hope and health, Haleema continues her struggle, embodying the enduring spirit of resistance(Rana 2021;Kashmir Observer 2016; Bashir 2014).

The story of our text showcases the traumatic situation faced by the population living over there. It was the time of 1990's and the long war in Kashmir has begun to claim its first victims. They include Halima's father, Ghulam Rasool Zhu, and her teenage son, Imran, who have been picked up by authorities only to disappear in the wake of Kashmir's missing persons(Kashmir Observer 2016; Hindustan Times 2014). *Half Mother* is a story of a broken mother Halima. Yesterday a mother and a daughter, a 'stepmother' and today an orphan, not knowing whether Imran is dead or alive, have been torn apart by his own loneliness. Although she is fighting for answers and looking for torture camps, prisons and mourning houses for Imran's signal, Kashmir is burning in a war that will haunt her for years to come. The heartbeat deeply disturbed and singing begins the sound of a new voice from *Half Mother Kashmir*(Goodreads2014;Countercurrents2020).

Halima was born into poverty, and soon after her mother's death, she had to drop out of school and marry a medical assistant. But it seems that Halima was also born unfortunate as her marriage ended in a few months and she had to return to her father's house in Natipura area. The only good thing that came out of her short life was the birth of her son Imran, who soon became her beloved son, and her father's new guide(Hindustan Times 2014; Goodreads 2014).

But in the late 1980s, military violence and militant attacks necessarily led to arrests, leaving every Kashmiri family living with the fear that they would either join the militants. Don't be kidnapped or caught by them. Arrested by the military, as neither of them has a safe repatriation guarantee. The unfortunate Halima also faces the wrath of such violence, when her father was killed in a violent raid by the Indian Army as a result of a militant attack. And that same evening, mourning the death of her beloved father, Halima lost her beloved son Imran, when the army arrested him in a similar raid and took him away(Countercurrent2020;Kashmir Observer2016).

Halima has no time to mourn for her father. So she puts grief on the back of her mind and begs the army to release her son because he has done nothing. And from there Halima's painful and long journey begins to find her son and bring him back home, so she knocks on the door of every government official, at the door of every army camp, and even from those people those who have had the same fate as Halima. Formed a joint body of people to meet the Chief Minister and also contacted a local BBC journalist, who at least pays some attention to his story and prints it. But Imran never comes back and no one has any idea about Imran's whereabouts. And over time, Halima's age and her health fail her, but she never loses hope(Hindustan Times 2014;Kashmir Observer2016;Goodreads 2014).

Literature Review

This section surveys critical investigations surrounding Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother* and its portrayal of Kashmir's political violence and psychological trauma. It highlights how earlier works have examined the author's literary skills and representation of Kashmir's struggle, while identifying the research gap that focuses on the psychological and emotional dimensions of trauma

in the novel (Rana 2021). Although considerable research has been conducted on the general Kashmir conflict, few studies have analyzed *The Half Mother* as a text that intricately reveals the suffering of Kashmiri people especially women under military oppression (Rana 2021).

In *Half a Mother: An Epitome of Motherly Pain*, Muzaffar portrays the novel as an emotional narrative set in Natipura, Srinagar, illustrating the helplessness and resilience of common Kashmiris. The protagonist Haleema's story is one of maternal love turned into relentless sorrow after her father's death and her son Imran's enforced disappearance by the Indian military officer Major Kushwaha. Muzaffar emphasizes how Bashir presents Haleema as a symbol of motherhood and endurance, whose psychological trauma mirrors that of countless Kashmiri women living amid loss and fear. Her journey from domestic peace to unbearable isolation encapsulates the transformation from hope to despair that defines Kashmiri life under occupation. Mudasir Altaf Bhat expands this argument, describing Bashir's work as a literary homage to the "missing ones" of Kashmir. He observes that *The Half Mother* marks Bashir's courageous entry into Kashmiri fiction in English, offering an insider's account of state oppression and the silencing of truth. Divided into three parts, the novel narrates the tragic story of Haleema and Imran against the backdrop of the 1990s insurgency. The author vividly depicts the chaos of curfews, crackdowns, and violence, while weaving a human story that mourns the breakdown of families and communities. Bhat calls the novel "a must read," praising it for awakening moral awareness about the human cost of militarization (Bhat 2024).

Similarly, Bilal Ahmad Dar interprets the novel as a documentation of Kashmiri women's pain and trauma under the dual weight of occupation and patriarchy. He argues that the Indian army's presence has led to a large-scale humanitarian disaster, with women being the primary victims of kidnapping, widowhood, and psychological destruction. The novel's central character, Haleema, becomes a microcosm of all "half mothers" who continue to live with the haunting absence of their loved ones. Dar situates Bashir's work within a global context of women's suffering in war zones, comparing Kashmiri women's plight to those in other conflict-affected regions such as Somalia, Afghanistan, and parts of Africa (Dar 2023).

Muhammad Maroof Shah provides a broader literary context, tracing the evolution of Kashmiri literature from its mystical and Sufi roots to its contemporary engagement with political and social injustice. He observes a paradigmatic shift in modern Kashmiri writing—from spiritual mysticism to a "literature of outcry." The themes of resistance, alienation, and moral loss have replaced traditional romantic or devotional concerns. Shah argues that modern Kashmiri writers like Bashir reflect the loss of cultural identity and the erosion of humanistic values amid violence, calling for a revival of Kashmir's spiritual and intellectual tradition (Shah 2023).

Parallel studies such as those by Sumeera Nazir and Shazia Manzoor (*Women Victims of Harassment: A Reading of Half Widows in Kashmir*) explore similar themes of trauma and gendered violence. Their research highlights the phenomenon of "half widows," women whose husbands have disappeared during military operations. According to the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP), approximately 8,000–10,000 cases of enforced disappearances have been documented in Kashmir (Nazir and Manzoor 2024). Nazir and Manzoor's study emphasizes the legal, psychological, and social marginalization of these women, whose experiences echo Haleema's suffering in *The Half Mother*.

Feroz Ahmad Chopan offers a psychological reading of the novel, describing it as a study of maternal trauma and resilience. He interprets Haleema's journey as a constant struggle for dignity and emotional survival. Her gradual descent into mental instability—marked by hallucinations,

insomnia, and emotional breakdown—exemplifies the lasting psychological impact of loss and displacement (Chopan 2024). Chopan praises Bashir for exposing the “invisible scars” of trauma that remain unacknowledged by society and the state. His analysis underscores the novel’s call for human empathy and mental health awareness in conflict zones.

Several interdisciplinary studies extend this discussion by linking the fictional representation of trauma in *The Half Mother* to real-world psychological and social conditions in Kashmir. Scholars have noted that decades of violence, poverty, and unemployment have created an environment of collective trauma. Reports by the United Nations and the World Health Organization (WHO) reveal alarming levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety among Kashmiris. Studies by Miller and Rasmussen (2010) and Kobiak (2005) emphasize how daily stressors—such as insecurity, displacement, and loss of livelihood—exacerbate war-related trauma, making psychological recovery more difficult.

Empirical research in Kashmir supports these findings. Surveys conducted by Khan (2013) and Margoob (2003–2005) reported high prevalence rates of anxiety, depression, and PTSD among civilians. A 2015 study by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in collaboration with Kashmir University found that nearly 47% of respondents had witnessed violent deaths, while 12% had contemplated suicide. These data align with Bashir’s depiction of mental breakdown and hopelessness in *The Half Mother*, illustrating how fiction mirrors lived reality. The sociopolitical backdrop further intensifies this psychological suffering. Reports from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (2018) document thousands of civilian deaths and disappearances, with extensive use of laws such as the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and Public Safety Act (PSA), which provide military impunity. These realities reinforce the novel’s central message about systemic injustice and the erosion of human dignity (UNHCHR 2018).

In conclusion, the reviewed literature collectively portrays *The Half Mother* as a powerful narrative of trauma, resilience, and protest. Scholars such as Muzaffar, Bhat, Dar, Shah, Nazir, Manzoor, and Chopan agree that Shahnaz Bashir’s work gives voice to the silenced experiences of Kashmiri women and critiques the structures of militarized power. Interdisciplinary studies further validate the novel’s depiction of mental health crises and social disintegration caused by prolonged conflict. Ultimately, *The Half Mother* stands as both a literary and psychological document of Kashmir’s suffering—a story of loss, love, and endurance that transcends borders and resonates with universal human pain (Rana 2021; Bhat 2024; Dar 2023; Shah 2023; Nazir and Manzoor 2024; Chopan 2024; UNHCHR 2018).

Theoretical Framework

This section explores the concept of trauma and its multiple dimensions, psychological, social, cultural, and linguistic forming the theoretical basis of the study. Trauma theory provides a framework for understanding how extreme experiences disrupt human consciousness, memory, and identity, and how these ruptures are represented in literature and society (Caruth 1996; Freud 1895; Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 1996; Tal 1996). Drawing upon psychological and literary theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth, Bessel van der Kolk, and Kali Tal, this framework examines trauma as both an individual and collective phenomenon shaped by language, memory, and historical experience (Freud 1895; Caruth 1996; Tal 1996; Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 1996).

Trauma is generally defined as an overwhelming event that fragments the self and distorts one’s perception of reality. The fight-or-flight response, a biological survival mechanism, illustrates how

trauma affects both body and mind, triggering intense emotional and physiological reactions. When exposed to prolonged fear or violence especially during childhood individuals may develop heightened sensitivity to stress, anxiety, and aggression. This biological response often manifests psychologically as flashbacks, nightmares, dissociation, and other symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 1996; Dar 2020). Such experiences demonstrate that trauma not only injures the body but also destabilizes identity and emotional regulation (Chishti and Saxena 2021).

The psychoanalytic foundations of trauma theory were established by Freud, who argued that trauma involves repression and delayed recall, creating a “latency period” before symptoms reappear (Freud 1895). Later thinkers such as Pierre Janet introduced the idea of dissociation, a defense mechanism that separates traumatic memory from ordinary consciousness (Freud 1895). Building on these foundations, Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) developed the classical model of trauma, emphasizing the paradox of “knowing and not knowing.” According to Caruth, trauma is an event so overwhelming that it cannot be fully experienced or narrated at the moment it occurs. It returns later in the form of haunting memories or repetitive behaviors, revealing the mind’s struggle to integrate the unbearable experience into language or narrative (Caruth 1996).

Caruth’s theory situates trauma as a crisis of representation and temporarily. The event remains “absent” in ordinary memory but continues to exert a powerful presence in consciousness, shaping identity and historical understanding (Caruth 1996; Tal 1996). Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, she and other post-structural theorists argue that trauma fractures meaning itself, demonstrating the limitations of language in expressing pain (Ansari 2025). Van der Kolk and Van der Hart (1996) contribute a neurobiological perspective, suggesting that trauma alters brain function, preventing the event from being encoded semantically and leaving it “frozen” in the body as non-verbal memory (Van der Kolk and Van der Hart 1996). Contemporary trauma studies also recognize its social and collective dimensions. As Kali Tal (1996) argues in *Worlds of Hurt*, trauma narratives are essential for bearing witness to suffering and for reconstructing self-hood after devastation. Trauma is not limited to individual experience but extends across generations and communities, as seen in collective historical traumas like war, colonization, and displacement. This inter-generational transmission of trauma reveals how memory and identity are shaped within cultural and historical contexts (Tal 1996; Hanif 2018).

In literary studies, the “trauma novel” has emerged as a genre that represents personal or collective loss through fragmented narration, repetition, and silence. Such works expose how trauma transforms perception and storytelling, challenging traditional linear narratives. Scholars like Tal and Caruth argue that revisiting traumatic memory through narrative serves as both a symptom and a means of healing, allowing fragmented identities to find partial coherence through storytelling (Ansari 2025; Caruth 1996).

In conclusion, this theoretical framework combines psychoanalytic, neurobiological, and cultural perspectives to analyze trauma as a disruption of self, language, and history. It emphasizes that traumatic experience whether individual or communal resists complete articulation yet demands representation. Literature becomes a crucial medium through which the unspeakable is expressed and re-experienced, making trauma theory vital for interpreting narratives of suffering, survival, and identity reconstruction (Chishti and Saxena 2021; Ansari 2025).

1.1 Significance of the Study

The novel highlights the psychological torment of Kashmiri women coping with the disappearance of loved ones. Through Haleema's character, Shahnaz Bashir exposes the emotional devastation and mental anguish inflicted by decades of conflict. The study of *The Half Mother* offers valuable insight into maternal grief, the psychological dimensions of trauma, and the socio-political oppression in a militarized zone.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the dimensions of psychological trauma portrayed in the novel.
2. To analyze the effects of suffering and loss on Haleema's mental state.
3. To explore Haleema's coping mechanisms and emotional responses.
4. To examine how overwhelming emotions affect human bodies and psyches.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What forms of psychological trauma are represented in *The Half Mother*?
2. How do suffering and pain impact Haleema's psyche?
3. How does Haleema respond to trauma during her journey?
4. How do intense emotions damage human physical and psychological well-being?

1.5 Methodology

This qualitative study adopts an investigative and explanatory approach, combining philosophical and psychological perspectives. It examines the text of *The Half Mother* through the lens of Sandra Bloom's Trauma Theory (1999). The research explores the psychological impact of conflict, enforced disappearances, and emotional suffering on individuals—particularly women—in Kashmir's war-torn context. By analyzing Haleema's character, the study aims to reveal the lasting effects of trauma and the human capacity to endure grief amidst political and military violence.

Psychological Trauma and the Impact of Sufferings and Pain on the Protagonist

To comprehend the depth of psychological trauma and its impact on human consciousness, it is necessary to understand its nature. Terr (1990) defines psychological trauma as a sudden, violent, and emotionally intense blow that strikes from outside but embeds itself within the mind. Similarly, Van der Kolk (1989) explains that trauma arises when an individual's internal and external coping resources are inadequate to manage external threats. These definitions highlight that trauma is not only the result of an external event but also the product of the body and mind's complex responses to terror and helplessness. It alters the way people think, learn, remember, and perceive the world, reshaping emotional, psychological, and social realities.

Pain, both physical and psychological, is central to the experience of trauma. As Schoenfeld (1981) suggests, pain is not merely a physical sensation but a deeply subjective and existential state that reflects human vulnerability. It encompasses emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions, particularly among those who suffer prolonged distress. In such cases, pain becomes inseparable from identity, it defines how individuals interpret their existence and relationships with others. Therefore, understanding pain requires examining not only physiological responses but also the psychological and cultural frameworks through which individuals experience suffering.

In the context of Kashmir, these theoretical perspectives find a tragic embodiment. The region has been immersed in decades of violence, repression, and identity struggle under military occupation. The ongoing conflict has created a collective psychological wound, turning Kashmir into what Bashir describes as "a lake of blood" (Bashir, 2014, p. 32). The presence of armed forces, disappearances, and curfews has destroyed the normalcy of everyday life, producing a cycle of fear and despair. The state-driven narratives often silence the authentic voices of Kashmiris, particularly women, whose lived experiences of trauma remain underrepresented.

Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother* mirrors this reality through the character of Haleema, a mother who suffers multiple losses—her father's brutal death and her son's disappearance at the hands of the Indian army. These events mark the beginning of her psychological deterioration. The death of Ab Jaan, who courageously resists military oppression before being shot, initiates a chain of trauma that transforms Haleema's world. When her only son, Imran, is abducted, her existence collapses into loneliness and perpetual grief. Her repeated pleas "You killed my father! Leave me someone to live with!" reflects the unbearable agony that drives her into a state of mental paralysis (Bashir, 2014, p. 56).

Haleema's psychological decline represents the cumulative impact of emotional suffering, loss, and helplessness. Her non-physical pain manifests in symptoms such as restlessness, fear, numbness, and despair, paralleling Van der Kolk's (1989) theory that trauma disturbs both body and mind. Bashir's depiction of Haleema's sleepless nights, hallucinations, and sensory hypersensitivity "She could perceive the sounds of her house groaning in the peace of darkness" (Bashir, p. 58) illustrates the embodiment of trauma. Her body becomes a site of memory, where emotional pain translates into physical sensations such as trembling, heart palpitations, and exhaustion.

The narrative also presents Haleema's trauma as a metaphor for collective Kashmiri suffering. The oppressive political environment denies the people their identity, producing a deep psychological void. Bashir's inclusion of dialogues about erased histories—"They don't want us to know ourselves" (Bashir, p. 34)—reflects how cultural silencing intensifies psychological wounds. For Haleema, the loss of her son symbolizes the disappearance of hope and continuity. Her constant search for Imran becomes both a coping mechanism and a symptom of repetition compulsion, where the traumatized person unconsciously re-enacts the past to master the unbearable pain, echoing Freud's psychoanalytic theory of trauma.

The physiological dimension of trauma is evident when Haleema's body mirrors her emotional pain. Her wounds, bleeding, and physical frailty symbolize her inner disintegration. The persistent injuries and "the wound that never stops bleeding" (Bashir, p. 61) function as metaphors for unresolved grief. According to Van der Kolk and Van der Hart (1996), such bodily symptoms occur when traumatic experiences are not fully integrated into conscious memory, leaving them "frozen" in the body. Haleema's trembling, hallucinations, and inability to perceive time "Time had stopped for her, and she now waited for it to unfreeze itself" (Bashir, p. 80)—embody this psychological paralysis.

Ultimately, Haleema's suffering transcends personal loss and becomes an allegory for the collective trauma of Kashmir. Her life reflects the endless struggle of Kashmiri women who endure disappearance, oppression, and displacement. Bashir's novel transforms Haleema's story into a representation of resistance and remembrance, revealing how trauma reshapes identity and survival. Through the psychological fragmentation of its protagonist, *The Half Mother* captures the enduring pain of a community caught between loss and resilience, silence and testimony.

The Impact of Sufferings and Pain on Haleema's Psyche

In *The Half Mother*, Shahnaz Bashir portrays the devastating psychological effects of emotional pain and suffering through the life of his protagonist, Haleema. The novel explores how trauma, loss, and loneliness profoundly affect her mind and body, transforming her from a simple Kashmiri woman into a symbol of collective agony and endurance (Rana 2021; Ansari;2023). Bashir vividly

depicts how non-physical pain rooted in grief, injustice, and separation can be as destructive and enduring as physical suffering, particularly in the war-torn context of Kashmir. Emotional pain, as described, originates not from physical injury but from distressing life experiences such as loss, helplessness, or injustice. It often manifests as deep sorrow, depression, anxiety, or feelings of worthlessness. Haleema's life embodies these symptoms, as her emotional journey mirrors the experiences of thousands of Kashmiri women who have lost loved ones due to political violence. Her mental and emotional suffering begins with the violent death of her father and intensifies with the disappearance of her only son, Imran, at the hands of the Indian army (Countercurrents 2020; Rana 2021).

Bashir first introduces Haleema's trauma through the harrowing scene of her father's death. The brutality of the soldiers and the inhumanity of Major Kushwaha set the stage for her lifelong suffering. Her helplessness in witnessing her father's murder, when she begs for mercy and is denied marks the start of her psychological disintegration (Rana 2021). The quoted dialogue, "Let me give some water to him. He is dying. What kind of people are you?" reveals her profound despair and the cruelty that fuels her anguish. This emotional shock becomes the seed of her later mental torment, showing how war dehumanizes both victims and perpetrators (Countercurrents 2020; Ansari; 2023).

The second major blow comes when her son Imran is abducted by the same military forces. This event pushes Haleema into an abyss of pain and loneliness, symbolizing the collective trauma of Kashmiri mothers whose children have disappeared (Rana 2021). Her desperate pleas "He is a small child! Don't you see?" illustrate the agony of helplessness and the failure of humanity in times of conflict. This emotional wound transforms Haleema into a "half mother," a woman suspended between hope and despair, motherhood and emptiness. Her maternal instincts drive her to plead, beg, and even humiliate herself before the authorities, but her efforts are futile. The emotional intensity of this scene reflects her descent into psychological trauma (Rana 2021; Daath voyage Journal 2023).

Bashir captures the aftermath of Haleema's pain through her sleepless nights and heightened awareness of her surroundings (Ansari 2023). After Imran's disappearance, she experiences an acute state of sensory alertness, as seen in the passage describing her first night of loneliness, where even the smallest household sounds become haunting echoes of her solitude. This hyper-awareness symbolizes how trauma alters perception, forcing the mind to fixate on meaningless details to cope with unbearable grief. Haleema's pain isolates her emotionally and mentally, representing the psychological paralysis often experienced by trauma victims (Rana 2021; Countercurrents 2020).

The author also uses physical metaphors to represent emotional suffering. Haleema's wound, which continues to bleed despite healing attempts, becomes a powerful symbol of her unending emotional pain. The persistent bleeding reflects how her grief is not bound by time; it remains open and raw, signifying the permanence of loss. Similarly, Bashir describes her physical symptoms palpitations, tremors, and numbness to show how emotional suffering manifests in the body. Her physical state mirrors her psychological collapse, illustrating the inseparable link between the mind and body in trauma.

As the novel progresses, Haleema's grief evolves into a psychological fixation. She begins to lose her sense of time and reality, existing in a liminal state between past and present. The line, "Time had stopped for her and she now waited for it to unfreeze itself," symbolizes her emotional stagnation and inability to move beyond loss. This frozen temporality is a hallmark of post-traumatic stress, where survivors live perpetually within the moment of their trauma. Haleema's

sorrow consumes her completely, erasing her capacity to function normally or experience joy. Her entire identity becomes defined by her search for Imran and the hope ever fading that he might return.

In conclusion, Haleema's suffering and pain profoundly impact her psyche, leading to emotional paralysis, psychological trauma, and eventual self-destruction. Her story captures the essence of non-physical pain, grief, loneliness, fear, and hopelessness that corrodes the human spirit more deeply than any physical wound. Through her character, Shahnaz Bashir highlights the enduring effects of trauma on individuals living in conflict zones and emphasizes the need for empathy and recognition of their silent struggles. Haleema's journey, though tragic, stands as a powerful testament to human endurance and the haunting legacy of emotional pain in the face of relentless suffering (Rana 2021; Ansari 2023; Countercurrents 2020).

Haleema's Response to the Psychological Trauma

The concept of the "fight or flight response" in psychology explains how humans react to extreme stress or danger, either by confronting the situation (fight) or escaping from it (flight) (Cannon, 1915; Verywell Mind, 2009). First introduced by psychologist Walter Cannon in 1920, this physiological reaction prepares the body to deal with threats. Sandra Bloom's trauma theory builds on this concept, explaining how individuals psychologically respond to unbearable experiences (Bloom, 1997). In Shahnaz Bashir's novel, *The Half Mother*, Haleema embodies the "fight" response as she faces emotional, social, and psychological trauma following the disappearance of her son, Imran (Rana, 2021; Ansari, 2023).

Despite immense suffering, Haleema's resilience reflects her strength and hope. The Imam's words "The greatest of sufferings bring the greatest of hopes" ignite her determination. She refuses to yield to manipulation and humiliation in a male-dominated society while searching tirelessly for her missing son. Even when subjected to suggestive and demeaning behavior, she endures the pain with quiet strength. Her unending visits to government offices and officials highlight her courage to confront an oppressive system (Rana, 2021; Ansari, 2023).

Haleema's trauma manifests physically and psychologically: sleeplessness, anxiety, and deteriorating health. Yet, she remains steadfast. Her "fight" response symbolizes human perseverance under unbearable distress. The narrative illustrates that while trauma breaks many, some individuals channel it into resistance and purpose. Haleema's unwavering spirit demonstrates the resilience of the human psyche under prolonged suffering.

The story also explores the significance of hope as a psychological motivator. For Haleema, hope becomes a survival mechanism the force that prevents her from giving up. She continues her search despite despair, poverty, and exhaustion. Hope sustains her mental energy and becomes a substitute for meaning in a life filled with loss. Even when her efforts seem futile, her belief that she might find Imran keeps her alive. This mirrors psychological research showing that hope enables individuals to persevere through uncertainty and pain (Countercurrents, 2020; Rana 2021). Haleema's struggle transforms from a personal search into a social movement. Her suffering connects her with other "half mothers", women who have lost loved ones in conflict. Together, they become symbols of collective resilience against injustice. What began as a mother's desperate attempt to find her son evolves into a larger fight for truth, dignity, and human rights (Rana, 2021; Ansari, 2023).

Ultimately, Haleema's journey embodies the human condition under trauma, the conflict between despair and hope. Through her, Bashir portrays how psychological endurance can emerge from unbearable grief. Haleema's story aligns with trauma theory, emphasizing that individuals may

experience both emotional devastation and psychological growth simultaneously. Her continuous fight reflects the indomitable spirit of humanity that refuses to surrender, even in the face of hopelessness (Bhat, 2024; Dar, 2023).

In conclusion, Haleema's response to trauma in *The Half Mother* exemplifies the "fight" aspect of the stress response. Her endurance, resilience, and unyielding hope transform her pain into purpose. She not only survives her trauma but turns it into a lifelong mission symbolizing how faith, courage, and hope can sustain the human soul amidst overwhelming suffering.

Conclusion:

The conclusion highlights that *The Half Mother* presents a grim and realistic portrayal of Kashmir, where military and police forces operate with unchecked power under laws like AFSPA, PSA, and the Disturbed Areas Act. These draconian regulations allow arbitrary arrests, detentions, and killings, exposing the helplessness of civilians and the failure of the justice system. Shahnaz Bashir condemns these oppressive laws and the moral decay of institutions that deny justice to victims. Through the tragic story of Haleema, a mother searching endlessly for her abducted son, the novel symbolizes the pain of countless "half mothers" in Kashmir whose children have disappeared. Despite immense suffering, Haleema's perseverance represents resilience and a silent protest against tyranny. Her death evokes deep empathy, portraying the psychological trauma and emotional devastation faced by Kashmiri women. This research concludes that Bashir's novel vividly explores the psychological dimensions of trauma resulting from political conflict and human rights violations. By depicting Haleema's mental and emotional struggle, the author not only personalizes the tragedy of Kashmir but also universalizes the endurance of a mother's love and courage amid despair.

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