



TRAUMA AND DISPLACEMENT IN THINNER THAN SKIN BY KHAN

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Abstract

This article examines the themes of trauma and displacement in Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Thinner Than Skin*, using Cathy Caruth's trauma theory as a critical lens to explore how emotional and cultural dislocation are represented through silence, fragmentation, and landscape. Set in the conflicted and fragile northern regions of Pakistan, the novel traces the journeys of characters who are physically present yet emotionally unmoored, struggling with fractured identities and unresolved grief. Through a close analysis of Nadir's diasporic alienation, Farhana's internalized silence, and the symbolic presence of nature as a witness to suffering, the article argues that Khan reimagines trauma not as an event to be remembered, but as a haunting presence that resists narration. The melting glacier, eroded terrain, and broken relationships reflect the psychological and environmental consequences of disconnection. Silence, both narrative and emotional, emerges as a powerful form of resistance and survival, challenging the conventional notion that healing requires confession or clarity. By blending lyrical storytelling with psychological realism, Khan constructs a narrative where pain is carried in pauses, in photographs, in unspoken histories, and in landscapes that grieve alongside their people. This study positions *Thinner Than Skin* as a profound exploration of how trauma is lived, not always told, and how displacement leaves behind not only lost places, but lingering silences that echo long after the story ends.

Keywords: *Suffering, Critical, Emotional, Confession, Displacement, Exploration, Emerges, Constructs.*

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1.Introduction

Stories have always helped us make sense of loss, longing, and the search for home. In today's world that is marked by migration, cultural shifts, and climate crises many people carry emotional wounds that don't have easy explanations. These wounds are often explored through literature, especially in stories that come from places shaped by history, conflict, and change. One such powerful story is Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *Thinner Than Skin*, which brings together deep personal emotions with broader issues like displacement, environmental damage, and the feeling of not belonging whether in a place, in a relationship, or even within oneself.

Set in the northern regions of Pakistan, *Thinner Than Skin* follows a group of characters trying to reconnect with the land they once called home. Nadir, a photographer who has lived in the West for years, returns to Pakistan in search of meaning, memory, and maybe even healing. Alongside him is Farhana, whose quiet strength hides a world of unspoken pain. Their journey through stunning landscapes quickly becomes something more than just a road trip as it becomes a confrontation with old memories, unresolved guilt, and emotional distance. What they find in the mountains is not just beauty, but the heavy presence of silence, grief, and confusion. The further they travel, the more their inner turmoil rises to the surface. This article takes a closer look at how *Thinner Than Skin* explores two key ideas: trauma and displacement. But instead of treating trauma as a dramatic event or a clear-cut memory, the novel shows it as something quieter and something that lingers in silences, in broken conversations, and in the spaces people try to avoid. To understand this unique portrayal, I'll be using the work of Cathy Caruth, a leading voice in trauma theory. Caruth believes that trauma isn't just about what happens to someone, it's also about how that experience refuses to be fully understood or told. According to her, trauma often returns in unexpected ways: through dreams, repetition, and especially through the failure to speak or remember clearly.

Khan's novel reflects this idea beautifully. The story doesn't follow a neat timeline. Instead, it moves like memory sometimes circling back, sometimes skipping ahead just like how trauma often works in real life. The characters don't always say what's bothering them, but their silences speak volumes. And the landscape around them the glaciers,

mountains, and melting snow becomes more than just a setting. It turns into a witness, silently carrying the weight of everything that has happened and everything that can't be said.

In this article, I argue that *Thinner Than Skin* uses both form and story to show how trauma and displacement affect people on a deep emotional level. This isn't just about individuals struggling with personal grief. It's also about shared cultural pain, broken connections, and a land that seems to remember more than the people do. The novel asks us to listen not always for loud confessions, but for the quiet traces of pain that live in memory, silence, and place. In the next sections, I'll first look at how other scholars have written about trauma, especially in South Asian literature. Then, I'll explain Cathy Caruth's theory in more detail before diving into the novel itself. Through this journey, we'll see how *Thinner Than Skin* speaks to anyone who's ever felt far from home geographically, emotionally, or even within their own skin.

2. Literature Review Trauma and Displacement in *Thinner Than Skin*

When we think of trauma, we often picture a dramatic event, a disaster, a war, a personal loss. But literature has shown us that trauma doesn't always arrive with a bang. Sometimes, it creeps in quietly, hiding in memories, dreams, and even in the landscapes we walk through. And when characters carry the weight of both personal and cultural history especially in postcolonial settings like South Asia, trauma becomes even harder to pin down. This is where fiction, especially a novel like *Thinner Than Skin*, steps in to show us what psychology and history books often can't.

One of the most powerful tools we have to unpack this kind of deep emotional storytelling is trauma theory and at the heart of that is the work of Cathy Caruth. Caruth doesn't see trauma as something that happens and then ends. Instead, she describes it as an experience that refuses to stay in the past. It lingers, loops, returns. According to her, trauma is something that's not fully understood in the moment it happens it only comes back later, in bits and pieces. That's why people repeat painful memories, why silences often speak louder than words, and why stories about trauma are so often fragmented and disjointed. Caruth also gives us a different way to think about storytelling. She says the reader or the listener is not just a passive observer. In trauma narratives, we're witnesses. That means we carry a kind of responsibility: to listen, to notice what isn't being said, and to feel the weight of the silence. When applied to a novel like *Thinner Than Skin*, this becomes especially meaningful. The story doesn't hand everything over. It withholds, it circles back, and it trusts us to pay attention to what's left unsaid.

But Caruth is just one piece of the puzzle. Psychoanalytical thinkers, from Freud to more recent scholars, have long explored how trauma plays out beneath the surface of consciousness. They show us how people bury pain, how it resurfaces in strange ways through habits, avoidance, guilt, or even in art. This is particularly true for characters who are displaced or disconnected from their roots.

In Khan's novel, for example, Nadir's obsession with photography becomes more than a career it's a quiet act of control, maybe even a desperate attempt to capture something that always seems just out of reach.

Now, if we zoom out a bit, there's a growing wave of scholars talking about postcolonial trauma and this is where things get really interesting. Writers and critics have pointed out that trauma in formerly colonized countries often looks different from the Western models we're used to. Think about the Partition of India, the lingering shadows of colonialism, the instability of borders, and the ripple effects of political violence. These aren't just personal traumas they're collective, inherited, and often unnamed. Scholars like Stef Craps have argued that traditional trauma theory has been too focused on Western experiences and needs to include more diverse voices and histories. Uzma Aslam Khan's novel fits perfectly into this expanded view.

In South Asian literature, trauma often goes hand-in-hand with displacement not just physical, but emotional and cultural too. Characters who move between countries, languages, and belief systems often struggle with who they are. They feel "in-between." Writers like Kamila Shamsie, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Mohsin Hamid have all written about this complex, often painful space. Khan brings her own spin to this by weaving in the natural world making glaciers, mountains, and rivers part of the emotional landscape. In her novel, the environment doesn't just set the scene it reflects the characters' inner turmoil. When the land is cracking, melting, or collapsing, so are the people. And here's the really exciting part: this connection between trauma and nature what we might call *ecological trauma* that is still a fairly new area in literary studies. Khan doesn't just write about environmental change as a backdrop; she links it to human pain. When the land suffers, so do her characters. When the past can't be spoken, the mountains remember it instead. It's haunting, poetic, and powerful. And surprisingly, few scholars have explored this aspect of her work in depth.

Which brings us to a key point: while trauma theory and postcolonial studies are thriving fields, Uzma Aslam Khan's work remains under-discussed in academic spaces especially from a trauma studies perspective. That's a gap this article hopes to address. Khan's lyrical, layered storytelling deserves more attention, especially because she doesn't

follow the usual rules. Her characters don't spill their secrets in dramatic monologues. They live with their pain. They misunderstand each other. They find no neat resolutions. And that, in many ways, is the most honest portrayal of trauma we can ask for.

3.Theoretical Framework Reading Trauma:

Cathy Caruth, Memory, and the Echoes of the Unspoken
What if the most painful experiences in life are the ones we don't even fully remember? What if trauma doesn't shout, but instead returns in whispers, fragments, and silences? These are the questions at the heart of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, a groundbreaking way of understanding how deeply our pasts especially the ones we've tried to forget that can shape our stories, identities, and even the structure of the narratives we tell.

Caruth, one of the most influential voices in trauma studies, turns the usual ideas about memory on their head. She argues that trauma isn't just something remembered it's something that breaks memory apart. It's not an event with a clear beginning and end. Instead, it's a wound that returns belatedly, often without warning, and not in words but in symptoms, repetition, and gaps. This concept of trauma as a belated experience is central to her theory. According to Caruth, the traumatic event is so overwhelming that the mind can't absorb it in real time. It gets buried, only to come back later disguised, distorted, and often misunderstood.

This delay is what Caruth calls latency. The trauma doesn't vanish; it waits. And when it resurfaces, it rarely comes back as a full memory. More often, it arrives as a flash, a nightmare, a compulsive act, or a deafening silence. That's why many trauma narratives like *Thinner Than Skin* don't move in a straight line. They circle, stall, shift perspectives. They fragment because the characters' psyches are fragmented too. Language can't always carry the weight of pain. Sometimes, what's missing from the page says more than what's written. This is where testimonial silence becomes important. In trauma fiction, characters often avoid talking about the thing that haunts them most. Not because they don't care but because they can't. The trauma is unspeakable. Caruth doesn't see this silence as a failure, but as part of the trauma itself. And yet, she believes that telling the story even in fragments that matters. It's not about finding closure. It's about bearing witness. And here's where her theory becomes even more powerful: Caruth shifts the focus to the role of the listener or in our case, the reader. If trauma can't be fully understood by the person who experienced it, it might still be heard by someone else. But this hearing isn't passive. The reader becomes what Caruth calls an ethical witness, someone who listens not just to the words, but to the silences, repetitions, and ruptures. In *Thinner Than Skin*, Khan doesn't spoon-feed us her characters' grief. She challenges us to see it in the unsaid moments in

the distance between lovers, the failed connections, and the way the landscape speaks when the people cannot.

Another key concept in Caruth's theory is the compulsion to repeat. Traumatized individuals often relive their pain not by choice, but as a symptom. Nadir, for example, returns to Pakistan not for a vacation or closure, but because something inside him is unresolved. His photographs aren't just art they're desperate attempts to capture something lost. Farhana's emotional distance isn't just personality, it's survival. Their journeys echo a deeper truth: trauma doesn't fade by being ignored. It loops, quietly demanding attention.

Caruth's work also links with ideas from clinical psychology, including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which describes how trauma can lead to flashbacks, numbness, emotional detachment, and memory loss. But where clinical definitions aim for diagnosis, Caruth opens the door for literature to go deeper to show trauma as an emotional and narrative force, something that resists neat explanations. In Khan's novel, memory doesn't arrive in full. It arrives in flashes, in pain-filled silences, and in a sense of disconnection so sharp it almost feels physical. This framework fits seamlessly within the postcolonial and diasporic context of *Thinner Than Skin*. The novel isn't just about individual trauma as it's about cultural dislocation, fractured identities, and a homeland that no longer feels like home. For characters like Nadir and Farhana, the trauma isn't only from their past relationships or personal losses it's also from being uprooted, from not fully belonging anywhere, and from trying to return to a place that no longer exists as they remember it.

Moreover, Khan adds another layer by linking trauma with landscape. The glacier, the melting snow, the harsh terrain these are not just backdrops; they are emotional symbols. The land itself seems to remember. It bears witness to violence, history, and silence in a way that echoes Caruth's belief that trauma defies linear storytelling. The shifting geography mirrors the inner worlds of the characters: broken, beautiful, and unsteady. Cathy Caruth gives us the tools to read trauma not just as a plot point, but as a structural force. Through her theory, we begin to understand that trauma is not always visible, not always spoken but it is always present. And Uzma Aslam Khan uses this invisibility to her advantage, crafting a novel that pulls readers into the emotional undercurrents of pain, identity, and memory. In doing so, she doesn't just tell a story, she makes us feel what it's like to live inside the silence.

4. Textual Analysis:

Nadir and the Trauma of Diasporic Displacement Some wounds don't bleed. They simply grow quieter over time, buried beneath years, passports, and photographs. For Nadir, the protagonist of *Thinner Than Skin*, displacement is not just physical it's emotional, psychological, and deeply existential. Born in Pakistan but raised and settled in the West, Nadir stands on the fragile fault line between two worlds. And no matter how far he travels or how many photos he takes, he cannot seem to bridge that distance not with the past, not with his homeland, and not with himself.

At first glance, Nadir appears composed, analytical, artistic, and in control behind the camera. But beneath that calm exterior is a man emotionally adrift. One of the most striking aspects of his character is his detachment, especially when it comes to grief. His father's death, an event that should have shaken him to the core that is met with chilling silence. There are no floods of memories, no emotional outbursts. Just a void. His numbness isn't indifference; it's trauma in disguise. It's the kind of pain that refuses to surface, the kind Cathy Caruth describes as "unclaimed experience" a pain too deep, too unprocessed to be fully grasped in the moment. This emotional distance reveals a much deeper problem. Nadir is not just lost in the present; he's haunted by everything he left behind and everything to which he can't return. His trauma is layered. It's rooted in diasporic guilt, buried familial emotions, and the haunting sense of unbelonging. His return to Pakistan isn't a triumphant homecoming. It's awkward, uncertain, and full of ghosts. The streets are unfamiliar, the people distant, and the land no longer welcoming. What he's looking for the idea of "home" either no longer exists or perhaps never existed at all.

This is where the true depth of Nadir's trauma begins to unfold. He longs for a homeland that feels like it should be his but isn't. He tries to reclaim a sense of identity, but what he finds is confusion and disconnection. Home is a memory, a myth, a mirage. It slips through his fingers every time he tries to hold it. He is too Western to feel Pakistani, too Pakistani to feel Western. That in-between space is both lonely and unsteady. His discomfort is not just with his surroundings, but within his own skin. He carries the guilt of leaving, the shame of returning, and the ache of never truly belonging anywhere.

Still, he tries to make sense of it all through the lens of his camera. Photography is his language, his escape, and his shield. But in Nadir's hands, it becomes something more than art as it becomes a ritual. He keeps capturing images of landscapes and people as if trying to fix something in time, to make something stay. But the more he photographs, the more obvious it becomes that he's chasing shadows. The photos don't bring him clarity. They reflect the distance he cannot close. This repetition, this need to capture and

recapture, is a symptom of trauma. As Cathy Caruth explains, trauma has a way of looping. It doesn't just visit once, it keeps returning. And Nadir's camera becomes the vehicle for that return. He isn't just creating art. He's reenacting his pain, again and again, through the mechanical click of a shutter. In this way, Khan presents Nadir not just as a diasporic character but as someone who is emotionally fractured. His trauma isn't loud. It doesn't come with dramatic scenes or heavy monologues. It reveals itself in silence, in hesitation, in stillness. It lives between the photos he takes, between the conversations he avoids, and in the wide emotional space between him and the people he once loved.

Through Nadir, Uzma Aslam Khan offers a powerful portrait of what it means to be emotionally displaced. His story is a quiet storm, unfolding in snapshots and silences. And perhaps that's what makes it hit even harder. Because sometimes, the most devastating stories are the ones that can't be told directly only lived, endured, and witnessed in fragments.

5. Farhana's Internalized Trauma and Emotional Estrangement

If Nadir is emotionally adrift, then Farhana is emotionally locked away present, but unreachable. She moves through the pages of *Thinner Than Skin* like a shadow with weight, carrying a silence that feels louder than any scream. Her trauma is not chaotic. It is cold, composed, and deeply internalized. Where others might cry or confess, Farhana simply withdraws.

From the moment she enters the story, there is a sense that she is holding something back. She is physically present in the group's journey through northern Pakistan, but mentally and emotionally, she feels somewhere else entirely. Her silence is not just a personality trait. It is a survival mechanism, shaped by a lifetime of repression, distance, and emotional suppression. Farhana's trauma doesn't announce itself. It simmers quietly beneath her calm exterior. This is the kind of pain that never found words, the kind that Cathy Caruth describes as unprocessed and inaccessible to consciousness. Unlike Nadir, who turns to photography to express his longing, Farhana seems to have no outlet at all. She holds everything in, as if speech itself might unravel her carefully maintained composure.

Her estrangement is multilayered. It is not just from others it is from herself. There are hints of a past she refuses to revisit, memories that remain off-limits, even to the reader. Her emotional numbness seems rooted in something more than just cultural dislocation. There's a buried story there, one shaped by gender, power, and perhaps violation. While the novel never spells it out completely, the suggestion is powerful. Farhana's silence

becomes a symbol of how women's trauma is often made invisible, ignored, doubted, or left to quietly rot beneath the surface.

Culturally, she floats in limbo. She is neither fully connected to the land of her birth nor fully accepted in the West. And unlike Nadir, who still tries to rebuild a bridge to the past, Farhana appears to have burned hers long ago. She doesn't speak of home with nostalgia. If anything, her silence suggests a home that hurt her, a past she'd rather leave untouched. In her, we see not just emotional displacement, but cultural and gendered erasure. Her relationship with Nadir only deepens the sense of emotional isolation. They share space but rarely share feeling. Misunderstanding simmers between them, not because of a lack of love, but because of unspoken pain. Farhana does not explain herself, and Nadir rarely asks. They move together, yet alone. This quiet disconnect becomes a powerful metaphor for trauma itself how it builds walls even in the most intimate spaces.

In Farhana, Uzma Aslam Khan gives us a portrait of trauma that refuses visibility. Her silence is its own language, her distance a form of protection. She is not loud, but she is unforgettable. Through her, Khan reminds us that trauma isn't always about what happens. Sometimes it's about what's buried, what's avoided, and what's endured in the quiet corners of the soul.

6.Landscape as Witness: Trauma Inscribed in Nature

In *Thinner Than Skin*, the land does more than host the story. It speaks. It remembers. It bleeds silently alongside the characters. Uzma Aslam Khan transforms the natural landscape into something much more than background. The glacier, the mountains, the forests they are alive with memory. In this novel, nature is not separate from human pain. It reflects it, absorbs it, and at times, even seems to carry it when the characters cannot. The novel's most haunting presence is the glacier. Cold, ancient, and slowly disappearing, it becomes a metaphor for everything that has been buried or lost. The trauma of the characters is mirrored in the melting ice, as if even the Earth can no longer hold itself together. As the glacier recedes, so too do the boundaries between past and present, between personal memory and collective grief. The environment is collapsing, and with it, so are the stories that were once held safely in silence.

This collapsing landscape feels deeply connected to the emotional unraveling of the characters. Nadir and Farhana do not simply travel through these remote regions as they dissolve into them. The physical geography mimics their inner turmoil. The jagged rocks, the unpredictable storms, the shifting terrain, everything they encounter is an echo

of their instability. It is as if the land is grieving too. As if it has witnessed too much violence, too much abandonment, too many unspoken stories.

Trauma, as Cathy Caruth tells us, often defies language. It is stored in fragments, in symptoms, in silence. Khan applies this logic to the land itself. The mountains do not speak, but they hold testimony. The glacier cannot scream, but it cracks. The rivers do not cry, but they overflow. Nature becomes a silent witness to the trauma that has no voice. It bears marks of displacement, just like the people who try to find meaning in its vastness. But what makes this landscape even more powerful is that it is also a site of colonial and cultural trauma. The northern territories, once romanticized by imperial explorers, are now viewed through a different lens. For Khan's characters, the land is no longer a space of discovery. It is a space of reckoning. A space haunted by past violence, environmental degradation, and cultural disconnection. What was once exoticized is now broken. What was once untouched is now disappearing.

The land also plays a role in shaping identity. For Nadir, returning to Pakistan is not just about revisiting a country. It is about reentering a landscape that should feel familiar but doesn't. Every mountain and every valley feels alien, as if rejecting his presence. For Farhana, the land holds memories she cannot voice. For Maryam, the young local girl caught in a web of tragedy, the land is both home and prison. Each character connects to nature differently, but all of them are bound to it emotionally. In Khan's narrative world, nature becomes something sacred and sorrowful. It is a character in its own right, one that suffers, remembers, and occasionally rebels. The melting glacier is more than an environmental concern. It is a wound. A vanishing archive. A disappearing history.

By making the land a witness to human trauma, Khan challenges the boundaries between the personal and the political, the human and the ecological. She reminds us that trauma is not just carried in bodies or minds. Sometimes, it is written into the land itself.

7. Interpersonal Disconnect and Cultural Displacement:

In *Thinner Than Skin*, silence is never just silence. It speaks of tension, miscommunication, and emotional distance that stretches across relationships like fault lines beneath a fragile surface. The novel is filled with characters who orbit each other closely but never quite collide, always missing the moment of connection. This emotional isolation doesn't happen by accident. It grows out of displacement, cultural, personal, and generational and it touches every relationship in the story.

At the heart of these disconnections is the strained relationship between Nadir and Farhana. They travel together, they share space, but emotionally, they live on opposite ends of a chasm. Their conversations are cautious. Their silences, heavy. Nadir attempts to reach her, but he does not know how. Farhana keeps her distance, but she never says why. There is no dramatic explosion, no defining confrontation. Instead, their bond fades slowly, worn thin by unspoken pain and unresolved guilt. What they fail to say to each other becomes more important than what they do.

Their relationship reflects a broader truth about trauma. It isolates. It makes intimacy difficult. It interrupts empathy. Cathy Caruth reminds us that trauma defies full understanding, even by the one who experiences it. If a person cannot understand their own pain, how can they possibly explain it to someone else? This is the impasse that haunts Nadir and Farhana. They are not enemies. They are simply two people lost in their own unhealed stories, unable to meet each other in the middle. Beyond them, the novel is filled with other fractured bonds. Nadir's interactions with locals feel awkward and strained. His connection with Maryam, the young girl native to the mountainous region, is filled with curiosity but filtered through misunderstanding. His presence in the landscape feels unnatural, and his attempts to connect are met with suspicion or silence. Despite his heritage, he is seen as an outsider. The cultural distance is not just social. It is emotional. Nadir believes he is returning home, but the people and the land treat him like a stranger.

Farhana too, is disconnected not just from others, but from her own voice. Her silence is not passive. It is protective. She holds her truth tightly, refusing to place it into the world where it can be misread or dismissed. Her emotional self is a locked room, and no one, not even Nadir, is given the key. Even the natural connections between generations are fractured. Nadir's loss of his father is not just a moment of grief as it is a loss of emotional inheritance. His father's absence looms over him, not just as death, but as disconnection. There is no closure, no ritual of mourning, no way to bridge the gap between who his father was and who he has become. This persistent inability to communicate is not portrayed as failure. It is portrayed as the natural consequence of being emotionally and culturally unmoored. Displacement doesn't only remove people from places. It removes them from each other. It turns speech into silence, affection into distance, and understanding into guesswork.

Khan doesn't dramatize this with loud arguments or shocking plot twists. Instead, she lets it unfold quietly, devastatingly, in the way characters look away or fail to answer or misunderstand what the other person needs. The result is a novel filled with invisible wounds. Everyone is trying. No one is connecting. In these emotional gaps, Khan captures

a deeper truth about trauma and cultural dislocation. It doesn't just scar individuals. It breaks the bridges between them. It lingers in missed chances, unsaid words, and the ache of wanting to be understood and never quite being heard.

8. Conclusion

By the time *Thinner Than Skin* ends, there is no dramatic closure, no sweeping resolution. And that is exactly the point. Uzma Aslam Khan does not offer comfort. She offers truth. A truth that comes wrapped in silences, in landscapes that are falling apart, in people who are too wounded to speak their stories aloud. Through this haunting narrative, Khan asks us not to solve the trauma, but to sit with it. To witness it. To understand that some pain never forms into words, and some displacements never really end. This article has explored how trauma and displacement shape not only the lives of Khan's characters but also the very form of the novel. Using Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma as a belated, fragmented experience, we see how Khan mirrors psychological wounds in the structure of her storytelling. The characters move in circles. The narrative loops. The silence stretches. This is trauma not as event but as atmosphere, not as memory but as presence.

Nadir's emotional detachment and his failed attempt to reconnect with home show us what happens when identity is fractured across borders and years. His photography becomes both obsession and symptom, a way to freeze what keeps slipping away. Farhana's silence, meanwhile, reveals how trauma often hides behind calmness. Her emotional estrangement reflects not just personal grief but a deeper commentary on gender, memory, and survival in a culture that punishes vulnerability. The land itself becomes a character in the novel, one that absorbs human suffering and echoes it back in glaciers that melt, forests that burn, and paths that lead nowhere. Khan turns nature into a kind of witness, one that carries the pain that people cannot voice. The emotional and ecological collapse are intertwined. One mirrors the other. Both speak of things lost.

But perhaps the most powerful element in the novel is its use of silence not as emptiness, but as resistance. Khan dares to leave things unsaid. She trusts her readers to listen between the lines, to become witnesses themselves. And in doing so, she challenges the idea that healing requires clarity or confession. Sometimes, the act of carrying a story silently is itself a form of survival. *Thinner Than Skin* is not just a novel about trauma. It is a novel that enacts trauma, that breathes it, that invites readers to feel its weight without expecting resolution. It shows us that trauma can live in a photograph, in a paused conversation, in the space between footsteps. And it reminds us that displacement is not always a journey from one place to another. Sometimes, it is the quiet, aching realization that you no longer know where you belong.

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