



REPRESENTATION OF TRAUMA AND IDENTITY IN PAKISTANI CONTEMPORARY FICTION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF *EXIT* *WEST* AND *BLUE DUST*

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Abstract

This study explores the representation of trauma and postcolonial identity in Pakistani contemporary fiction through a comparative analysis of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* and Ayesha Salman's *Blue Dust*. Grounded in trauma theory and postcolonial theory, the research examines how narrative strategies shape the articulation of displacement, psychological suffering, and identity formation in a globalized yet conflict-ridden world. Using qualitative textual analysis, the study focuses on narrative techniques such as fragmentation, magical realism, memory reconstruction, symbolism, and shifting focalization. The findings suggest that *Exit West* constructs trauma as a collective, transnational, and spatially fluid phenomenon, whereas *Blue Dust* represents trauma as an intimate, interiorized, and memory-driven experience embedded in personal relationships. Both texts engage deeply with postcolonial concerns of hybridity, belonging, and cultural dislocation, though through distinct narrative modes. The study contributes to trauma and postcolonial literary studies by demonstrating how narrative form mediates lived experience and how contemporary Pakistani fiction reimagines identity in conditions of mobility, loss, and global instability.

Keywords: *Hybridity, Migration, Narrative Strategies, Pakistani Fiction, Postcolonial Identity, Trauma Theory*

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1. Introduction

Contemporary literature increasingly reflects the psychological, social, and cultural consequences of displacement, violence, and globalization. Within postcolonial contexts, these concerns are intensified by the historical legacy of colonialism and its continuing impact on identity formation, cultural belonging, and political instability. As a result, trauma has emerged as a central thematic concern in modern literary studies, particularly in narratives that engage with migration, war, and fragmented subjectivities. In the twenty-first century, processes such as globalization, transnational mobility, and ongoing geopolitical conflicts have reshaped how individuals experience and articulate identity. The rise of forced migration and refugee crises has produced new forms of trauma that are both deeply personal and collectively shared. Literature serves as a vital medium through which these experiences are represented, allowing for a deeper understanding of emotional and psychological realities that are often overlooked in political and historical narratives. Pakistani contemporary fiction offers a particularly rich context for exploring these themes. Shaped by a complex history of colonialism, cultural diversity, and socio-political tensions, Pakistani writers frequently engage with issues of displacement, identity crisis, and emotional suffering. Their works not only reflect local experiences but also contribute to global discussions on migration, belonging, and cultural transformation. In this sense, literature becomes a space where personal narratives intersect with broader historical and social forces. Among contemporary Pakistani authors, Mohsin Hamid is widely recognized for his exploration of globalization and migration. His novel *Exit West* (2017) presents a speculative yet deeply human portrayal of displacement through the use of magical realism. By introducing mysterious doors that enable instantaneous movement across borders, the novel challenges conventional understandings of space, migration, and belonging, emphasizing the fluid and uncertain nature of modern existence.

In contrast, Ayesha Salman's *Blue Dust* (2019) offers an intimate and introspective exploration of trauma and identity. The novel focuses on memory, relationships, and emotional depth, presenting trauma as an internalized and enduring experience. Rather than emphasizing largescale movement, it highlights the psychological impact of personal loss and the complexities of identity within social and cultural frameworks. Despite their differences in scope and narrative style, both novels engage with the interconnected themes of trauma and identity, making them suitable for comparative analysis. While *Exit West* foregrounds collective and transnational experiences, *Blue Dust* emphasizes individual emotional realities. This contrast enables a deeper understanding of how trauma can be represented through diverse narrative approaches.

This study aims to comparatively analyze how trauma and identity are constructed in these texts, with particular attention to narrative strategies such as fragmentation, symbolism, magical realism, and shifting perspectives. By employing trauma theory and

postcolonial theory, the research seeks to examine how individual experiences of suffering are shaped by broader cultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of narrative form in representing complex human experiences. Trauma often resists direct expression, requiring innovative literary techniques to convey its effects. Both novels demonstrate how form and content work together to represent the challenges of displacement, memory, and identity in a globalized world.

In conclusion, this research positions *Exit West* and *Blue Dust* as significant contributions to contemporary literary discussions on trauma and identity. Through a comparative and interdisciplinary approach, it underscores the role of literature in exploring the complexities of human experience and the evolving nature of identity in the modern world.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Trauma Theory and Narrative Representation

Trauma theory has emerged as a significant framework in literary studies for understanding how extreme experiences—such as war, displacement, and psychological suffering—are represented in narrative form. One of the foundational scholars in this field, Cathy Caruth (1996), conceptualizes trauma as an experience that is not fully grasped at the moment of its occurrence but returns belatedly through fragmented memories, flashbacks, and repetitive structures. According to Caruth, trauma resists direct representation because it exceeds the limits of language, thereby necessitating indirect and often disrupted modes of narration.

This notion of belatedness is central to trauma narratives, where events are not narrated in a linear or coherent manner but instead emerge through discontinuities and gaps. Such narrative fragmentation reflects the psychological condition of the traumatized subject, whose memory is fractured and unstable. In literary texts, this often manifests through nonlinear timelines, abrupt shifts in perspective, and symbolic imagery.

Dominick LaCapra (2001) further develops trauma theory by distinguishing between “acting out” and “working through.” “Acting out” refers to the repetitive reliving of traumatic events, where individuals remain trapped within their past, while “working through” involves a critical engagement with trauma that allows for some degree of understanding and transformation. This distinction is particularly useful in analyzing literary representations, as it highlights whether a text reinforces the persistence of trauma or gestures toward its possible resolution.

In the context of contemporary fiction, trauma is frequently linked to migration and displacement, where individuals experience not only physical uprooting but also psychological dislocation. In *Exit West*, for instance, trauma is closely tied to the experience of forced migration, where the loss of home and familiarity produces a profound sense of rupture. The line, “When we migrate, we murder from our lives those

we leave behind” (Hamid, 2017, p. 94), encapsulates the emotional violence inherent in displacement.

Similarly, *Blue Dust* presents trauma as an enduring psychological condition shaped by memory and emotional loss. The narrative emphasizes the persistence of past experiences, suggesting that trauma is not confined to a single (event) but continues to shape identity over time. This aligns with Caruth’s argument that trauma is not simply an event but an ongoing process of re-experiencing.

Recent scholarship has also emphasized the role of narrative form in mediating trauma. Scholars argue that literary techniques such as fragmentation, silence, metaphor, and magical realism enable writers to represent experiences that are otherwise inexpressible. Thus, trauma theory not only provides a thematic framework but also informs the analysis of narrative strategies.

2.2. Postcolonial Theory: Identity, Hybridity, and Cultural Negotiation

Postcolonial theory offers a critical lens for examining how historical processes of colonialism continue to shape contemporary identities, cultures, and power structures. Edward Said’s (1978) concept of “othering” highlights how colonial discourse constructs hierarchical distinctions between the colonizer and the colonized, positioning the latter as inferior and marginal. These representations have long-lasting effects, influencing how postcolonial subjects perceive themselves and are perceived by others.

Building on this, Homi K. Bhabha (1994) introduces the concept of hybridity, which challenges the idea of fixed or essential identities. According to Bhabha, postcolonial identity is formed within a “third space” of enunciation, where cultural meanings are negotiated and transformed. This space is characterized by ambiguity and fluidity, allowing for the emergence of new, hybrid identities that transcend binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized or tradition/modernity.

The concept of hybridity is particularly relevant in the context of globalization and migration, where individuals are increasingly exposed to multiple cultural influences. In *Exit West*, hybridity is evident in the characters’ evolving sense of belonging as they move across different countries and cultural environments. The statement “We are all migrants through time” (Hamid, 2017, p. 209) reflects the universality of displacement and the fluid nature of identity.

In contrast, *Blue Dust* explores postcolonial identity within a more localized and intimate context. The novel examines how cultural expectations, social norms, and personal experiences intersect to shape individual identity. Here, hybridity is not only a product of geographical movement but also of internal negotiation, where characters struggle to reconcile conflicting aspects of their identity.

Furthermore, postcolonial theory also engages with the concept of belonging and un-belonging, which is central to both novels. Displacement—whether physical or

emotional—creates a sense of alienation that challenges traditional notions of home and identity. This aligns with contemporary postcolonial scholarship, which emphasizes mobility, transnationalism, and cultural fluidity as defining features of modern identity.

2.3. Intersection of Trauma and Postcolonialism

While trauma theory and postcolonial theory have traditionally been treated as separate frameworks, recent critical approaches emphasize their intersection. Scholars argue that trauma in postcolonial contexts cannot be fully understood without considering the historical and political conditions that produce it. Colonial violence, war, migration, and cultural dislocation all contribute to forms of trauma that are both individual and collective.

This intersection is particularly evident in narratives that deal with forced migration, where trauma is shaped by both personal loss and structural inequalities. In *Exit West*, the experience of migration is not merely a personal journey but is embedded within global systems of power and conflict. The novel highlights how political instability and violence force individuals to leave their homes, thereby linking personal trauma to broader historical processes. Similarly, *Blue Dust* reflects the lingering effects of postcolonial structures on individual lives.

The characters' emotional struggles are not isolated but are influenced by social expectations, cultural norms, and historical legacies. This demonstrates how trauma operates at multiple levels, encompassing both the psychological and the socio-cultural.

The integration of trauma and postcolonial perspectives allows for a more comprehensive analysis of literary texts. It highlights the ways in which personal experiences of suffering are connected to larger historical and political contexts, thereby bridging the gap between individual and collective dimensions of trauma.

2.4. Narrative Strategies in Contemporary Pakistani Fiction

Contemporary Pakistani fiction has increasingly engaged with themes of trauma, identity, and displacement, reflecting the complex realities of a rapidly changing society. Writers such as Mohsin Hamid and Ayesha Salman employ diverse narrative strategies to explore these themes, ranging from magical realism to psychological introspection.

In *Exit West*, Hamid's use of magical realism allows for a reimagining of migration that transcends conventional realism. The magical doors serve as a narrative device that collapses spatial boundaries, enabling a fluid representation of movement and displacement. This technique not only reflects the unpredictability of migration but also aligns with trauma theory's emphasis on the disruption of linear perception.

On the other hand, *Blue Dust* employs psychological realism, focusing on the inner lives of characters and their emotional experiences. The narrative's introspective style allows for a detailed exploration of memory, identity, and trauma, emphasizing the subjective nature of these experiences.

Scholars have noted that contemporary Pakistani fiction often blends local and global perspectives, reflecting the interconnectedness of modern life. This hybridity is evident not only in thematic concerns but also in narrative form, where traditional storytelling techniques are combined with experimental approaches.

2.5. Research Gap

Despite the growing body of scholarship on trauma and postcolonial identity, there remains a lack of comparative studies that examine how these themes are represented across different texts within Pakistani contemporary fiction. While *Exit West* has received significant critical attention, particularly for its innovative narrative structure and global perspective, *Blue Dust* has been less extensively studied, especially in relation to trauma theory.

Moreover, existing research often focuses on thematic analysis without sufficient attention to narrative strategies as a mediating force. There is a need for studies that not only examine what is represented but also how it is represented, particularly in terms of form, structure, and literary technique.

This study addresses these gaps by offering a comparative analysis that integrates trauma theory and postcolonial theory while foregrounding the role of narrative strategies. By doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how contemporary Pakistani fiction engages with issues of trauma, identity, and displacement.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates trauma theory and postcolonial theory to examine the representation of trauma and identity in *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *Blue Dust* by Ayesha Salman. The combination of these frameworks allows for a comprehensive analysis of both the psychological dimensions of suffering and the socio-historical conditions that shape it. By bringing these perspectives together, the study explores how individual experiences of trauma are interconnected with broader cultural, political, and historical forces.

Trauma theory provides a critical lens for understanding how extreme experiences—such as violence, displacement, and loss—are represented in literature. As proposed by Cathy Caruth (1996), trauma is characterized by its belatedness, meaning that it is not fully experienced at the moment it occurs but returns later through fragmented memories, repetitions, and intrusive recollections. This delayed and disruptive nature of trauma challenges conventional narrative structures, often resulting in nonlinear storytelling, temporal dislocation, and gaps in representation. In literary texts, trauma is therefore not always explicitly stated but is embedded within narrative form, requiring interpretive analysis.

Dominick LaCapra's (2001) distinction between "acting out" and "working through" further informs this study. "Acting out" refers to the repetitive reliving of

traumatic events, where the subject remains trapped in a cycle of memory and emotional distress. In contrast, “working through” involves a more reflective engagement with trauma, allowing for partial understanding and the possibility of transformation. These concepts are particularly useful in analyzing how characters in both novels respond to trauma—whether they remain confined within their past experiences or attempt to reconstruct meaning and identity.

In addition, trauma theory emphasizes the limits of language in representing suffering. Traumatic experiences often resist direct articulation, leading to the use of metaphor, symbolism, and narrative fragmentation as alternative modes of expression. This is evident in the symbolic use of magical doors in *Exit West*, which represent both escape and disorientation, as well as in the introspective and memory-driven narration of *Blue Dust*, where trauma is conveyed through emotional depth rather than external action.

While trauma theory focuses on psychological experience, postcolonial theory situates these experiences within broader historical and cultural contexts. Edward Said’s (1978) concept of Orientalism highlights how colonial discourse constructs the “Other” as inferior, shaping cultural identities and power relations that persist even after the end of formal colonial rule. This framework is essential for understanding how identity in postcolonial societies is influenced by historical legacies of domination and marginalization.

Homi K. Bhabha’s (1994) concept of hybridity further expands this perspective by challenging the notion of fixed or essential identities. According to Bhabha, identity is formed within a “third space,” a site of cultural negotiation where meanings are continuously produced and transformed. This concept is particularly relevant to *Exit West*, where characters navigate multiple cultural environments and develop fluid, hybrid identities. The constant movement across borders destabilizes traditional notions of belonging, suggesting that identity is not rooted in a single location but is shaped by experience and interaction.

In *Blue Dust*, hybridity operates at a more internal level, reflecting the tension between cultural expectations and personal desires. The characters’ identities are shaped by their emotional experiences and social environments, highlighting the complexity of postcolonial subjectivity. This demonstrates that hybridity is not limited to physical movement but also involves psychological and cultural negotiation.

The integration of trauma and postcolonial theory allows this study to explore the intersection of personal and collective dimensions of experience. Trauma in postcolonial contexts is often the result of historical processes such as colonialism, war, and migration, which create conditions of instability and displacement. By combining these frameworks, the study examines how individual suffering is linked to larger structures of power and history.

Furthermore, this theoretical approach emphasizes the role of narrative as a mediating structure. Literature does not simply reflect reality but actively shapes how experiences are understood and represented. Narrative techniques such as fragmentation, shifting focalization, and symbolic imagery are not merely stylistic devices but are integral to the construction of meaning. Through these techniques, authors are able to represent complex and often inexpressible experiences of trauma and identity.

Another important aspect of this framework is its attention to temporality and memory. Trauma disrupts the linear progression of time, creating a sense of discontinuity between past and present. Postcolonial identity, similarly, is shaped by the coexistence of multiple temporalities, including colonial pasts and globalized presents. This temporal complexity is reflected in both novels, where memory plays a central role in shaping identity and narrative structure.

By employing this combined theoretical framework, the study moves beyond a purely thematic analysis and instead focuses on the dynamic relationship between form, experience, and context. It highlights how trauma and identity are not only represented in literature but are also constructed through narrative processes that reflect broader socio-cultural realities.

In conclusion, the integration of trauma theory and postcolonial theory provides a robust and nuanced foundation for analyzing contemporary Pakistani fiction. It enables a deeper understanding of how literature engages with issues of displacement, memory, and identity, demonstrating that these experiences are both individually lived and historically produced. This framework ultimately underscores the importance of examining not only what is represented in literary texts but also how it is represented, revealing the intricate connections between narrative form and human experience.

4. Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative comparative textual analysis to examine how trauma and identity are represented in *Exit West* and *Blue Dust*. Qualitative methodology is particularly appropriate for literary research as it allows for an in-depth exploration of meaning, symbolism, and narrative form rather than quantifiable measurement. This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of how literary texts encode complex psychological and socio-political experiences.

The research is grounded in close reading, a method that involves detailed and attentive analysis of selected passages from both novels. Close reading enables the identification of subtle narrative techniques such as metaphor, imagery, symbolism, and shifts in narrative voice, all of which contribute to the construction of trauma and identity. Rather than treating the texts as mere reflections of reality, this study interprets them as discursive spaces where meaning is actively produced through language and form.

A comparative framework is central to this research. By analyzing *Exit West* and *Blue Dust* alongside each other, the study highlights both convergences and divergences in their representation of trauma and postcolonial identity. This comparative lens allows for a deeper understanding of how different narrative strategies produce distinct yet related interpretations of similar thematic concerns. The comparison is not limited to thematic similarities but extends to structural and stylistic elements, including narrative temporality, focalization, and genre conventions. The analysis is structured around key analytical categories, which guide the interpretation of both texts:

5. Narrative Structure and Temporality

This involves examining whether the narrative follows a linear or non-linear progression and how time is manipulated to represent traumatic experience. Trauma often disrupts chronological order, and this disruption is reflected in fragmented or cyclical narrative forms.

5.1. Memory and Fragmentation

Memory plays a crucial role in trauma narratives. This study analyzes how memory is represented—whether as intrusive, suppressed, or reconstructed—and how fragmentation shapes the reader's understanding of character identity.

5.2. Symbolism and Metaphor

Symbolic elements such as the magical doors in *Exit West* or recurring motifs in *Blue Dust* are analyzed to understand how abstract experiences like displacement and emotional pain are made representable.

5.3. Characterization and Subjectivity

The study examines how characters perceive themselves and their surroundings, focusing on internal consciousness, emotional states, and identity negotiation.

5.4. Displacement and Hybridity

These postcolonial concepts are explored to understand how characters navigate cultural boundaries and construct hybrid identities. The study is theoretically informed by trauma theory and postcolonial theory, which are applied interpretively rather than rigidly. Trauma theory provides insight into the psychological dimensions of suffering, particularly the ways in which trauma resists direct representation and instead appears through fragmentation and repetition. Postcolonial theory situates these experiences within broader historical and cultural contexts, emphasizing issues such as colonial legacy, migration, and identity negotiation. Furthermore, this research adopts an interpretivist epistemology, which assumes that meaning is subjective and constructed through interaction between the text and the reader. This perspective acknowledges that literary interpretation is not fixed but open to multiple readings, shaped by theoretical frameworks and contextual understanding. To ensure analytical rigor, the study maintains consistency in its comparative criteria and grounds interpretations in textual evidence. Direct

quotations from the novels are used to support key arguments, ensuring that the analysis remains closely tied to the primary texts.

Overall, the methodological approach enables a comprehensive exploration of how narrative form, thematic concerns, and theoretical frameworks intersect to produce complex representations of trauma and identity in contemporary Pakistani fiction

6. Analysis and Discussion

6.1. Trauma as Displacement and Global Insecurity

In *Exit West*, trauma is not confined to individual experience but is deeply embedded within global systems of violence, migration, and political instability. The novel presents a world in which traditional notions of borders and belonging are destabilized, creating a constant sense of uncertainty. This instability reflects the lived realities of contemporary migrants, whose identities are shaped by continuous movement and adaptation. The concept of spatial trauma becomes particularly significant here. Movement across borders, rather than providing relief, often intensifies psychological dislocation. The magical doors, while offering escape, simultaneously erase the gradual process of transition, leaving characters emotionally unprepared for new environments. This abrupt displacement reflects trauma's disorienting nature, where individuals are uprooted without the opportunity to process loss. Moreover, the collective dimension of trauma in *Exit West* suggests that suffering is not isolated but shared across communities. The narrative frequently shifts focus to unnamed characters and global perspectives, emphasizing that migration is a widespread phenomenon rather than a singular experience. This technique broadens the scope of trauma, transforming it into a universal human condition.

In contrast, *Blue Dust* situates trauma within the intimate sphere of personal relationships and emotional memory. The narrative foregrounds the internalization of pain, where trauma is experienced as a persistent psychological presence rather than an external event. Unlike the spatial mobility in *Exit West*, trauma in *Blue Dust* is characterized by emotional stagnation, where characters remain trapped within their memories. This distinction highlights two different modes of trauma representation: one external and collective, the other internal and personal. However, both forms reveal the enduring impact of loss and dislocation on identity formation.

6.2. Narrative Strategies: Magical Realism and Psychological Realism

The use of magical realism in *Exit West* plays a crucial role in mediating traumatic experience. By introducing fantastical elements into a realistic setting, the novel creates a sense of estrangement that mirrors the characters' psychological state. The magical doors function as a metaphor for the unpredictability of migration, collapsing time and space in ways that reflect trauma's disruption of normal perception. Importantly, magical realism allows the narrative to address complex political realities without becoming constrained by strict realism. It creates a symbolic framework through which trauma can be represented

indirectly, aligning with trauma theory's emphasis on the limits of language in expressing extreme experiences.

In contrast, *Blue Dust* employs psychological realism, focusing on the inner lives of characters. The narrative is deeply introspective, often delving into thoughts, emotions, and memories. This approach allows for a detailed exploration of trauma as a subjective experience, emphasizing how individuals internalize and interpret their suffering. The use of internal monologue and reflective narration creates a sense of immediacy, drawing the reader into the character's emotional world. Unlike the fragmented spatial narrative of *Exit West*, *Blue Dust* offers a more continuous exploration of consciousness, though it is still marked by temporal disruptions caused by memory. These differing narrative strategies demonstrate how form shapes meaning. While magical realism externalizes trauma through symbolic structures, psychological realism internalizes it, highlighting the diversity of literary approaches to representing suffering.

6.3. Fragmentation, Memory, and Temporal Disruption

Fragmentation is a defining feature of trauma narratives, and both novels employ it in distinct ways. In *Exit West*, fragmentation is primarily spatial, as characters move abruptly between locations. This constant movement disrupts any sense of continuity, reflecting the instability of migrant identity. Additionally, the narrative structure itself is episodic, composed of brief, interconnected scenes that mirror the fragmented nature of traumatic memory. The lack of detailed transitions between locations reinforces the sense of disorientation, emphasizing the unpredictability of the characters' experiences. In *Blue Dust*, fragmentation operates at the level of memory and temporality. The narrative frequently shifts between past and present, blurring the boundaries between memory and reality. This temporal disruption reflects the intrusive nature of trauma, where past experiences resurface unexpectedly. Memory in *Blue Dust* is not merely recollection but a form of re-experiencing. The persistence of memory prevents characters from achieving emotional closure, illustrating trauma's cyclical nature. This aligns with trauma theory's assertion that traumatic events are not fully processed but continue to affect the individual over time.

6.4. Postcolonial Identity and Hybridity

Both novels engage deeply with the concept of postcolonial identity, though they approach it from different perspectives. In *Exit West*, identity is shaped by mobility and cultural interaction. As characters move across borders, they encounter diverse cultural environments, leading to the formation of hybrid identities. This hybridity reflects the breakdown of fixed cultural boundaries, suggesting that identity is fluid and constantly evolving. The novel challenges the notion of a stable homeland, presenting identity as something that is constructed through experience rather than rooted in a specific place. In *Blue Dust*, identity is more closely tied to cultural expectations and emotional experiences.

The characters navigate tensions between tradition and modernity, reflecting the complexities of postcolonial society. Trauma further complicates identity formation, as emotional suffering influences how individuals perceive themselves and their relationships.

The contrast between external hybridity and internal conflict highlights the multifaceted nature of postcolonial identity. While *Exit West* emphasizes cultural fluidity, *Blue Dust* underscores psychological depth.

6.5. Comparative Interpretation

The comparative analysis reveals that both novels, despite their stylistic differences, converge on the idea that trauma and identity are deeply interconnected. However, they diverge in their scale and mode of representation. *Exit West* operates on a global scale, presenting trauma as a collective experience shaped by migration and geopolitical forces. Its use of magical realism and fragmented structure reflects the instability of the modern world. *Blue Dust*, on the other hand, adopts a more intimate perspective, focusing on individual emotional experiences. Its reliance on psychological realism allows for a deep exploration of internal suffering. Together, these texts demonstrate that trauma cannot be understood through a single framework. Instead, it requires multiple perspectives that account for both external conditions and internal experiences.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the representation of trauma and postcolonial identity in contemporary Pakistani fiction through a comparative analysis of *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid and *Blue Dust* by Ayesha Salman. By integrating trauma theory and postcolonial theory, the research has demonstrated how both novels engage with the psychological and cultural consequences of displacement, loss, and identity negotiation, albeit through distinct narrative strategies. One of the key findings of this study is that trauma in contemporary fiction cannot be understood as a singular or uniform experience. Instead, it is represented as a multi-layered phenomenon that operates across personal, social, and global dimensions. In *Exit West*, trauma is constructed as collective and transnational, emerging from large-scale processes such as war, migration, and geopolitical instability. The novel's use of magical realism and fragmented spatial movement reflects the disorientation and fluidity of modern existence, where traditional notions of home and belonging are continuously challenged.

In contrast, *Blue Dust* presents trauma as deeply internalized and emotionally embedded, focusing on the psychological experiences of individuals. The narrative's emphasis on memory, introspection, and personal relationships highlights the enduring impact of emotional wounds that persist over time. This inward-looking approach complements the outward, global perspective of *Exit West*, together offering a

comprehensive understanding of trauma as both external and internal. Another significant contribution of this study lies in its exploration of narrative strategies as mediating tools in the representation of trauma. The analysis has shown that form is not merely a stylistic choice but a fundamental component in shaping meaning. Magical realism in *Exit West* enables the articulation of complex global realities in a symbolic manner, while psychological realism in *Blue Dust* allows for an intimate engagement with the inner lives of characters. These differing narrative modes demonstrate that trauma often resists direct representation and must instead be conveyed through innovative and indirect techniques.

Furthermore, the study highlights the centrality of postcolonial identity and hybridity in both texts. The characters in *Exit West* embody fluid and evolving identities shaped by migration and cultural interaction, reflecting the realities of a globalized world. Meanwhile, *Blue Dust* portrays identity as a site of internal conflict, influenced by cultural expectations, social constraints, and personal experiences. Despite these differences, both novels emphasize that identity is not fixed but continuously negotiated in response to changing circumstances. Importantly, this research also underscores the interconnectedness of individual and collective experiences. Trauma, as depicted in both novels, is not isolated but shaped by broader historical, political, and cultural forces. This intersection of the personal and the political reinforces the relevance of combining trauma theory with postcolonial theory, as it allows for a more holistic understanding of literary representations. In addition to its analytical contributions, this study opens up several avenues for future research. Further studies could explore a wider range of Pakistani or South Asian texts to examine how trauma and identity are represented across different genres and historical contexts. Comparative research could also be extended to include diasporic literature, thereby deepening the understanding of transnational identity formation. Moreover, interdisciplinary approaches that incorporate psychology, sociology, or cultural studies could provide additional insights into the complex dynamics of trauma.

In conclusion, this study affirms that contemporary Pakistani fiction plays a vital role in reimagining trauma and identity in a rapidly changing world. Through their distinct yet complementary approaches, *Exit West* and *Blue Dust* illustrate the diverse ways in which literature can engage with the challenges of displacement, memory, and belonging. By foregrounding the importance of narrative form and theoretical integration, this research contributes to ongoing discussions in trauma studies and postcolonial literary criticism, emphasizing the power of fiction to illuminate the complexities of human experience.

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