



THE PORTRAYAL OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER IN SABAA TAHIR'S NOVEL *ALL MY RAGE* (2022)

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Abstract

This research examines the portrayal of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Sabaa Tahir's *All My Rage* (2022) through the lens of Sigmund Freud's drive theory. Focusing on Noor, a Pakistani-American teenager, the study investigates how her PTSD is manifested in three key manifestations: intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal. These reflect the emotional toll of her traumatic experiences, beginning with an earthquake in Pakistan that resulted in the loss of her family and worsened by the abuse from her uncle, *Chachu*, which triggered her trauma. Intrusion is reflected in Noor's recurring flashbacks and nightmares, avoidance is evident in her reluctance to face painful memories, and hyperarousal is portrayed through her heightened state of alertness and emotional outbursts. The study highlights the complex depiction of PTSD within Young Adult literature and explores the intersection of personal trauma and cultural tensions. It emphasizes the significance of resilience, self-awareness, and support systems in Noor's recovery journey, positioning *All My Rage* as a critical exploration of mental health in contemporary literature.

Keywords: PTSD, Cultural tensions, Freud's drive theory, *All My Rage*

A. INTRODUCTION

Trauma plays a significant role in shaping the narratives within literature that address the complex issues relevant to adolescents and young adults, effectively bridging the gap between children's and adult literature. Over the years, this genre has become a powerful medium for exploring psychological and emotional challenges encountered during young adulthood. It entertains and provides profound insights into personal struggles, offering readers opportunities to reflect on themes such as resilience and self-discovery.

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One recurring theme in Young Adult literature is the depiction of trauma, particularly Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which significantly affects individuals exposed to severe psychological stressors. PTSD, as defined by Fadillah (2021:545), arises from traumatic events such as natural disasters, violence, or witnessing harm to loved ones. These experiences disrupt mental health, leading to intrusive memories, avoidance behaviors, and heightened arousal. Surayya and Purwarno (2022:352) add that PTSD can profoundly alter thought patterns, emotional responses, and behaviors, creating lasting impacts on an individual's well-being.

Sabaa Tahir's *All My Rage* (2022) vividly portrays PTSD through the experiences of Noor, a Pakistani-American teenager grappling with a traumatic past. Noor's PTSD is rooted in the devastating loss of her family during an earthquake in Pakistan, an event that left her as the sole survivor. This trauma is compounded by her abusive relationship with her guardian, *Chachu*, whose control and mistreatment exacerbate her psychological struggles. Noor's journey reflects the complexity of PTSD as it manifests in vivid intrusion, persistent avoidance, and hyperarousal, illustrating the profound ways trauma shapes her identity and interactions with the world.

Despite the growing exploration of PTSD in contemporary Young Adult literature, studies often address the condition in isolation, neglecting its cultural and social dimensions. Noor's story offers a unique perspective by intertwining PTSD with the challenges of living as a minority in a predominantly white American community. This dual context deepens the portrayal of her mental health struggles, emphasizing how cultural tensions and personal trauma intersect to shape her experiences.

This research seeks to analyze the portrayal of PTSD in *All My Rage* through the lens of psychoanalysis, employing Freud's drive theory to explore Noor's psychological state and behavior. By examining the mechanisms of intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal, this study aims to uncover the nuanced representation of PTSD and its implications for Noor's journey of survival and self-understanding. According to Rossi et al. (2024:23036), these three mechanisms are the main clusters of PTSD, each contributing to the persistence of traumatic distress. Intrusions involve involuntary, vivid recollections of trauma, including flashbacks and nightmares, which evoke intense fear and anxiety, making individuals feel as if the event is recurring. Similarly, avoidance serves as a coping strategy that provides temporary relief but ultimately prevents individuals from processing trauma, often leading to increased distress and depression. In addition, hyperarousal manifests as heightened alertness, exaggerated startle responses, irritability, and difficulty sleeping, further exacerbating emotional and social struggles. By integrating these psychological concepts, this analysis highlights how *All My Rage* provides a compelling depiction of PTSD and contributes to the broader discourse on mental health.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

The data for this research consists of quotes from Sabaa Tahir's novel *All My Rage*, published in 2022 and awarded the National Book Award for Young

People's Literature. The novel follows Noor, a young Pakistani-American adult who grew up in Juniper, California, after losing her family to an earthquake. It addresses significant themes related to PTSD, particularly in the context of cultural tensions that Noor faces as a minority in her community. This makes it a suitable choice for this study. The data was collected from various textual components of the novel, including words, phrases, and chapters, and is supported by related books and journal articles.

This research employs qualitative methodologies to explore the meanings individuals assign to social issues, focusing on PTSD. The analysis follows a three-step process: first, the researcher read the novel multiple times, highlighting relevant sections related to these themes using a text-highlighting method. Next, the selected data was categorized and annotated. Finally, a text-based interpretation was conducted through a psychoanalytic lens, utilizing Sigmund Freud's drive theory to evaluate the characters' thoughts and behaviors. This approach aims to uncover the complexities of PTSD in Sabaa Tahir's novel *All My Rage* (2022).

C. DISCUSSION

Sabaa Tahir's *All My Rage* (2022) provides an in-depth portrayal of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) through the experiences of Noor, a Pakistani-American teenager grappling with a devastating past. Noor's PTSD is intricately depicted through her struggles with intrusive memories, avoidance mechanisms, and hyperarousal, reflecting the profound psychological and emotional toll of trauma. This discussion examines these three manifestations, employing Freud's drive theory: *Thanatos* (death drive) and *Eros* (life drive) to analyze the complexity of Noor's condition.

1. Intrusion

Intrusion is vividly illustrated in Noor's uncontrollable flashbacks and persistent memories of past trauma. Her recollections frequently return to the earthquake that destroyed her village and took her family, reinforcing her feelings of indebtedness to her uncle, *Chachu*, who rescued her and brought her to America. She repeatedly reminds herself, "*Chachu is the only reason I'm standing here... He saved me. He saved me. He saved me*" (Tahir, 2022, ch. 20, p. 132). The repetition emphasizes her fixation on his sacrifice, overshadowing the abuse she currently endures. This internalized debt prevents her from fully acknowledging her suffering, illustrating Freud's concept of *Thanatos*, wherein Noor remains emotionally bound to a traumatic past rather than seeking healing in the present.

Noor's intrusive memories manifest most intensely when she experiences physical violence at *Chachu*'s hands. During one such incident, her past and present merge in a dissociative episode: "*Down comes his fist... I can't breathe... The memory fades. Dissolves into nothing but what is happening here. Now...*" (Tahir, 2022, ch. 36, p. 212). The abrupt transition between her childhood trauma and present abuse signifies her inability to separate past suffering from current pain. This blurring of time is a hallmark of PTSD, as Noor involuntarily relives past terror, making her present reality even more unbearable. Her mind reverts to the

moment of her rescue, intertwining it with *Chachu's* violence, further reinforcing her emotional entrapment.

Beyond psychological distress, Noor's internal conflict is exacerbated by cultural expectations. Rooted in collectivist values, her upbringing instills a deep-seated obligation to honor familial sacrifices, often at the expense of personal well-being. In many collectivist societies, family duty takes precedence over individual suffering, making Noor feel morally compelled to endure mistreatment rather than confront it. *Chachu's* role as her savior complicates her perception of him; she cannot fully condemn his abuse without feeling ungrateful. This moral dilemma deepens her psychological turmoil, as she struggles between self-preservation and the ingrained duty to repay *Chachu's* sacrifice.

Ultimately, Noor's trauma is not only a psychological burden but also a cultural one. Her intrusive memories, reinforced by both PTSD and societal expectations, create an emotional prison from which she cannot escape. Her journey toward self-awareness and healing is obstructed by the very gratitude that binds her to her abuser, making her struggle one of both survival and self-liberation.

In summary, Noor's experience serves as a poignant illustration of the effects of PTSD, characterized by the relentless invasion of traumatic memories that overshadow her daily existence. This interplay between Freud's concepts of *Eros* and *Thanatos* underscores the profound struggle she endures: the instinctual drive to seek life and connection amidst the suffocating weight of death and despair. Her journey reveals not only the harsh reality of living with trauma but also the fragile glimmers of hope and resilience that emerge from her attempts to reclaim agency over her life. Ultimately, Noor's story highlights the importance of understanding the intricate dynamics of intrusive memories in trauma recovery and the potential for healing through the recognition of both the enduring pain and the relentless pursuit of life. This duality emphasizes the need for comprehensive support systems that foster healing, allowing individuals like Noor to navigate the complexities of their experiences while striving toward a renewed sense of self and purpose.

2. Avoidance

Avoidance is another manifestation of Noor's PTSD, evident in her reluctance to confront painful memories and her efforts to shield herself from emotional discomfort. Noor actively avoids discussing or even thinking about her traumatic experiences. This is particularly evident in her college application essays, where she replaces her tragic reality with more socially acceptable narratives: "*A life-altering experience. (Truth: my entire family dying and the smell of their bodies rotting around me. What I wrote: working at Juniper Hospital)*" (Tahir, 2022, ch. 16, p. 105). Noor's decision to conceal the truth about her trauma and instead write a sanitized version of her experience reveals the cultural pressure within immigrant communities to maintain a strong, respectable facade in public spaces. This silence underscores how cultural stigma around vulnerability hinders Noor's ability to process her grief authentically. Freud's *Thanatos* is apparent here, as this avoidance provides Noor temporary emotional relief but hinders her healing process.

Noor also exhibits physical avoidance of places and situations that evoke memories of her trauma. For instance, when returning to Juniper, she reveals: “*I don't want to go back. I don't want to face what comes next...My stomach twists. I don't want to do this. I just want to sleep...*” (Tahir, 2022, ch. 39, p. 230). Her reluctance to return to a place associated with pain and confrontation underscores her avoidance of addressing unresolved emotions. The desire to “just sleep” reflects her attempt to escape from reality, mirroring *Thanatos*' influence.

Additionally, Noor avoids opening up about her trauma to others, even those she trusts. When Misbah notices bruises on Noor's arm and tries to address them, Noor flinches and deflects the conversation: “*Noor sounded so subdued...She flinched and I knew. I knew it in my bones*” (Tahir, 2022, ch. 54, p. 305). This reaction highlights Noor's unwillingness to acknowledge or share her pain, reinforcing her emotional isolation. While avoidance shields her from immediate discomfort, it prolongs her suffering and deepens her sense of alienation.

In conclusion, Noor's avoidance behaviors are a significant manifestation of her PTSD, illustrating the tension between the desire to escape pain and the need for healing. Her reluctance to confront traumatic memories—whether by substituting her reality in college essays or physically avoiding places linked to her trauma—reflects Freud's drive theory, particularly the influence of *Thanatos*, which compels her to evade emotional discomfort. While this avoidance offers temporary relief, it ultimately prolongs her suffering and deepens her sense of isolation, underscoring the complex interplay of *Eros* and *Thanatos* within her experience. By highlighting these dynamics, it becomes clear that addressing avoidance in therapeutic settings is essential for helping Noor confront her past, fostering a pathway toward healing and reconnection with life.

3. Hyperarousal

Hyperarousal, characterized by heightened alertness and exaggerated emotional responses, profoundly impacts Noor's daily life. One of the most striking examples of her hypervigilance is her habit of carrying essential items in preparation for an escape: “*Her passport is in there, and a change of clothes in a ziplock bag...She was always ready to run. Every day, she came to school wondering if this would be the day she had to get out*” (Tahir, 2022, ch. 38, p. 217). This behavior reflects Noor's constant fear of danger, a survival mechanism rooted in her past trauma. Freud's *Thanatos* is evident in her inability to trust her environment, while *Eros* surfaces in her instinctive efforts to survive.

Noor's hyperarousal also manifests as exaggerated startle reactions. For instance, when her uncle calls her name unexpectedly, she describes: “*I jumped. Scrambled to switch my music off. Chachu sits in the living room*” (Tahir, 2022, ch.10, p. 61). Her immediate physical reaction, despite the lack of an immediate threat, illustrates how Noor's nervous system remains on high alert, unable to relax even in familiar settings.

Another manifestation of hyperarousal is Noor's irritability and outbursts of anger. This is particularly evident in her reactions during situations of school bullying, where her heightened emotional state causes her to respond explosively.

The ongoing pressure and distress she experiences lead to volatility in her temper, impacting her ability to maintain composure in challenging situations. "All my rage seethes inside me and there's no place for it to go. I thrash. I scream. I snarl and bite. (Tahir, 2022, ch.29, p. 182). Noor's physical and emotional explosion in this scene highlights the intense internal tension stemming from her trauma and feelings of helplessness. Her anger erupts, leading her to lash out and engage in a physical altercation, which signifies the destructive influence of *Thanatos*. This drive frequently manifests as aggression—whether directed at others or herself—stemming from psychological distress that feels uncontrollable. When Noor finds herself unable to contain her anger, she allows this destructive force to take control, as reflected in her admission that she "lets it course through" her. This indicates that her rage is not just a reaction to the immediate confrontation but rather a buildup of frustration, trauma, and a sense of injustice that she has endured throughout her life.

In a powerful moment during a confrontation with *Chachu*, Noor passionately expresses her feelings: "Don't talk about her!" I shout at him. My rage comes out of nowhere..."She was a mother to me. She cared about me. She loved me. She did more for me than you ever did, and she wanted me to go to college-" (Tahir, 2022, ch. 36, p. 211). *Chachu's* derogatory remark about "religious garbage" highlights a cultural tension between patriarchal authority and spiritual guidance in Noor's community. While religious teachings may empower Noor to seek justice and self-worth, *Chachu* weaponizes his authority to dismiss those values as a threat to his control. Noor's explosive reaction signifies her breaking point, as she challenges the oppressive cultural and familial structures that silence women's voices, particularly when they confront systemic patriarchy within their community. This emotional explosion, triggered by *Chachu's* insult toward Misbah, reflects Noor's deep-seated frustration and rage. While this anger can be destructive, it also signifies her emerging defiance against her uncle's control, marking a shift toward reclaiming her autonomy.

In conclusion, Noor's hyperarousal exemplifies the significant effects of trauma on her emotional state and behavior. Her heightened alertness, exaggerated startle responses, and frequent irritability reveal a mind struggling with ongoing fear and distress. The eruptions of anger she experiences—whether during school bullying or confrontations with family—highlight her difficulty in managing overwhelming emotions, while also signaling her growing defiance against controlling forces in her life. These moments, though destructive, reflect her desire for autonomy and the complex interplay between survival instincts and the quest for empowerment amidst her trauma.

Through its exploration of intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal, *All My Rage* provides a nuanced portrayal of PTSD's complexity. Noor's experiences illustrate the profound impact of trauma on an individual's psyche, emphasizing the challenges of living with unresolved pain. Freud's drive theory highlights the tension between *Thanatos*, which binds Noor to her traumatic past, and *Eros*, which drives her to seek healing and a better future. By delving into Noor's struggles, Tahir's novel not only deepens our understanding of PTSD but also underscores the importance of resilience and support in overcoming trauma.

D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Sabaa Tahir's *All My Rage* (2022) provides a poignant exploration of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) through the experiences of Noor, a Pakistani-American teenager grappling with a traumatic past and present challenges. This research analyzes the portrayal of PTSD in the novel using Freud's drive theory, emphasizing the psychological dynamics of Noor's condition, including intrusion, avoidance, and hyperarousal.

Noor's PTSD is deeply rooted in her childhood trauma, which began with surviving a devastating earthquake that claimed her family in Pakistan. This trauma is compounded by her abusive uncle, *Chachu*, whose behavior serves as a constant trigger for her distress. Noor's intrusive flashbacks reveal her struggle to escape vivid memories of the earthquake and her uncle's mistreatment, while her avoidance behaviors reflect her attempts to suppress painful experiences by altering her narrative. Hyperarousal is evident in her constant state of vigilance, exaggerated responses to stimuli, and moments of excessive anger, all of which highlight the long-lasting impact of her trauma.

Through the lens of Freud's drive theory, Noor's journey showcases the tension between *Thanatos* (death drive) and *Eros* (life drive). While her trauma repeatedly pulls her toward despair and self-destruction, Noor's resilience and determination to rebuild her life reflect the workings of *Eros*. Ultimately, her character illustrates the complexity of PTSD as not only a source of suffering but also a potential catalyst for change.

The novel highlights the importance of recognizing PTSD's psychological manifestations and their impact on personal identity. Noor's story sheds light on the struggles of individuals dealing with trauma while navigating cultural and interpersonal conflicts, making it a powerful contribution to the discourse on mental health and resilience in contemporary young adult literature.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for future research:

1. Exploration of Supporting Characters: While this study focuses on Noor, future researchers could examine the portrayal of PTSD and its impact on other characters in the novel, such as Salahuddin, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of trauma's ripple effects within the narrative.
2. Application of Alternative Theories: Researchers could apply different critical theories, such as intersectionality or postcolonial frameworks, to further explore the intersections of trauma, identity, and cultural tensions depicted in the novel.
3. Comparative Studies: Future studies could compare *All My Rage* with other works of young adult literature addressing PTSD, highlighting the similarities and differences in their approaches to portraying trauma and resilience.
4. Focus on Cultural Representation: Analyzing the novel's depiction of cultural identity and its role in shaping characters' experiences could offer deeper insights into the challenges faced by minority groups in literature.

By expanding on these areas, scholars can enrich the academic conversation surrounding *All My Rage* and contribute valuable perspectives on trauma, resilience, and identity in young adult literature.

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