



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Unveiling Trauma's Echo: Exploring the Impact of Traumatic Events on the Psyche of Sitara Zamani in 'Sparks like Stars'

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## ABSTRACT

The present study aims to focus on the traumatic events that occurred in the life of a young Afghan girl. All of a sudden, her life changes as she undergoes many traumatic events that badly affect her psyche. In this article, the inspection of challenges experienced by Hashimi's protagonist to come out from her childhood memories and to live a normal life will be conducted. The research begins with an introduction to the novel and the theory; a discussion follows the analysis of the selected text. The insights of this article have been taken from Freud's psychoanalytical Trauma theory (1990) and some aspects of the Trauma theory, which was put forth by Cathy Caruth in 1995 have also been incorporated. The present research uses a descriptive qualitative method by relying majorly on Hashimi's novel "Sparks Like Stars" (2021) and other sources that evaluate the same issue as Hashimi did. The research ends with a conclusion that sums up the outcomes which validates the hypothesis. Taking everything into account, the findings might prove that Trauma Theory can be used in analyzing and appreciating many other literary texts dealing with the themes of loss, trauma, and nostalgia.

**KEYWORDS** Childhood Trauma, Memories, Psychoanalytic Trauma Theory, South Asian Fiction

## Introduction

Life is not a bed of roses, nearly everyone in this world has experienced catastrophic events in their lives, including the loss of close ones. Trauma is an unrecognized event that alters personality and transcends regular recollection. The selected text, "Sparks Like Stars" (2021), has been skilfully written by Nadia Hashmi, a former paediatrician who now writes works for people. Since literature is a depiction of the world, there are numerous publications on subjects like "childhood traumas," "Remembering, Loss and nostalgia," and similar concepts recur throughout the text. She draws inspiration from her Afghan background in New York and New Jersey, where she was raised. They left Afghanistan in the middle of the 1970s even though both of her parents were born and raised there. Nadia was lucky to be surrounded by a sizable group of aunts, uncles, and cousins who made Afghan culture an integral part of their daily lives. With degrees in biology and Middle Eastern studies, she graduated from Brandeis University. She began writing stories on her days off from a busy trauma Centre that drew from her legacy and the strange interactions that Afghans had. Addressing issues including enslavement, forced migration, struggle, neediness, misogyny, and imperialism. The intriguing work "Sparks Like Stars" by Hashmi centres in Kabul of Afghanistan, beginning in the calendar year 1978. Sitara Zamani, the protagonist of the novel, has witnessed the butchery of her family and has been hidden in the compartment with her hidden fortunes. With the help of Shair, a guard, she is finally

able to flee. After that incident, Sitara is taken away to get to the new residence of a woman Antonia Shepherd, who works as an American ambassador, adopts her and raises her in the United States. Sitara adopts her deceased sister's name – Aryana Shepherd – in her new nation and dedicates herself to her studies, ultimately progressing to the position of a widely known oncological surgeon in the great city of New York. The narrative then jumps forward to 2008, as an old patient – a man Aryana had not anticipated seeing again – shows up in her examination room. This takes place thirty years to the day after that tragic Kabul night, destroying Aryana's world yet again. Shair, the military personnel who safeguarded her life, yet who might also be responsible for the death of her entire family. Aryana is roused by his presence and is possibly inspired to seek revenge.

This novel's protagonist, an Afghan lady who later immigrated to New York and established herself as a well-known physician, allows the novel to also be viewed through the autobiographical prism. The analogous subjects of Afghan women and their challenges appear in Nadia's other works as well. The narrative of the novel "*A House Without Widows*" (2016) is around a woman from Afghanistan and the traumatic events that completely alter her life. It is about Zeba, a devoted wife, a kind mother, and a contented inhabitant. Her tranquil existence is disturbed when she learns that Kamal, the love of her life, has been brutally murdered with an axe on their patio. In the opinion of Kamal's family, who demanded retribution, Zeba had committed that transgression. Zeba was arrested and put in prison just as she was about to escape a vengeful mob. She encounters a group of women while anticipating preliminary. Prison serves as both a refuge and a place of punishment for these women. The same thing happened to Sitara in *Sparks Like Stars*, who needed to travel to America to receive life-saving care. She desired to live in the city where her parents were born and where she had her first experience of the outside world, but she was forced to leave and move to America, a place that felt like both paradise and punishment because it had given her a second chance at life while also serving as a reminder of her separation from Afghanistan, where she had been enjoying her family to the fullest.

Another Hashmi's book is "*When the Moon Is Low*" (2021), which is also about an Afghan woman named Fereiba whose husband was killed by the Taliban in a shocking act of brutality. Fearing for the safety of her children, she flees to England, where the rest of her family has successfully located refugees. This may easily be compared to Sitara from *Sparks-like Stars*, who also located refugees in New York.

*Sparks Like Stars* (2021) is a novel about trauma experiences, and a trauma novel's defining feature is how the protagonist changes as a result of an external, frequently frightening experience. This change in self-perception illuminates the most typical method of resolving memory-related issues and leads to fresh perspectives on oneself and the world as a whole. The external incident that causes the protagonist to behave outrageously is typically connected to a mass human or calamitous occurrence like conflict or disaster. The impact of Sitara's early traumas was a significant factor in her decision-making throughout this story. Psychological trauma is what we refer to as emotional shock, and it cannot be detected the same way physical trauma can. ROGER LUCKHURST in his book "*THE TRAUMA QUESTION*" says:

*Because trauma has been transformed into a collection of engrossing tales about the mysteries of identity, recollection, and individuality that permeate Western cultural life, trauma has come to represent a paradigm.* LUCKHURST, R. (2013) ("*THE TRAUMA QUESTION*"), Cambridge University, publishers.

## Literature Review

Kalb, (2021) in *Q&A with Nadia Hashimi*, My stories are frequently influenced by articles in newspapers. The first president of Afghanistan and his family's bodies were buried there 30 years ago, according to a former army officer who divulged the location in a 2009 article by Carlotta Gall (New York Times). Several people had been killed in the military coup that took place in Kabul in April 1978 as a result of the Cold War tensions reaching a breaking point in the historically tranquil city. I was curious as to how such a tragic and important event could take place in such a beautiful setting. President Daoud Khan's 18-month-old grandchild was the youngest person whose body was discovered in the unmarked burial. I started to imagine what it may have been like to be a small child in the royal residence during a coup. What if an innocent child had been there that horrific night and lived?

The tale of Sitara is the tale of Afghanistan. That night, her world is shaken, but it doesn't end there. Irrespective of how far she travels, her history will always follow her. She stands for an entire generation of Afghan citizens, many of whom fled their oppressed country and found new lives in America.

Blankfein, (2021) in her article "*A Compelling Story of Survival Unfolds in 'Sparks Like Stars'*" says that She made the conscious decision to withhold details from her adolescence from others, which has created obstacles and limitations for her ultimate happiness and trust. When a person from her past enters her life, old wounds begin to reopen, and Sitara develops a strong desire to face her experiences, accept her family's murder as reality, and return home to witness Afghanistan's destruction firsthand.

According to Miller, (2021), in her article "*Afghan Culture from War-torn Kabul to Success in the U.S.*," Hashimi provides the academic fellow with a reasonably average overview of Kabul's way of life in 1978 when the city was on the brink of invasion and a protracted struggle. Sitara spends a lot of her time locked inside, dealing with her trauma, making an effort to communicate, and listening to various personalities, mostly white American women who end up being her agents and plotting her escape to the United States. While keeping her hidden and away from the outside tactical overthrow's combining force. A significant portion of the upset's viciousness and its effects are cleaned up or completely left out, maybe as they would appear to an 8-year-old.

Aviles, (2021) in her book review, "*Reclaiming Family and Memory*" in 'Sparks Like Stars' Sitara uses a passage from Kipling in the opening of her story to highlight the ruthlessness of his attack on her legacy and the power of her authority. In 1978, a tactical overthrow of the Afghan government severely disrupted her life. She is an Afghani native, so her tale isn't forced; it's an important part of her lineage, which is why the splendor revealed via her untangling, perseverance, and search for her adaptability comes from a place of reality.

*Sparks Like Stars*, appeared by Harper Collins, transports the viewer into the broader context of contemporary history to look behind the scenes at the impact of war and terror on human lives, according to (Marcus, 2021), in his critique of this book. Afghanistan is a place name associated with severe extremism, dread, and fighting for a great number of people. Nevertheless, it is also a person's residence.

Morrow, (2021) claims that a large portion of the tension and tragedy in *Sparks Like Stars* comes from the pain and chaos of an assured little child who is abandoned after witnessing her family's murder and is left with no one. After all of that, the subject of

endurance and leaving Afghanistan permanently is still brought up when she is taken in by an American woman who serves at an administrative office in Kabul. After arriving in America, events swiftly transition from Sitara's teens to her adulthood. She is proficient and productive, but all at once she starts to close off. She seldom ever shares her feelings even with her family members.

Children cling to encounter trauma because of the loss of family, guardians, or occasions of war, etc. As indicated by Judith L. Herman who is viewed as the main essayist who depicts horrible cherished recollections and the methods of recuperation from them in 1992 in her book, *"Injury & Recovery and an Accompanying Article"* "this hypothesis recommends that the enduring person has a set of experiences that made the recollections of an undesirable or hostile occurrence.

Laurence, (1974) and Atwood, (1988) *Cat's Eye* are real-life examples of literature that deal with this subject and illuminate what these kinds of trauma can imply for how the person accepts his or her vocation and standing in society. Margaret Lawrence created the fantastical mansion known as "The Diviners" (1974) as a means of recalling her memories of the past. She recalls that while she and her significant other were visiting England, she was given the chance to view images of her native country. Margaret Atwood, a fellow Canadian who published "Cat's Eye" (1988), also maintained contact. Elaine Risley, a suspect painter, is the protagonist and she continuously rejects and dismisses her adolescence. She believes it is impossible to accept her destiny because she is horrified by the memories of her early life, which makes her unable to accept her personality. It becomes risky for her when she makes an effort to reflect on her history and reevaluate her account of the horror that engulfed her Toronto existence. She went through the torment with her companions to escape it, but since she is stuck in the never-ending journey, she is unable to experience any sense of fulfillment or even wealth. Both "Diviners" and "Cat's Eye" focus on the distinctive aftermath of trauma and examine the protagonist's emotions about the horrible event of a relative's passing. In *Cat's Eye*, the protagonist is shown to be terrified by the terrible memories of her childhood, rendering her unfit to recognize her character, in contrast to *The Diviners*, which centers on the tragic deaths of the protagonist's parents.

### Theoretical framework

The psychoanalytical trauma theory developed by Sigmund Freud in the 1990s serves as the theoretical foundation for this article. This trauma model proves that suffering is unrepresentable. The psychoanalytic concept is fundamentally based on the idea that trauma always involves deprivation and death. The tragedy may be actual, like the absence of a beloved person, or symbolic, such as a decline in confidence or personality. When someone experiences a "traumatic event" or situation, unresolved hurts and childhood conflicts may accumulate and overpower them. This trauma theory is centered on Freud's description, which says that to integrate and make these experiences vital for one's conscious mystic ability, one needs to mentally absorb knowledge and recollections from traumatic incidents or accidents.

Freud and Breuer emphasize in "Studies in Hysteria (1895)" that the initial occurrence was not terrifying as a whole itself, instead being terrifying in recognition or recall. The past event can only be known after the period spent in nostalgia or remembering after a present event is taken into consideration.

Freud and Breuer (1895) "...We might switch the decree "*cessante causa cessat effectus*" It means "*When the reason comes to an end, the impact also comes to an end*".

Psychological trauma along with the impact of memory on society and personal traits are the two main issues that constitute the field of trauma studies. According to the conventional trauma model created by Cathy Caruth, a traumatic incident divides the public's consciousness. This idea stresses the decline brought on by an outside influence that changes the mind's internal processes and permanently alters character.

Trauma: "*Explorations in Memory*" (1995) by Cathy Caruth rose to prominence by attending conferences and gatherings of professionals in a few fields, including film, psychiatry, humanism, and writing. Caruth established the guidelines for comprehending and discussing trauma, which had an impact on interdisciplinary research on the subject. Trauma clarified by Caruth is "*a shock that works a lot like an actual risk but is actually a rift in the mind's perception of time*" (Caruth 1996: 61). A mysterious and unrepresentable horrible event is contrasted to the collective emotional interaction with social interactions in terms of how it affects one person's thinking to argue that this collection of experiences fails to adequately address terrible occurrences like dispute or annihilation because any depiction is a form of narrative. (1996: 15, 49, 76).

The broadly accepted theory of trauma is founded on the idea that trauma is reactive, which is used to argue that a traumatic event leaves a person with a "fleeting hole" and causes them to fall apart. For instance, in "*Worlds of Hurt*" Kali Tal suggests that

"Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without re-creating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of 'normal' conception" (Tal, K. (1996 (*World of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*) p.15 Cambridge University Press).

Thus, the urge to reproduce or respond by telling a tale about the experience is underscored by the Freudian concept of trauma and memory. However, this model also suggests that the awareness of trauma is frequently a conjectured memory of the past since traumatic experiences obstruct knowledge and, consequently, depiction. According to Kali Tal and Cathy Caruth's scientific trauma theory, the reactions to awful events—such as mental pain and the possible split of consciousness—are an essential part of horrible experiences and memories. The literary researcher uses the likelihood that a terrible experience neurotically divides personality as a similitude to depict the degree of destruction done to the person's conscious self-worth and the difference in perception caused by the incident.

Sitara, the main heroine in Hashmi's *Sparks Like Stars*, experiences numerous traumatic occurrences that have a highly negative impact on both her identity and psychology. She established some limits between herself and other individuals. She has no desire to have children. She lost her parents, loved ones, and friends when she was a child, so as an adult, she is afraid of losing individuals who are very important to her. In addition, all of the prior occurrences that took place in her life are still vivid in her memory, and she frequently recalls them. She also compares every current incident with previous memories of similar events that took place. In fact, the entire text is about nostalgia and is regarded as a type of narrating and remembering the past.

## Analysis

Hashmi has explained through various literary styles how young people suffer terrible experiences, how their identities are affected, and how they grow and conquer their concerns over time at a price. One can realize that even youngsters can experience trauma as a result of many circumstances and losses that occurred in their lives on account of the

protagonist's detailed explanation. The narrative begins in the late afternoon of April 1978 in the capital of Afghanistan. During the initial Soviet-Afghan War, the People's Democrat Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) ousted President Mohammed Daoud Khan's administration of the nation-state of Afghanistan.

The protagonist of the tale is Sitara, an Afghan girl whose father is Sulaiman Zamani's (the President's leading advisor) child. Except for Sitara, everyone in the castle perished during the Soviet assault. Sitara describes the terrifying moment she witnessed her loved ones and friends being brutally murdered right in front of her eyes in chapter 6 page no 45 of this novel. "*I closed my eyes ..... kept them open*" (p. 45). The first and worst thing that had ever happened to Sitara, who was eight years old, was this tragedy. To protect Sitara from the Soviet military, Shair, one of the Arg (name of the official royal mansion) troopers, loaded her into his car and drove her to his house. She disliked staying in Shair's house since she believed that he had murdered her family, but she was helpless because she had lost every member of her family in the previous hostile evening. In that strange place, she perceived herself as a caged creature.

One night, Shair brought Sitara to the market to try to save her life. He discovered two English women on one of the lanes and gave them Sitara, begging them to safeguard her because Kabul is perilous for her life. Sitara was then once more under the hands of strangers, the language of whom she was unfamiliar because each of the women spoke English when Shair vanished. Sitara wanted to immediately rush back to her house and her family since she was so frightened and restless as described in Chapter # 10, *I wondered if.... my own home*. (p.66), One woman went by the names Antonia and Tilly; the elderly woman was Antonia's mother. Both showed Sitara tremendous kindness and when she informed them about the tragic events in her life, they started to assist her. However, she is prevented from seeking any happiness in her life due to that traumatic event, as Caruth's model emphasizes that externally caused experience leads to internal brain enhancements and permanently alters personality. In Chapter No. 11, it is clear that Sitara found Tilly entertaining while she was acting like a child. Unaware of it, Sitara begins to smile, but when she realizes she has done something wrong, she immediately begins to feel ashamed of herself. As she said, "*I hadn't meant... moment of lightness*" (p. 75) (*Sparks like stars*). The dreadful and tragic evening when Sitara lost her family, was saved by a man she believed to be their killer, and then spent the rest of the night with another outsider left her intellectually confused. According to Cathy Caruth, reactions to terrible experiences often include intellectual disorientation and the concept of contingency. Sitara will be affected by this for the rest of her life.

Tilly's health deteriorated as Sitara and Tilly were traveling to America, and when the plane touched down in New York, Sitara along Tilly split up. Sitara never encountered Tilly again after that. In Chapter 24 of the novel, for an additional encounter of her life, Sitara is confronted with the terrible misfortune of losing someone else who was growing to be more important to her After her parents, she was Tilly As she says" *For the second time.... in a storm*" (p. 137). As time went on, she was feeling alone and began to recall a childhood episode in which some boys were making fun of a dog while it was alone and frightened inside the group of mischievous lads. Sitara is also comparing herself with that stray dog in chapter # 28 of the novel "*I couldn't help.... dog*" (p. 152). After that, Sitara was transported by American police to her home to nurture it for security and care. Compared to Antonia's house, the location was substantially more excruciating. Sitara had come a long way since she had left her homeland. She didn't believe or feel that way, though. She sensed that she was still in Afghanistan as she mentions "*I've come so far.... gone far enough*" (Chapter # 32) (p.178)

The story then abruptly jumps to the year 2008, when she has become a well-known specialist and is still living with Antonia, but her ability to think has been severely damaged. According to the abreactive model of trauma, which asserts that traumatic events cause a "worldly hole" and a person to fall apart, Sitara's situation is a clear example of this because she even claims that she has trouble connecting with her significant other. *"My fingers hover... I want to say"* (Chapter # 33) (p.184). Sitara, who is now known as Aryana Shepherd, also has no desire to get married or have children. When asked why, she cited her busy schedule, but we now know that childhood trauma has a long-lasting impact on a person's existence. As she has gone through a lot in her life so far, she does not want to be around anyone or engage in relationships with them. In the book, she explains why she is single and states that *"I accepted ...last of my kind"* (Chapter # 35) (p.193).

Aryana is also unable to communicate about that terrible experience in her day-to-day life, as the Freudian concept of trauma reveals that suffering is unrepresentable. She has generally tried in her life to tell her partner Adam about her history, but she hasn't succeeded in doing so. In chapter 39, Aryana added that despite the multiple treatments she received, whenever she tried to talk about such a huge event, she became agitated and frightened and wasn't ready to do so. She has often considered that unless she has the chance to leave the consumed darkness of her past, she cannot be a decent wife or have a normal life. She can't help but think back to that particular time in the past when she suffered separation from her family, and in that scene, she repeatedly goes over their memories and makes comparisons to the time she experienced in her adolescence. As mentioned in Chapter # 37 by stating that *"I closed my eyes.... smell of artillery..."* (p.207)

In Chapter # 56, Similarly, Antonia tells Aryana that we are just reluctant to talk about the people we have lost. We stop talking about them because she claims that doing so would be more harmful than really losing them and it is the same thing that Freud and Breuer underscore that the first occasion was not awful in itself but rather just its recognition. Sitara experienced numerous unbearable events in her life, but all changed when she met "Abdul Shair Nabi," an elderly patient with gastric cancer. He was the same person who might have murdered her loved ones thirty years before. She was unwilling to see him again. She returned to the location that had once been her beloved country in search of reality. In this manner, the novel's final section develops into a straight line, with Sitara's journey bending towards the book's conclusion. *"And for the first time.... not daunt me"* Those are the words Sitara (Aryana) spoke on the novel page 353 in the final sentence. She stopped remembering the past at that point, and she overcame trauma by returning to the location where she sacrificed her entire family. That is what Freud said that the original incident was not traumatic or agonizing in itself rather, it is the recalling and remembering that makes it more torturous, it is the point when she/he starts accepting reality.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Nadia Hashimi's novel "Sparks Like Stars," which explores the depths of pain and its resonance within Sitara Zamani's mind, has shown a multitude of human experiences. This study's course has highlighted the significant impact that traumatic experiences have on a person's emotional landscape, behavioral reactions, and general psychological well-being. Examining Sitara's difficulties in moving past her traumatic childhood and living a normal life via the lens of trauma theory has highlighted the enduring themes of loss, resiliency, and the complex connection between memory and recovery. Additionally, her inability to talk about past events with her boyfriend foreshadows a future incident in which the truthful depiction of the experience is perceived as lessening its trauma. This is evident at the end of the novel as Sitara feels comfortable talking about the incident with another character, Clay, and in fact, needs to share more

about herself. Through this work of fiction, Hashimi explores the ways that trauma affects memory and character, focusing in particular on the psychological effects of catastrophic accidents and how children respond to their mundane instances of misery.

This study not only advances our knowledge of the intricate details of trauma but also highlights the ability of literature to act as a mirror illuminating the state of mankind as a whole. It is also a tribute to the ongoing value of narrative in revealing the darker sides of human experience and making visible that which may otherwise remain buried as the shadows of Sitara's pain echo within the pages of "Sparks like Stars."



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