

NARRATIVE FRAGMENTATION AND TRAUMA: A STRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS OF JAVED'S *RANI*

Humaira Tabassum^{*1}, Nazia Anwar²

^{*1}MPhil Scholar, English, University of Gujrat,

²Lecturer, English, University of Gujrat,

¹humairahali651@gmail.com, ²nazia.anwar@uog.edu.pk

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Corresponding Author: *

Humaira Tabassum

Abstract

This study investigates the presence of trauma and pain through narrative fragmentation in Kanza Javed's *Rani*. An excessive research under the canopy of contemporary Pakistani fiction, has focused on themes like social marginalization, patriarchy, gender inequality, oppression, and pain. However visibly less focus has been devoted to the formal narrative structures, through which these experiences are conveyed. While addressing this gap, the present study answers how broken text, riddle of silent characters, and fragmented time-line contribute to the depiction of psychological trauma, depression and suppressed memory in *Rani*. The research is grounded in Tzvetan Todorov's model of narrative progression, Gérard Genette's concept of narrative temporality and Roland Barthes' narrative codes as its core theoretical models. This research investigates the instability of traumatic memory through *Rani*'s non-linear structures, Using qualitative text analysis and close reading. Memory loss, inner suffering, dialogue shift, repeated calling and silence reflects psychological disturbance and emotional pain. Additionally, this study argues that missed details in the text compels the reader to rebuild hidden or partially revealed events and make meaning. Trauma in *Rani*, therefore, is observed not only through themes but also through the structure of the story itself. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that fragmentation in the story functions as both an aesthetic strategy and a narrative mode through which memory, guilt, and unresolved trauma are articulated.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Pakistani fiction has been seen continuously revolving around domestic and social issues of trauma, memory, emotional pain, suffering, societal hierarchy and turmoil. Kanza Javed a famous contemporary writer, has drawn attention for her subtle yet emotionally intricate storytelling. Her short story *Rani*, included in the collection *What Remains after a Fire*, presents a deeply unsettling portrayal of hidden violence, suppressed memory, and emotional trauma.

Instead of explaining or narrating these experiences through proper stream, she chooses fragmented narration, imbalance chronology and loops of silence. While reading *Rani*, its textual structure reshapes the understanding of events and emotional stress.

Themes like Patriarchy, female oppression, cultural-bound rituals, social division and class pressure have enjoyed dominance in Pakistani fiction for more than decades. While these concerns remain inevitable, comparatively less

attention has been paid to the formal narrative models through which such themes are represented. Although, in past few years researchers have found that text itself carries emotional, psychological and cultural meaning, that are connected with past trauma. Experiences related to trauma and pain often come in the form of fragmented narration and resist smooth flow because traumatic memory appears in repetitions, and sudden jump to the past. To investigate this aspect, a Structuralist approach becomes essential in examining how narrative structures produce meaning. This study, therefore, focuses on the role of narrative fragmentation in representing trauma and repressed memory in *Rani*.

The story reveals itself through an irregular movement between past and present, where the narrator's concern for her aging grandmother (*dadi*) slowly alerts disturbing memories connected to a lady named Nargis (*Rani*). These events do not appear in a clear sequence rather they appear in scattered pieces, depicting the instability of memory and confrontation of painful experiences. The fragmented text actually narrates the broken psychological condition of the characters and creates restlessness and disturbance throughout the reading. Traditional storytelling technique is actually challenged by *Rani* through refusal of fixed text-structural application. Sudden time-line shifts, intervened memories, missed details about some characters force the reader to actively build the sequence of events. This technique closely defines Gérard Genette's concept of narrative temporality, specially his discussion of *anachronism* and *analepsis*. Flashbacks are not merely explanatory tools; rather, they work as structural expressions of trauma itself. Persistence of unresolved suffering and pain reflects trauma and inability to stay in one single realm. This unresolved repeated pattern is the main core of narrative temporality.

Silence has also been seen playing another main role in shaping narrative structure. Repeated calling of *Rani* appears as a trigger that connects present with some buried memories of past. *Rani* doesn't unveil all the details, rather it partially holds some evidences back for reader's personal assumption. These gaps are actually essential for

the reader to interpret hidden meaning through missing details and loops instead of direct available details. The concept of Hermeneutic code by Roland Barthes' becomes much relevant here, because the story creates curiosity and emotional stress through delayed revelation, confusion and unanswered questions. As the text proceeds, Tzvetan Todorov's model of equilibrium and disruption is also observed. At the beginning, the story discloses relative stability as the narrator tends to return home and takes care of her grandmother. Afterwards, *dadi*'s strange behavior and repeated calling of *Rani*, disturbs this stable pattern and balance of textual flow. With the re-surfacing of past in the form of fragments, the text begins to expose pain, remorse, hidden violence, guilt, and emotional suffering. Yet *Rani* does not offer complete exposure or closure. Instead, it ends with continuous discomfort and unresolved emotional pain, depicting that trauma cannot always be resolved with the structure of traditional narrative.

Use of domestic areas like house, courtyard, and upper room as the main setting of the story also carries a heavy symbolic validity. These locations demonstrate secrecy, pain, silence, memory, and power. This physical setting further contributes to the fragmented and layered structure of *Rani*. *Rani* has successfully shifted the attention span from thematic core to narrative form. This study attempts to demonstrate that structure is pivot to the representation of trauma and pain. Stylistic choices like fragmentation, silence, repetition, and scattered chronology function as meaningful structural instrument, through which the emotional pain, repression, and memory is communicated.

1.1 Problem Statement

Contemporary Pakistani fiction has widely explored the thematic interpretive areas such as domestic oppression, violence, patriarchy, gender discrimination and socio-cultural marginalization. However, comparatively less attention has been given to the structural techniques through which these themes are actually articulated. In Pakistani short fiction limited research has investigated how fragmented narration functions as a structural tool

for portraying trauma and suppressed memory. Kanza Javed's *Rani* showcases a complex narrative structure embedded with fragmented recollections, disrupted chronology, disturbed memory, resilience, repetition and silence.

1.2 Research Objectives:

This study aims to investigate the role of fragmented narrative structure in the representation of pain, trauma and memory in *Rani*. The major objectives of the research are:

- To analyze how fragmented narration disrupts chronological sequence and shapes the narrative structure of the story.
- To investigate the role of repetition, silence, and narrative gaps in representing trauma and suppressed memory.
- To explore how Structuralist narratological theories developed by Genette, Todorov, and Barthes help explain the organization and meaning of the text.

1.3 Research Questions:

The present study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How does narrative fragmentation function in Kanza Javed's *Rani*?
2. What role do repetition, silence, and narrative gaps play in shaping the reader's understanding of trauma within the story?
3. How can the narratological theories of Genette, Todorov, and Barthes be applied to analyze the structure and meaning of the text?

1.4 Research Gap

Researchers in South Asian region, specifically Pakistani fiction writers have mainly focused on the themes related to female oppression, domestic violence, gender and social marginalization. These studies certainly provide a strong vision, into the socio-cultural and political aspects of literary texts, yet attention span to the stylistic and structural techniques, through which meanings are to be

produced is comparatively low. Pakistani fiction is rich in the cases, where trauma is discussed mainly as a theme rather than as a narrative construction. Recent work in trauma theory and narratology have claimed that haphazard chronology, fragmented text, painful memory, silence, and repetition are deeply interconnected, yet limited work has been observed on how narrative fragmentation itself works as a structural mechanism for these themes. Still a noticeable lack of research that merges Structuralist narratology with trauma theory in the analysis of contemporary Pakistani short fiction, prevails. More specifically, Javed's *Rani* is deeply enriched with temporal shifts, incomplete disclosures, repetition, and narrative gaps. The story does not depend only on thematic discussion of trauma; rather, trauma becomes the structure of narration itself. Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap by shifting focus from what the text represents to how the text produces meaning through fragmented narration. The application of Structuralist frameworks of Genette, Todorov, and Barthes' trauma theory, *Rani* aims to contribute to an underexplored area in Pakistani literary studies by highlighting the value of text and its form in the representation of memory and trauma.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Narrative Structures

Narrative structures have remained an essential area of work in meaning production, with reference to structuralism and narratology. Structuralism believes that meaning is not only connected with themes, rather it sprouts from narrative elements like repetition, sequence, silence, and temporal arrangement. Tzvetan Todorov (1971), Gérard Genette (1980) and Roland Barthes (1966) have shaped modern narratology. Although their work has been widely applied to western literature, yet Contemporary Pakistani fiction remains underexplored, especially in trauma narratives.

2.2 Genette’s Narrative Discourse

Genette’s (1980) theory of narrative discourse focused on examining narrative temporality through concepts such;

order

duration

frequency

His discussion of analepsis, or flashback, is directly connected to narratives that move away from chronological order and progress. According to Genette (1980), jumps and loops in temporal order affect the reader’s understanding of text and create alternative ways of experiencing time within fiction. Scholars such as Mieke Bal (2009) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (2002) further

proceeded with Genette’s (1980) ideas by investigating how timeline shifts shape interpretation and reader engagement. In trauma studies, scattered chronology and sudden swing between past and present are often linked with the unstable and recurring nature of traumatic memory.

2.3 Todorov’s Structural Model

Similarly, Todorov’s (1971) structural model of narrative progression explains narrative movement through a sequence, comprising of five stages:

Equilibrium

Disruption

Recognition

Repair

Restoration



Traditional narratives often end with the restoration of a new equilibrium. However, modern studies argue that contemporary fiction mostly resists complete closure, while dealing with

damage, trauma, violence, pain or psychological disturbance. In such narratives, the absence reflects the presence of emotional conflict and unresolved memory.

2.4 Barthes Narratives Codes

Barthes’ (1966) theory of narrative codes further explains that how meaning is extracted from concealment and disclosure. His concept of the hermeneutic code focuses on;

Mystery

Delay

Unanswered questions

Barthes (1974), argued that readers actively get involve in interpreting meaning when information is held before and revealed further slowly. Silence

and omission are mostly linked up with socio-cultural repression, which helps readers to interpret what is left unspoken.

2.5 Cathy Caruth’s Trauma

While discussing structural narration, trauma theory explained by Cathy Caruth (1995), holds equal validity and importance, as a major tool of analysis. According to Cathy Caruth (1995) trauma cannot be understood suddenly at the spot, rather it needs to come back after a while, in the form of fragmented recollections, repetitions, and intrusive memories. In Unclaimed Experience (1996), she argues that trauma needs belatedness and disruption, because traumatic narratives frequently resist linear storytelling. Similarly, Dominick LaCapra (2001) discusses “acting out” and “working through” as recurring nature of trauma. These theories sharply highlight that fragmented narration is not simply a stylistic showcase but a clear mirror of the trauma itself.

3. Theoretical Framework

Structural analysis of *Rani* is grounded upon structuralism by Ferdinand De Saussure (1916), Narrative Temporality and Anachronism by Gérard Genette (1980), Narrative Structure and Disruption by Tzvetan Todorov (1971), Narrative

Codes and Hermeneutic Delay by Roland Barthes (1966) and Trauma studies by Cathy Caruth (1995). These theories cumulatively provide a route for analyzing trauma, suffering, memory loss, silence, repetition and delayed exposure of characters in fragmented narrations. Their application to *Rani* investigates how discourse itself becomes a tool for demonstrating social issues.

3.1 Structuralism and Narrative Meaning

Ferdinand De Saussure (1916) argued that isolated ideas do not generate proper meaning alone, rather sequence, shifts and structural patterns combine an analysis within the text. According to structuralism (1916), “Fiction is not simply a reflection of reality; rather it is an organized system governed by specific rules and relationships.” Ferdinand’s structuralism sees narrative as breakdown of emotions, events and experiences. Especially while analyzing trauma texts, it considers the fractured nature of memory and halt as a whole meaning making device.

3.2 Gérard Genette: Narrative Temporality and Anachronism

Genette’s (1980) theory of narrative discourse explains narrative temporality through three major aspects:

order

duration

frequency

3.2.1 Order (Anachronism)

This concept refers to the link between the actual sequence of events in the story and the order in which those events are presented within the text. Any sort of deviation from chronological

arrangement is described by Genette as *Anachronism*. Two important forms of anachronism are:

Analepsis (flashback)

Prolepsis (flash-forward)

In *Rani*, memories and recollections of specific events continuously push back the text. These flashbacks do not appear in a sequence, rather they are random and quick. Such disturbed time-line

reflects the traumatic memory and destabilizes the reader’s sense of chronology. The swingy movement between past and present therefore becomes an important stylistic feature of the text.

3.2.2 Duration

Genette’s (1983) concept of duration analyzes the link between textual time and textual space allotted to different events. In fragmented narratives, trauma and pain are often depicted through repetition and memory. While other details remain hidden or compressed. This uneven division between concealed and open textual details highlight the missed details indirectly.

3.2.3 Frequency

Frequency explains how frequent some specific words, events, images or personalities are repeated in a text. Repetition is mostly assumed as a sign of unresolved trauma, because pain keeps on

knocking the threshold of mind till healed. In *Rani*, repeated words, gestures, and references create a pattern that arouses emotional disturbance and contributes to the fragmented structure of the text.

3.3 Tzvetan Todorov: Narrative Structure and Disruption

Todorov’s (1971) theory explains the progress of text from equilibrium to disruption and then repair, sometimes this repairing state is actually the restoration of equilibrium. According to Tzvetan Todorov, narratives generally move through the following stages:

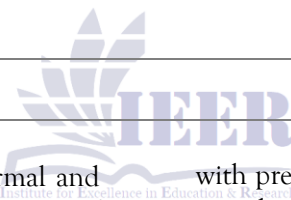
1. Initial equilibrium

2. Disruption of equilibrium

3. Recognition of disruption

4. Attempt to repair disruption

5. Restoration of equilibrium



In *Rani*, the text opens up in a very normal and stable way, narrator returns home to take care of her grandmother *dadi*. Afterwards the memories related to *Rani* or *Nargis* began to create suspense and chaos. As the pieces of past start connecting

with present, the colors of emotional turmoil and pain began to appear. Although, the story never fully restores equilibrium, instead, it ends with hidden pain, unresolved guilt, silence, and emotional unease.

3.4 Roland Barthes: Narrative Codes and Hermeneutic Delay

Barthes’ (1970) introduced his five narrative codes that explains how meanings are produced in the texts.

Hermeneutic Code (Enigma Code)

Proairetic Code (Action Code)

3.4.1 Hermeneutic Code (Enigma Code)

The hermeneutic code explains how text creates mystery for reader by hiding some details and letting the reader guess the meaning. In this way readers gets engaged in solving the riddle of untold events.

In *Rani*, many important details and characters of past are not suddenly opened, instead, the text

slowly provides scattered hints that forces readers to rebuild the hidden story themselves.

3.4.2 Proairetic Code (Action Code)

Proairetic code relates the flow of narration to the incomplete and scattered information. Specifically in *Rani* the events and experiences do not follow a smooth pattern; rather characters make

themselves appear via silent moments, gaps and interrupted talks.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

Rani adopts a qualitative research design, because it aims to study its structural and stylistic features rather than showcasing statistical data. This piece of research investigates the meaning interpretation

4.2 Analysis

4.2.1 Narrative Fragmentation as a Structural tenet

Fragmented Narrative Structure

Fragmentation and Structural Meaning

Trauma and Temporal Movement

Repetition as a Structural Device

a) Fragmented Narrative Structure

Rani unfolds in a smooth wave and continues to move through scattered memories, disturbed emotions and interrupted recollections. These abrupt temporal shifts create a fractured narrative that reflects suppressed emotions and instability.

b) Fragmentation and Structural Meaning

Anachronism and analepsis observed that Rani continuously embeds the mind of its readers with fragmented flashbacks, fogging of mind and recalling of long forgotten past.

c) Trauma and Temporal Movement

of text into the mind of its reader through narrative fragmentation, via close in-depth reading. Deep interpretation helped in clogging out equilibrium, memory shift, halt, flashback, repeated talks and delayed exposure of details. This qualitative and in-depth analysis has become a medium through which pain, trauma, depression, turmoil, repression, emotional conflicts and socio-cultural dimensions are portrayed.

The loop of swing between present reality and past trauma triggers the emotional association. This association forces the reader to actively get involved in catching the hidden meaning of the story.

d) Repetition as a Structural Device

Grand ma’s repeated calling of the name “Rani” performs as a trigger that joints narrator with the hidden memories of past. “Rani” is not only a name rather it is an echo from the window of sub-consciousness that played the music of pain and suffering.

4.2.2 Temporal Disjunction and Analeptic Structure

Blurring of Past and Present

Trauma and fragmented memory

Structural importance of temporal disjunction

a) Blurring of Past and Present

Temporal disjunction highlights the blurred boundary lines of past and present. All the events do not open up in a smooth flow, rather they appear in a haphazard condition. One after another they make the readers jump from present to past, and past to present. The opening of the scene, where narrator is seen visiting her ancestor’s home and taking responsibility of her seems very natural. Eventually, the journey of leaps from

present to past, began to reshape the reader’s clarity of events.

b) Trauma and Fragmented Memory

In Rani, we see that fragmented text patterns are an apparent cause of feelings that trigger remorse and trauma. Just as the story proceeds we see that *dadi* is the characters who seems to be in a wave of traumatic memory loss. The structure of the story depicts that *dadi* is in a swinging state of staying in present and behaving normal and then suddenly jumping towards past and showcasing Trauma.

c) **Structural Importance of Temporal Disruption**

Refusal of chronological balance causes temporal disturbance and results in uncertainty about events.

Rani compels readers to experience the same uncertainty and trauma that victim herself has suffered long ago.

4.2.3 Disruption of Narrative Equilibrium (Todorovian Model)

<i>Initial state of equilibrium</i>	<i>Emergence of disruption</i>	<i>Recognition of hidden trauma</i>
<i>Absence of resolution</i>	<i>Structural Significance of Disruption</i>	

Todorovian modal explains *Rani* as a ball, rotating around initial equilibrium till restoration. The story begins when narrator was supposed to take care of her *dadi*, things remained very normal till the chaos of underneath unease and trauma begins to rise and *Rani* began to disturb apparent normalcy and balance. This disruption further keeps on disturbing through scattered memories, silences, and emotional recollections. The story therefore shifts from an apparently stable domestic environment toward psychological tension and emotional fragmentation. According to Todorov, fiction usually moves from recognition of disruption before attempting restoration. In *Rani*,

this recognition appears when Nargis’s (*dadi*) behavior, and the atmosphere of household collectively discloses deeper emotional violence. At this stage, the story becomes an exploration of guilt, repression, and unresolved trauma. *Rani* very beautifully keeps on denying the complete restoration of harmony. Unlike traditional stories that end with solution, *Rani* continues with discomfort, silence, and psychological unease. Todorov’s framework demonstrates that the disruption of equilibrium in *Rani* functions as more than a narrative technique. It has become a structural model of psychological instability and unresolved pain and suffering.

4.2.4 Hermeneutic Delay and Narrative Gaps (Barthes)

<i>Mystery and delayed revelation</i>
<i>Narrative gaps and readers participation</i>
<i>Silence as a structural device</i>
<i>Trauma and incomplete narration</i>
<i>Structural importance of hermeneutic delay</i>

The three most inevitable pillars on which *Rani* is standing are mystery, silence, and delayed disclosure. The story does not reveal important information immediately; instead, it gradually unfolds its secret chambers through scattered memories, indirect references, and incomplete explanations. The story frequently hides important details, forcing readers to reconstruct meaning from hints and clues scattered throughout the text. Instead of openly explaining the relationship between Nargis and the grandfather, the narrative explains it indirectly

through gestures, memories, silences, and emotional tension. *Rani*’s refusal to open up all the details does not show its weak point, rather it intensifies emotional tension and reinforces the hidden nature of trauma. Silence gradually reveals the emotional truth of the narrative through disconnected fragments. Hermeneutic delay in *Rani* functions as a tool for creating suspense. It becomes an essential structural mechanism through which the narrative represents trauma, repression, and emotional fragmentation. By withholding information and relying on narrative

gaps, the story transforms absence into an interpretive presence.

4.2.5 Genette's Concept of Frequency

Repetition and traumatic memory

Continuity with fragmentation

Structural importance of repetition

In *Rani*, repeated gestures, phrases, and recollections function as reminders of memories that cannot be fully suppressed. The grandmother's repeated utterances, especially expressions such as "Accha, accha," create a repetitive rhythm that reflects both emotional instability and mental deterioration. Instead of disappearing, painful memories continue to intrude upon present consciousness through recurring thoughts, images, and emotional triggers. In *Rani*, repetition demonstrates how the past repeatedly interrupts the present. The same memories and emotional tensions reappear in different forms throughout the narrative, suggesting that trauma remains unresolved. Although the narrative is fragmented, repetition provides a certain degree of structural continuity. In this sense, repetition acts both as a sign of fragmentation and as a device that links fragmentation and trauma together. Repetition in *Rani* therefore serves as more than a stylistic feature. It performs as a structural marker that highlights emotional tension, fragmented temporality, and psychological instability.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The Structural analysis of *Rani* explains narrative structure of text as a mouthpiece of trauma, memory, guilt, repression and social injustice. The story does not travel in a proper sequence rather it keeps on swinging between past and present. This loop in present and past supports the structuralism's concept that meaning is not only generated from text only, rather the form of text also depicts meaning. Although, the missed details in the text created unease for the readers, but it urged them to construct meaning and identify

hidden characters. Similarly, Gérard Genette's narrative temporality reveals that repeated use of analepsis halts the text to sustain a balance of chronology. Memories jump back mostly without clear transitions, and create blurred relationship between past and present. These blurred visions do not remain intact to the past, rather they keep on knocking and alerting the present. Javed's *Rani* is a true essence of trauma, ellipses, emotional instability, hinged progress of time-line, silence of essential details and suppression through text. Theories by Caruth, Todorov, Barthes and Genette have explained *Rani* as a narrative model that depicts its colors under the umbrellas of *Narrative Temporality and Anachronism*, *Narrative Codes and Hermeneutic Delay*, *Narrative Structure and Disruption and Trauma studies*. Textual gaps are obviously significant as they portray time-line. Silence and absence surround the reader with gendered violence, emotional suffering, and repression. As a result, silence itself becomes meaningful within the structure of the narrative. What remains hidden or partially spoken often carries greater emotional weight than what is openly described.

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