



Echoes of Resilience: Trauma and Resistance in the Intersecting Narratives of Mona and Anjum

Dr Papri Mukhopadhyay

Assistant Professor English, Kalinga University, Raipur, India
paprimukherjee1971@gmail.com

Received: 30 Mar 2025; Received in revised form: 27 Apr 2025; Accepted: 04 May 2025; Available online: 10 May 2025
©2025 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Abstract— *Mona and Anjum*, two literary characters shaped by systematic oppression and marginalisation, are the subjects of this paper. The study delves into the theme of trauma and resilience in Mona's narratives in *Mona's Story* by Urvashi Butalia and *Anjum in The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* by Arundhati Roy. It examines the experiences of Mona and Anjum through the lenses of trauma studies, feminist theory, and intersectionality. The paper highlights that trauma is not just a personal affliction but a socio-political construct that affects those on the fringes of society. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, Judith Butler's concept of precarity, and G.A Bonanno's view of natural recovery after trauma, the paper explores how the journeys of these two transgender individuals reflect the broader struggles of transgender people and marginalised communities in navigating imbalanced power and social structures. Notably, the paper underscores the broader societal implications of the experiences of two transgender characters, underlining the need for systemic change.



Keywords— *Trauma, Resistance, Challenges, Psychological, Gender.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Resilience, Trauma, and Resistance: Defining the Concepts

The fundamental concepts of resilience, trauma, and resistance are essential to understanding survival narratives. Cathy Caruth explains that trauma affects the individual psychologically, leaving emotional scars and distressing memory, identity, and perceptions. Caruth says, "It is a rupture in a person's existence often emerging in displaced, fragmented forms. Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). Caruth concentrates and redefines trauma as a psychological injury more than a personal crisis, a disturbance in the flow of identity and memory. Caruth explains that trauma comes back in a broken pattern. It does not tell the story; instead, it shows reactions like hallucinations, flashbacks or disturbing thoughts. Describing trauma as "a rupture in a

person's existence," Caruth clarifies that it disrupts an individual's sense of self. These effects do not appear to be all of a sudden; they return unexpectedly and can be frightening. Caruth finds trauma is not only about the event itself but how the mind fights with it gradually. To Caruth, trauma can cause lasting pain to the victim. In contrast, Bonanno refers to resilience as the ability to adapt and recover from the experience of trauma that varies depending on social, cultural, and psychological factors. Bonanno's research underlines that most people's exhibition of resilience is natural, without professional intervention. Understanding Judith Butler's concept of resistance offers a socio-political aspect to trauma and survival. Butler finds resistance an ethical and political way to fight against oppressive systems. This emphasis on resistance can make the audience feel empowered and inspired. Resistance is a new avenue to live and connect with others. "Let us face it. We are undone by each other. And if we are not, we are missing something."— (Butler, 2004, p. 28). When societal injustice causes individuals suffering, resistance becomes a

means of survival and evidence of still-existing power. People and communities reject to be overlooked using actions of resistance, therefore making their existence known. Butler urges us to see past trauma's suffering and concentrate on how individuals act to challenge authority, restore their dignity, and reconstruct their common identity.

II. METHODOLOGY

A comparative analysis is executed through a close reading of two characters Mona and Anjum, investigating their narratives of trauma resistance and framing of their identity. The Study investigates through the lens of gender, caste and religion and social exclusion. Qualitative interpretation method is applied with a socio-political and cultural context. The study engages in the recurring themes such as silence, defiance and survival of the two transgender characters that marks how each character steers marginalization and seeks agency.

III. DISCUSSION

Trauma marks a profound impact on the identities of Mona and Anjum, the two characters whose intersecting narratives bring the complexities of resilience and resistance within the framework of cultural and societal challenges. Both the characters structure their identities through personal experiences and trauma. Mona's story tells how she had to limit seeing herself as fitting to the family problems and meet societal expectations. Anjum experiences discrimination of gender and religion, showing how identity is affected by multiple layers of social bias. The authors Urvashi Butalia and Arundhati Roy depict the intricate narratives of the two transgender characters and set the fundamental examples of how trauma and resistance are demonstrated within the socio-political and cultural landscape of present India. Both the characters are part of the tumultuous history of their times. Mona and Anjum's stories depict their pain and the collective struggle caused by social violence. Both the characters incorporate gender experiences, bringing out the themes of resilience and identity from a feminist perspective. The life of Mona is marked by a series of traumatic experiences that she derives from intersections between gender, loss and dislocation. On the background of a rich plot, the narrative of *Mona's Story* reveals Butalia's deep exploration of not only the personal scars but also the aftermath of the emerging adversities. The author showcases how memories of pain, shared and personal, shape a woman's identity. She survives in a broken world and attempts to find direction despite gender inequality.

In a juxtaposition, the powerful character of Arundhati Roy's Anjum questions traditional ideas on gender and identity. Anjum's life is a constant balancing act of personal desire and societal expectations. Roy fills Anjum's life with a sense of belonging and a cognizance of the ongoing battle against dominant power structures of gender. Anjum's layered existence challenges broader feminist movements and aids and inspires to rethink how marginalized identity can contest oppression and produce space for new stories.

Mona and Anjum's story focuses on a broader feminist perspective that questions the role of gender allotted by patriarchal systems. Both the characters stand as symbols of resistance in their worlds. Mona reclaims her voice amid historical silence, and Anjum shows an example of fluid identity challenging strict gender rules. Their stories become the tool of resistance—using a way to affirm identity and strength on the surface of trauma.

Trauma in the Life of Mona

Gendered trauma is especially the central theme in many of Butalia's writings. Prominent feminist, historian, and writer she regularly accents silenced voices—especially those of women—whose lives have been moulded and damaged by political, social, and cultural upheavals. In Mona's story, she creates a close-knit story that shows how profound trauma could affect one person's life—Mona. Using Mona, Butalia raises awareness of the human expenses of abuse, neglect, and society's indifference towards the suffering of women. Mona's trauma arises from personal experiences and the larger patriarchal arrangements that shape her world. Mona's story is marked by emotional neglect, sexual abuse, abandonment and social isolation. Her childhood environment is devoid of love and safety. The lack of emotional security in the family is coupled with instances of physical abuse. The unspoken feelings turned out to be a trauma in her life. The silence for such abuses compounds her suffering. As she grows up, she is marked as 'different'. Her mental struggles and unaddressed trauma make her an object of ridicule instead of being empathetic to her. Societal unacceptance and lack of emotional support add another layer of trauma. She faces detest

One day, the *maulana* molested me. I remember.....At first he admitted he had done this and later he swore he had not. So, my father punished me by sending me back to him. I hated it, I was frightened of him. My mother fought with my father about this, but he refused to change, he was adamant. He insisted the fault was within me (Butalia Web).

The use of silence is the most powerful narrative technique of Butalia, which conveys that trauma is not always about

visible scars but often remains hidden. Marking silence also indicates the failure of society to address trauma as experienced by the victim, Mona. The mental state of Mona is marked by confusion, withdrawal and unstable emotion. Butalia portrays Mona's trauma not to reduce her but to vehicle suffering as an absolute, complex lack of familial support. Sometimes, Mona may seem incomprehensible, which Butalia intends to convey as trauma does not follow a neat narrative arc.

Mona's psychological state—marked by confusion, withdrawal, and emotional instability—is a testament to how unresolved trauma can grind down one's sense of identity and belonging. Butalia does not reduce Mona to her trauma but portrays her as someone whose suffering is real, complex, and shaped by a lack of institutional or familial support. Butalia questions the role of family and establishes the truth of the failure of family, legal institutions and mental health system to prevent Mona's suffering. Mona is a representative of silenced voices. The narrative highlights how trauma is often shared, a collective experience amidst marginalised women.

Anjum's Trauma of Gender Identity and Social Exclusion

Anjum, born Aftab, is the protagonist in Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Roy crafts Anjum and uses her to symbolise resilience and marginalisation, portraying multiple layered personal, social, political and existential traumas. Anjum realises her different identity, which causes confusion and emotional pain. The familial unacceptance leads her to alienation. The mother, Jahanara, could not understand whether every child is a girl or a boy, but Aftab's identity is binary. The father, Mulaqat Ali, tried to instil manly valour in Aftab and imparted stories that would inspire him to fight like men, but all in vain as the woman inside him was more prominent. The love of Jahanara for Aftab, the so-called son, was subdued due to societal pressure of conformity, which dictated that Aftab should conform to the gender assigned at birth, pushing Anjum away from her biological home into the hijra community: "Aftab stepped through an ordinary doorway into another universe" (Roy, 2017, p. 25). This act of self-exile marks the beginning of her lifelong confrontation with rejection and trauma. Anjum's fluid identity and society's binary constructs offer no space for her. Trauma occurs in Anjum's life during the 2002 Gujarat riots. While travelling to Gujarat, she was caught in violence where Muslims were systematically targeted, which was the after-effect of the Godhra incident in which pilgrims from Ram mandir were attacked. The brutal killings and her narrow escape from death scar her deeply. Anjum escaped being a hijra, where the binary identity saved her. She hides in a graveyard to

safeguard herself. The communal violence deeply affects her psyche. The trauma is not only of violence but also of identifying fragile identity in a politically charged and polarised nation.

Post-riot, Anjum returns to Delhi and cannot reclaim her old life. She is a changed person now. The Trauma Anjum has undergone forced her to be another self-imposed and spiritual person. She starts living in a graveyard and builds a Jannat guest house, a place for marginalised and outcasts. She turns the graveyard into a metaphor for survival, where life coexists with death.

The mainstream society constantly made her feel like 'other', which is another trauma Anjum faced besides events. She suffers a conflict of identity and is mentally a victim of loss of faith in relationships, and all these reflect emotional trauma and existential longing. The invisible trauma of Anjum is a national narrative. As a hijra and a riot survivor, she stands at the intersection of manifold forms of marginalisation. Her pain critiques the state's failure to protect the marginalised. Roy uses Anjum as a mouthpiece to bring the silenced histories and neglected narratives of modern India often shared, a collective experience amidst marginalised women.

Mona and Anjum: Two Stories of Quiet Strength and Resistance

Resistance does not always come with protest. Sometimes, it comes silently through survival, refusal to give up, or small acts. Mona and Anjum exhibit two ways of standing firm against pain and injustice. The two different people teach us how to fight back in their own ways and confirm that life challenges are to be handled not only with defiance but also with dignity, resilience and courage. Mona's life is full of silence. No one listens to her hidden pain, but Butalia, as a speaker, makes people hear Mona's life. Mona does not shout but endures. Mona shows strength by staying alive.

However, Anjum resists more openly. Anjum faces social rejection and cruelty. "Quote to be added." After the riot in Gujarat, she survived and realised her existence was not to live a life of oppression but to live her life on her own terms. Leaving her life behind, she moves into a graveyard. She creates a Jannat Guest House, a home for the forgotten and rejected, a new space where all are accepted. She creates something new, a paradise where she can live with her ancestors and live in her Utopia.

Mona resists pain, quietly surrenders, and accepts her fate, whereas Anjum is bold and recognises her marginal state; she creates a paradise where equality is a prime concern. However, both women fight back in their processes. Mona taught extreme endurance and Anjum protests by creating a new space for the downtrodden. Together, they show

resistance in many forms through speaking, remembering or accepting challenges in the world unfair to them.

Comparative Journey: Mona and Anjum

Aspects	Mona	Anjum
Resistance Type	Silent defiance, endurance	Radical defiance, communal resistance
Community	Women's solidarity groups	Khwabgah: Alternative family structure
Intersectionality	Gender oppression	Gender, religion, caste-based oppression
Outcome	Personal survival	Structural change, new community formation

IV. CONCLUSION

Mona's Story is not merely a narrative of marginalised women but a powerful experience of trauma survivors highlighting the social structures that continue violence against women. Butalia urges readers to protest the uncomfortable truths, abuse, neglect and the invisible mental health of Mona and many other women of the country who remain silent, resist the pain and accept life as it comes her way. The life of Mona is marked by pain, and the exhibition of the status demanded change. The author does not merely count Mona's experiences. She digs the layers of quietness that surround her to give voice to unsaid words. Butalia's narrative is a testimony of resilience not only of Mona but of countless women who suffer visible suffering due to societal indifference and loss of identity. Mona's journey is representative of a wide reality where women's lives are shaped by regular oppression, but speaking remains a form of resistance. Mona's stories are often buried, but the narrative stands as a beacon that reminds us that healing begins with truth-telling and the fight for justice begins with the courage to challenge uncomfortable realities. *Mona's Story* is not about survival but about the transformative power of perceiving the responsibility that comes with it, which refers to the idea that acknowledging one's own suffering and the suffering of others is the first step towards healing and change.

Anjum survives amidst trauma, a narrative that depicts endurance that refuses the simplistic definition of

victimhood. Roy does not create Anjum as a passive sufferer but as a courageous, complex and profoundly transformative character. Born as Aftab in old Delhi and later embracing her identity as Anjum, her life reflects the complexities of gender, social exclusion and religious violence. Anjum's trauma does not remain a private wound. She situates it within the broader political landscape of India. The Gujarat riot marks a massive scar in her psyche that changes her life completely; additionally, it becomes a turning point in her life. Her going to the graveyard is initially a withdrawal from mainstream society and the juncture of transformation in the process she builds the Jannat Guest House. Creating an improvised shelter for outcasts, broken and abandoned—Anjum asserts a radical community, a community that challenges societal norms and provides a safe space for those who are marginalized. It is here where living comes to heal. Anjum emerges as a powerful force of resistance. Her body becomes a site of resistance, and her voice sabotages silence. Roy allows Anjum to live with dignity on her terms and invites readers to witness the political tensions that aid in turning people's lives into disasters. Anjum is the most memorable character in contemporary Indian literature, for universality is embedded in her fight for belonging. She speaks to everyone, makes them feel like a family, and redefines love. Anjum binds the broken being empathetic and secures justice in the fragile mind. She epitomises hope, reminds us to face relentless marginalisation, and teaches us to rebuild from ruins and love again. Her story is not about survival but about demonstrating to others how to live in a world that refuses humanity.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bonanno, G. A. (2004). Loss, trauma, and human resilience.
- [2] Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso.
- [3] Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- [4] Roy, A. (2017). *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. Penguin Books.
- [5] Butalia, U. (n.d.). *Mona's Story*. *Granta*. <https://granta.com/monas-story/>