International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR)
E-ISSN: 2582-2160 ● Website: www.ijfmr.com ● Email: editor@ijfmr.com

Visualising the Metaphysics of Pain: Trauma, Identity and Resistance in Saim Sadiq's *Joyland*

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Abstract

Trauma is a common worldwide phenomenon that affects more or less all individuals' day-to-day lives. The emotional reaction to trauma varies greatly, as the individual's socio-cultural history significantly influences it. Diving deep into the metaphysical dimensions of experience and expression, visual media aims to intervene with the contextual analysis of pain, trauma and anxieties as reflective categories in literature and cinematic narratives. The visual media and modernity seek to engage and go beyond current tendencies in trauma studies, sharing the complex interactions between presence and absence and the 'impossibility' of representation. The present study is on Saim Sadiq's movie *Joyland* (2022), which aims to address the plural voices in narrative, weighing more considerations to women's conditions affected by emotional abuse, psychological abuse, discrimination and marginalisation that lead women towards 'domestic trauma'.It also acknowledges the queer themes, emphasising their resilience and quest for dignity amidst societal stigma. At large, the paper deals with the cinematic language of trauma, offering insights into the intersection of personal and collective suffering in post-colonial society.

Keywords: Domestic trauma, gender, identity, film, narratives

Introduction

Like literature, cinema fosters a nuanced understanding of the cultural and societal nexus, capturing various facets of the sociopolitical realities unique to human existence. Cinema represents collective labour, anchored in the ideological foundations of the collective imagination of time and space. A good film not only aims to depict what society is but also stimulates viewers intellectually and emotionally to explore what it could be or sometimes is. Film studies within the discipline of sociology typically examine themes such as social structure, patriarchy, hegemony, marginality, and subordination, with particular attention to issues of caste, social class, religion, tradition, and ethnicity in analysing representations in films. Gender has been a recurring discourse in postcolonial societies, highlighting the issue of female identity and its construction. A complex and contentious history surrounds how class, caste, and other factors, such as economy, political empowerment, and literacy, have influenced the condition of women. The role of women involves constructing social, communal, and national identities. Further, Post-structuralism dismantles gender binaries by revealing their social construction, emphasising performativity, and advocating for a fluid, intersectional understanding of identity. It deconstructs binary oppositions, paving the way for the emergence of queer theory, which primarily focuses on sexual orientation and gender identity. As Judith Butler states, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 25). She argues that gender is not an innate essence but a social construct enacted through repeated

performances. This destabilises the notion of fixed identities and creates space for queer critiques of heteronormativity. 'Queer' now encompasses not only LGBT issues such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender but also includes other practices, identities, and communities that have been historically marginalised, such as bisexuality, sadomasochism, and transgender identities.

The portrayal of women in Indian and world cinema has been a subject of debate since the inception of the visual medium. The position of women in visual media has evolved significantly over the decades, reflecting shifting societal norms and feminist movements, as well as the diversification of storytelling platforms. Indian cinema has long been rooted in patriarchy and class hierarchies, often displaying confined roles of sacrificial mothers, virtuous wives, or tragic victims, as seen in *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan). However, new wave films like *Kahaani* (Sujoy Ghosh), *Thappad* (Anubhav Sinha), *Pink* (Aniruddha Roy Chowdhary), and *The Great Indian Kitchen* (Jeo Baby) critique patriarchy by exploring complex female agency. In addition to women' s representation, queer representation in Indian cinema has been highly contentious due to conventional notions. Films like *Fire* (Deepa Mehta), one of the first mainstream Bollywood films to explicitly depict homosexual relations, faced considerable controversy, along with *Aligarh* (Hansal Mehta). Nevertheless, after the approval of Section 377 in 2018, there has been an inevitable evolution, likely influencing independent filmmakers to push boundaries for such representations. We observed a sudden shift in the 2000 s, with films such as *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* (Hitesh Kewalya), *Bhadhaai Do* (Harshavardhan Kulkarni), *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga* (Shelly Chopra Dhar), and *Super Deluxe* (Thiagarajan Kumararaja) showcasing such narratives. Indian queer representations are still emerging within mainstream films featuring LGBTQ + themes, while world cinema has a longer history of activist films and festivals promoting queer voices. Western cinema often dominates global conversations, but queer narratives from non- Western regions offer unique perspectives shaped by local histories and struggles. Films like *Midnight Cowboy* (John Schlesinger) and *Taxi zum Klo* (Frank Ripploh) have pushed boundaries, but often framed queerness as tragic. In contrast, films like *Paris is Burning* (Jennie Livingston), *Happy Together* (Wong Kar–wai), *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (Céline Sciamma), and *Call Me by Your Name* (Luca Guadagnino) capture the tension between progress and backlash.

The present film, *Joyland*, directed by Saim Sadiq, is a critically acclaimed drama that explores gender identity and sexual fluidity within a repressive patriarchal society while infusing elements of hope. It gained international recognition by winning the Un Certain Regard Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, making it the first Pakistani film to premiere. Additionally, it was officially submitted as Pakistan's entry for the 95th Academy Awards and was eventually shortlisted for Best Foreign Feature. Sadiq's short film *Darling* inspired *Joyland*, winning the Best Short Film award at the 76th Venice Film Festival and was officially selected for the Toronto International Film Festival. Through *Joyland*, Sadiq delivers a powerful critique of patriarchy, gender expectations, and personal freedom, providing a voice for the marginalised and illustrating the struggles of individuals caught between their desires and societal expectations. The film delves into intertwined trauma, highlighting how emotional, psychological, and cultural experiences shape the characters' lives and decisions. Through this narrative, Sadiq captures the inner struggles of his characters, reflecting how survivors navigate the complexities of their trauma.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative textual analysis approach to examine Saim Sadiq's film *Joyland* as its primary text. The study aims to address the plural voices within the film's narrative, focusing specifically

on how women's conditions are affected by emotional and psychological abuse, discrimination, and marginalisation, leading to 'domestic trauma', while also acknowledging queer themes, emphasising resilience and the quest for dignity amidst societal stigma. The methodological framework of this study is interdisciplinary, integrating Film Studies and Visual Media Theory, Trauma Studies, Gender Theory, and Queer Theory, to examine the film's representation of trauma, identity, and marginalisation.

Domestic Trauma and Women's Subjectivity in *Joyland*

Hartman associates trauma, which marks "the disjunction between experiencing…and understanding" (Hartman 5), with figurative language. In clinical psychology, trauma is described as a psychological injury produced by the experience of an external event that damages the individual's sense of self and yields negative effects. *Joyland* presents a rich narrative that dissects the psychological and emotional wounds inflicted by patriarchal oppression, gender repression, and societal exclusion. The film's depiction of silenced female suffering (Mumtaz), reproductive oppressions (Nucchi), trans survival (Biba), and repressed masculinity (Haider) reveals that trauma is not merely personal but systemic, exploring how trauma is intricately linked to the characters' relationships with their environment and each other, highlighting the resilience of shared experiences.

Joyland is a beautifully crafted film that explores the poignant narrative of forbidden love, identity, and familial duty, delving deep into the tension between individual desires and societal norms surrounding gender, family, and social roles. It presents a rich story that dissects the psychological and emotional wounds inflicted by patriarchal oppression, gender repression, and societal exclusion. The film follows the Rana family in Lahore, Pakistan, focusing on Haider, a man who joins an erotic dance theatre and becomes entangled with Biba, a transgender dancer. At the same time, his wife, Mumtaz, suffocates under domestic expectations. Gender acts as a dynamic force shaping the narrative due to the contextual connotations attached to femininity and masculinity. Mumtaz is introduced as a vibrant and independent woman who once worked at a salon but is now confined to household duties under the constraints of traditional norms. The dynamics begin to shift once Haider gets a job as a background dancer for a burlesque theatre. At that moment, Mumtaz is expected to leave her job and contribute to the household by assisting Nucchi, her sister-in-law. In one scene, Salim, Haider's brother, says, "What is the need to work"? (23:55). Mumtaz resists, saying, "It is not about necessity; I am working because it is my hobby" (23:57). This incident portrays her slow descent into despair, emphasising the emotional toll of patriarchal norms that dictate women's lives, portraying how her independence is simultaneously begrudgingly tolerated and quietly resented.

Haider's father appears to be a straightforward, domineering patriarch, embodying the rigid patriarchal structure. He discusses the false premise of 'balance', urging Mumtaz to quit her job for family harmony. This scene highlights the patriarchal order in which men earn, and women serve. A complex power dynamic characterises the Rana figure, illustrating the concept of the 'logic of domination' proposed by Karen Warren, and showcasing how the underlying power structure stifles those deemed inferior, including women, minorities, and even the environment. At this juncture, Haider attempts to voice Mumtaz's perspective, yet it is ultimately his father who holds authority. Angela Onwuachi- Willig, an expert in critical race theory, discusses the 'trauma of the routine', a cultural trauma that can arise even when routines are merely reaffirmed. An interplay exists between history and the accumulation of the 'routine', which diminishes the meaning of shaping a narrative of cultural trauma. We observe how Mumtaz's complex emotions of longing and resentment continue to haunt her later due to the 'trauma of routine'.Her

suffering is often unnoticed by her husband, who is preoccupied with his own awakening, underscoring the invisibility of women's emotional labour and pain within patriarchal households. We see her drifting through days, her routines supplanted by mindless chores. The camera frequently lingers on her vacant expressions, underscoring her growing dissociation.

Though the film opens with Haider playing hide-and-seek with his nieces, engaging in a carefree, childish scuffle, in which one of them anticipates that once their brother arrives, they will advocate for them, the scene suggests how gender performativity is intricately woven into the character dynamics from a very young age. The scene, therefore, functions not merely as a domestic introduction but as an early indication of the film's broader critique of gender performativity, masculine privilege, and the social conditioning that shapes identity and power relations within South Asian familial structures. Nucchi is expecting her fourth time, likely anticipating a boy, but regrettably, it turns out to be another girl. Her husband, Salim, asks the doctor, "There was a son in the report"? (7: 11). It critiques reproductive oppression, depicting how males exert their power over the female body, sexuality, and labour. As Adrienne Rich states in her book *Of Woman Born*, the 'institution of motherhood' is an artificial construct that was invented by patriarchy. Patriarchy silences women, particularly mothers, while influencing how both men and women define 'maternal' or 'feminine' in themselves. We see how Nucchi embodies the oppressive realities of forced motherhood, lack of bodily autonomy, and the emotional toll of patriarchal control over women's bodies. Nucchi is not the loudest character, but she is perhaps the most important embodiment of female suffering, where motherhood is equal to womanhood, especially when giving a male heir to the family. As the elder daughter-in-law, she is under immense pressure to bear a male heir, a common patriarchal expectation in South Asian families. The violence of this situation is intensified by its cultural normalisation within the logic of the extended family system. The issue of culture remains a significant excuse for abusing women in South Asia; perpetrators often use 'culture' as a pretext for violence. Frequently, abandonment, financial deprivation, physical and sexual violence, as well as emotional wounding, are the leading causes which women face in their quotidian lives. "Experience can be highly variable; the trauma experience is not pure either, nor is it simply a question of the initial pure trauma experience, which is then conditioned by the cultural context and interpretation. Rather, what is and is not a trauma is very much culturally contingent, as is how the trauma is experienced" (Ocak 162). This idea is evident in Nucchi's character because her emotional distress is deeply embedded within the traditional family structure and gender expectations of the society. Her trauma is not represented through overt physical violence alone; rather, it develops through continuous emotional neglect, domestic pressure, silencing, and the expectation that women must remain obedient and self-sacrificing. Reproductive oppression refers to the systematic control and regulation of women's bodies and reproductive choices, thereby perpetuating cycles of gender inequality, social injustice, and patriarchal domination. The film foregrounds the sociological and patriarchal structures that constrain women's autonomy, agency, and participation within society. Through female characters such as Mumtaz and Nucchi, the narrative explores the multiple layers of reproductive oppression prevalent in South Asian societies, highlighting how cultural expectations, familial pressures, and gendered norms regulate women's identities and bodily autonomy.

The weight of reproductive oppression falls most heavily on Mumtaz, ultimately leading her to take her own life. Her suicide is not merely an isolated act of despair; it symbolises the devastating psychological consequences of continuous suppression, emotional neglect, and reproductive oppression. The act reflects how prolonged exposure to patriarchal violence, both explicit and subtle, can produce unbearable

emotional suffering. Her death exposes the destructive impact of a social structure that systematically silences women's voices and desires. The emotional abuse Mumtaz experiences is rendered visible through Sadiq's restrained cinematic language. There are no dramatic confrontations or explicit acts of cruelty; instead, the film accumulates a series of small, devastating moments: a dismissive gesture, an unacknowledged achievement, a conversation from which she is excluded. It enacts the phenomenology of emotional abuse. It is precisely because the violence is undramatic and quotidian that it is so thoroughly wounding. This aligns with Caruth's understanding of trauma as something that resists direct representation and must be apprehended obliquely, through the gaps and silences of narrative. As Caruth asserts, "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature, the way it was precisely not known in the first instance, returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). Caruth argues that trauma returns belatedly to haunt the survivor because the original wound was never fully processed or understood. Mumtaz experiences profound traumatic suffering, which emerges through emotional neglect, reproductive oppression, patriarchal control, and the gradual erosion of her personal identity. Her trauma is not represented through a single catastrophic event alone, but rather, it develops through everyday experiences of gendered oppression and emotional isolation. There is a scene when Mumtaz jokingly confesses to Nucchi that "My heart wants me to run away" (1:25:34). It clearly illustrates the level of emotional and psychological fatigue she has suffered throughout her marriage and domestic life. This statement expresses Mumtaz's repressed wish to escape from the socially imposed expectations, emotional emptiness, and reproductive pressure that slowly lead to trauma. Importantly, this is the only time Mumtaz expresses her pain in the film in an overt way. Most of the time, she remains quiet and composed. Thus, this seemingly trivial conversation with Nucchi can be taken as an expression of her true feelings. Mumtaz's suffering can also be connected to concepts such as insidious trauma and developmental emotional harm. Maria Root's idea of 'insidious trauma' is particularly relevant because Mumtaz's trauma emerges from normalised everyday oppression rather than overt physical violence alone. The repeated denial of agency, emotional invalidation, and societal control over her body gradually destroy her psychological well-being. Insidious trauma often operates through systems that make individuals feel trapped, powerless, and emotionally unseen. This is much evident through this scene, as it reflects accumulated emotional exhaustion. By the end of the film, her death becomes the tragic culmination of these accumulated psychological pressures, revealing how socially normalised oppression can become deeply traumatic even when it remains outwardly invisible.

The film's use of spatial composition, in particular, its repeated use of doorways, thresholds, and frames-within-frames, visually enacts the boundaries and constraints that define its characters' lives. Characters are frequently shown partially occluded by doors or walls, visible but not fully present, inhabiting the liminal spaces between inside and outside, belonging and exclusion. Silence, as a formal choice, is perhaps the film's most powerful traumatic register. In the scenes following Mumtaz's suicide, the film represents through absence rather than a spectacular event, a choice that is itself profoundly ethical, the Randhawa household is shown continuing in its routines. The normalcy of this continuation is rendered unbearable by the silence that surrounds it, a silence in which the full weight of what has been lost and what could have been witnessed, could have been prevented, resides. The scene in which Mumtaz drinks floor cleaner powerfully encapsulates her emotional devastation and psychological isolation. Although Haider briefly embraces her after asking if she needs anything, he remains oblivious to both the poison in her hand and her deeper emotional suffering. His gesture of care becomes tragically superficial, revealing his inability

to recognise her longing for autonomy and emotional validation. Visually, Mumtaz is reduced to an image of silent despair, trapped within the oppressive structures of domesticity and patriarchal expectation.

The day after Mumtaz's death, Saleem blames her for killing his unborn nephew, saying, "she should have waited to deliver the baby boy" (1:54:11). This reveals how her identity continues to be reduced solely to her reproductive function even after her death. Rather than mourning Mumtaz as an individual with emotions, desires, and suffering, he prioritises the loss of the unborn male child. This scene closely connects to Judith Butler's concept of the 'ungrievable life'. As Butler asks, "Whose lives count as lives?" (Butler chp 2). In this scene, Saleem's reaction demonstrates precisely this denial of grievability. Instead of grieving Mumtaz herself, he mourns the unborn male child she carried. Even after death, she is not acknowledged as an individual whose pain mattered; rather, she is judged for failing to preserve the unborn son. Butler suggests that social norms determine which lives are visible and mournable and which remain invisible. In Mumtaz's case, her desires, depression, and emotional trauma remain unrecognised throughout the film, and after her death, this erasure reaches its utmost. Saleem's response, therefore, becomes more than an individual act of insensitivity, reflecting a broader patriarchal structure in which women's humanity is subordinated to reproductive expectations. However, Nucchi's assertion, "We all killed her together. She was running away, I stopped her, so I too killed her" (1:55:10), marks a moment of painful self-awareness and collective guilt. Unlike the others, Nucchi recognises that Mumtaz's death was not caused by a single moment but by the cumulative emotional suffocation imposed by the family and society. This highlights how everyday actions, silences, and compliance with patriarchal norms contributed to Mumtaz's trauma. Caruth's assertion that trauma is characterised by its 'unspeakability' finds literal, cinematic expression here. The wounds inflicted are not voiced, not narrativised, not witnessed, and this non-witnessing is itself a form of violence. Cinematically, the film reinforces this unspeakability through silence, restrained dialogue, and emotional distance. Mumtaz's pain is communicated not through explicit declarations but through what remains unsaid and unseen. Her death finally exposes the reality of a suffering that the family failed to recognise while she was alive.

Crisis of Masculinity and Trans Identity in *Joyland*

Haider's character represents a dimension of fluid masculinity that is often overlooked in feminist and queer scholarship. As a man who is unemployed while his wife works, who stays home to care for his nieces and nephews, and who is increasingly drawn to a trans woman, Haider inhabits a position of radical gender incoherence within the patriarchal family system. His situation is not presented as a matter of personal choice or individual deviance but as a form of structural entrapment. Haider is often portrayed as a sensitive and gentle man who does not fit within the traditional mould of masculinity in his patriarchal family. From the very onset of the film, we see him helping Nucchi with household chores, which subtly underscores his rejection of rigid patriarchal norms while highlighting the emotional and societal tensions in the family. The camera repeatedly uses tight, intimate shots within the cluttered kitchen, contrasting with the wider, chaotic shots of the household. The visual language emphasises his entrapment in a role he cannot fully inhabit, neither as a traditional patriarch nor as a liberated individual. In an early scene, when Haider is tasked with slaughtering a goat, he finds he simply can't do it. The scene immediately establishes him as someone who feels alienated from dominant masculinity. Unlike his father or the traditional male figures around him, Haider embodies a softer and more vulnerable masculinity that does not fit the expectations imposed upon him. Haider cannot verbally express his emotional suffering, so it emerges symbolically through his inability to perform the violent masculine act expected of him. This

scene, therefore, becomes an important metaphor for his emotional vulnerability, psychological repression, and alienation within patriarchal masculinity. In many South Asian societies, masculinity often involves being the breadwinner, assertive, dominant, and emotionally restrained. Rana, Haider's father, constantly nags Haider to find a job, framing it as a moral duty rather than a personal choice. This reversal of gender roles brings constant judgment from his father, who berates Haider for not being a 'man' in the traditional sense. His father wants Haider to embody patriarchal strength, get a 'real' job, and take charge as an authority. When Haider gets the role as a backing dancer, he needs to keep this new job a secret from his family. This concealment carries traumatic significance because it forces Haider into emotional repression and constant anxiety. He cannot openly express his desires, interests, or vulnerabilities. The fear of exposure creates a condition of psychological fragmentation, where he must continuously perform different identities in different spaces. His involvement with Biba and the dance troupe challenges his rigidly defined masculine role. Haider occupies spaces that are traditionally considered feminine, such as being a dancer in the erotic dance theatre, which challenges the traditional notions of masculinity. His journey is a major subversion, as he explores a softer, more fluid version of masculinity that contrasts with his family's hypermasculine ideals. Haider's attraction to Biba complicates the notion of Butler's framework, as Biba is a trans woman, and Haider's desire for her is not straightforwardly legible as same-sex desire within the categories of contemporary Western queer theory. It refuses to categorise Haider's sexuality in simple terms and instead represents it as a form of desire that is defined by its transgression of available categories. This complexity is itself politically significant as it resists the assimilation of queer experience into Western LGBTQ+ frameworks and insists on the culturally specific forms through which desire, gender, and sexuality are organised in South Asian contexts.

The cinematic representation of Haider's psychological suffering is characterised by an emphasis on passivity and suspension. He is repeatedly filmed in postures of waiting, watching, and deferring, the postures of a person who has no clear script to follow and no available future to move toward. This formal strategy resonates with Halberstam's concept of the 'queer art of failure', which argues that the refusal of normative success and productivity can itself be a form of queer political practice. Haider's apparent passivity is thus not simply a character flaw but a structural condition, the expression of a psychic life that has been formed by and against the demands of normative masculinity. Biba, the transgender starlet, is portrayed as a figure of remarkable strength and resilience. Despite being vulnerable, she possesses the confidence to take a stand for herself and is powerful enough to resist those who oppose her. Her active pursuit of a career in the male-dominated theatre industry is an overt act of defiance against rigid societal and gender norms. Biba exudes a commanding presence, both on and off stage, embodying confidence and charisma even when facing societal prejudices. Her open expression of her sexuality and assertion of her agency is a powerful statement against the norms. The film contrasts Biba's public performances, which occur in open, free and wide frames associated with liberation, with the claustrophobic domestic spaces, visually reinforcing her defiance and self-expression. The film also tries to shed light on the struggles faced by transgender individuals while simultaneously emphasising their resilience and quest for dignity. The film is acutely attentive to the material and psychological precarity of her existence: the constant threat of violence, the economic dependence on the performance space, the impossibility of conventional domestic arrangements, and the perpetual demand that she justify and explain her existence to a society that has not granted her the status of a fully legible subject. Sedgwick's concept of the epistemology of the closet is here complicated and extended for Biba, as there is no closet to emerge from and no act of revelation that could transform her social position. The relationship between Biba and Haider

is one of the film's most complex and nuanced dimensions. Their mutual attraction is rendered with a restraint that refuses both sensationalism and sentimentality. It is a relationship defined by its impossibility, by the social structures that surround and constrain it, and by the tenderness that nonetheless persists despite these constraints. This relationship serves multiple narrative functions as it develops Haider's character and reveals the repressed dimensions of his sexuality, gives Biba a space of recognition and desire that is otherwise denied to her, and demonstrates the film's broader commitment to representing queer relationality not as catastrophe but as a form of connection and resilience.

If Haider's trauma is rooted in the suppression of interiority within the patriarchal household, Biba's trauma is located at the intersection of embodiment and social abjection. The relationship between Haider and Biba emerges as a deeply affective yet structurally impossible connection shaped by shared trauma, social marginalisation, and the oppressive demands of patriarchy. Their relationship is not presented as a sensationalised transgressive intimacy, rather, it is framed through silence, restraint, and emotional vulnerability. Haider's attraction to Biba becomes significant because it destabilises the rigid masculine identity imposed upon him within the patriarchal Rana household. His emotional passivity, uncertainty, and inability to conform to hegemonic masculinity find momentary liberation in Biba's presence, where desire becomes a space of self-recognition rather than domination. Through Biba, Haider confronts the repressed dimensions of his identity and the psychological suffering produced by compulsory masculinity. At the same time, Biba's trauma is inseparable from the social precarity attached to transgender embodiment. Unlike Haider, whose suffering remains largely internalised within domestic repression, Biba experiences trauma publicly through social exclusion, economic vulnerability, and the constant threat of humiliation and violence. Their relationship, therefore, functions as an intersection of two different yet interconnected forms of trauma. Haider seeks escape from patriarchal expectations, while Biba seeks affirmation within a society structured around trans exclusion. The tenderness between them momentarily creates an alternative emotional space outside normative structures. However, the impossibility of sustaining this relationship reveals the enduring violence of heteropatriarchal society. Their bond ultimately illustrates how queer intimacy in the film becomes both a site of healing and a reminder of social impossibility.

Conclusion

Joyland employs a visual language to represent the complex interactions between presence and absence, and the 'impossibility' of fully capturing the plural voices in postcolonial, patriarchal society, and about how that suffering is inscribed on bodies that society refuses to see. While trauma can be seen as 'beyond the reach of representation', the film uses cinematic techniques to evoke the unsaid and unseen psychological wounds. Through its closely observed portraiture of Mumtaz, Haider, Biba, and the other members of the Randhawa family and their world, Sadiq's film gives cinematic form to the insights of trauma theory, feminist criticism, queer theory, and postcolonial thought, demonstrating that these are not merely academic frameworks but living descriptions of how pain is produced, distributed, and sometimes, tentatively survived. The low-key lighting and claustrophobic spaces used to depict Mumtaz's domestic life visually convey her emotional turmoil and weakened attachment within her marriage. The film's use of frame within a frame when depicting Mumtaz in doorways and windows accentuates her confinement and suppressed urge to escape. Conversely, the 'open, free and wide frames' of the dance studio and rooftop signify spaces of liberation and identity building for Haider and Biba. This visual contrast powerfully illustrates the oppressive nature of conventional spaces versus the liberating potential of spaces

where gender and sexual norms are challenged. Haider's chronic emasculation and suppressed desire, and Biba's structural abjection as a transgender woman, emerge not as individual pathologies but as socially produced wounds that the film bears witness to with exceptional delicacy. This analysis has traced how film stages trauma at the level of character, narrative, and cinematic form. What Joyland ultimately offers is not resolution but the rarer and more demanding gift of a sustained, ethically committed gaze that refuses to look away from the cost of living outside the sanctioned scripts of gender and desire in the contemporary scenario.

Sadiq's direction, particularly through its neo-realist approach and moments that distress the audience to another level of frustration, hints at the unrepresentable nature of deep-seated trauma without resorting to explicit portrayal. The film never judges, instead allowing the aching narrative to unfold, compelling viewers to question societal roles. The ambiguity of the final scene with Haider walking into the sea, where the sound of waves symbolically represents the screams of the suppressed section of society, signifies a form of trauma that transcends individual experience, resonating with Cathy Caruth's idea of trauma as an enigma that demands witness despite its incomprehensibility. The film's overall visual aesthetics work to reconfigure traditional gender roles and representations, inviting the audience to see beyond the confines of conventional representations and embrace a more fluid understanding of identity.

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