



Original Article

## **Broken bonds: A study of addiction, sexuality and traumatized aging in 'A Mirror Made of Rain'**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the multi-layered depiction of trauma and its intergenerational transmission in the novel 'A Mirror Made of Rain' by Naheed Phiroze Patel through the character of Asha, an alcoholic mother whose unresolved traumas and addiction lead to her tumultuous relationship with her daughter Noomi. This study explores the ways through which identities, gender roles, and intergenerational relationships are shaped by addiction. The paper delves into the mechanisms through which trauma is not only inherited but re-enacted in complex familial bonds by studying Asha's psychological condition and the repercussions of maternal trauma passed down from her own mother. It delves deeper into the relationship between gender and addiction, highlighting the particular difficulties experienced by Indian women who battle substance misuse as well as the stigma associated with female addicts. Through the character of Asha, the novel presents a complex depiction of sexuality, particularly how trauma disrupts sexual agency and distorts the mother-daughter relationship. This paper contends that Asha's ageing process, which is characterised by physical and mental deterioration, is a heartbreaking tale of self-destruction and wounded motherhood, reflecting the cumulative impacts of addiction and unresolved trauma. By taking recourse to a multidisciplinary approach that integrates insights from psychology, gender studies, and

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trauma theory, this paper aims to expand the understanding of how addiction and trauma intermingle with gendered experiences and how these elements contribute to a cycle of fractured familial bonds in 'A Mirror Made of Rain'.

### **Introduction**

'A Mirror Made of Rain' by Naheed Phiroze Patel explores the complexities of trauma, addiction, and sexuality via the prism of a broken family. The lives of Asha and her daughter Noomi are

examined in this book, which illustrates how addiction and unresolved trauma can run through families and create a vicious cycle of suffering and estrangement. Asha's battles with alcoholism and her turbulent connection with her mother are not isolated incidents; they are reflected in her relationships with Noomi, who both becomes a victim and a witness to this intergenerational cycle. This study explores the social and psychological aspects of addiction and provides a complex account of how trauma affects both individual identities and familial connections via a thorough analysis of Asha's path. Knowing the many ways in which trauma and gender interact is essential to comprehending the larger societal ramifications of Asha's addiction and the ageing process that followed.

Patel creates a figure in Asha who personifies the internal struggle between survival and self-destruction. Asha's alcoholism is depicted from the beginning as a sign of deeper emotional wounds rather than just a personal habit. "She drinks all day, these days. She's anxious, depressed, etc. Nothing new" (p. 25).<sup>[1]</sup> This quote perfectly captures Asha's obsessive addiction, which has its roots in her mother's past cruelty and neglect. It comes to light that Asha's drinking is a recurrent pattern in her relationship with Noomi, an effort to numb the unresolved emotional pain inherited from her mother. Conventional narratives of addiction, which sometimes centre only on individual blame, are complicated by Patel's placement of Asha's addiction within the context of generational trauma.

Asha's gendered experiences exacerbate her addiction even more. Her battle with alcoholism is complicated by social rejection and condemnation since she is a woman. "Alcohol was a movie, a song, a conversation in a bottle. Like religion, music, art, it eased the symptoms of living as a woman" (p. 73).<sup>[1]</sup> The irony inherent in how society views addiction is shown by this quotation, which portrays female addicts as morally reprehensible while male addicts are frequently viewed as tragic characters. Therefore, Asha's addiction is a struggle against the constrictive rules that regulate feminine behaviour as much as a personal failure. In this situation, her alcoholism may be interpreted as a coping strategy for the pressures she faces from her roles as a wife, mother,

and daughter. It provides her with an escape from the oppressive reality of her existence, where she is often questioned about who she is.

The way that Asha and her daughter Noomi interact is essential to comprehending the generational transmission of trauma. Noomi was exposed to Asha's unpredictable behaviour as a youngster, which made her feel unstable and afraid. "On the days when Asha's anger disappeared for a few hours, she transformed into the kind of mother one reads about in stories... But her anger would always return. One mother sang me to sleep, while the other woke me up with her screams" (p.25).<sup>[1]</sup> This quote illustrates how Noomi cannot escape the emotional consequences of Asha's addiction despite her best efforts to navigate her mother's unpredictable moods. Asha's failure to provide a secure and caring atmosphere damages the mother-daughter bond, causing Noomi to take on a more caring role. Reversals of roles like this are a sign of intergenerational trauma, in which the kid is made to carry the emotional weight of their parents' unresolved grief.

Noomi's experiences with Asha unavoidably influenced her sense of self as she vacillates between bitterness and a fervent need for her mother's affection. She hated her mother for what she was, but she hated herself more for wanting to be loved by her so fiercely. "When I was little, on the nights my parents stayed up fighting with and screaming at each other, I'd creep into Lily Mama's bedroom to sleep" (p. 19).<sup>[1]</sup> This passage perfectly expresses the inner struggle that forms Noomi's personality and is brought on by the pain passed down through generations. Noomi's battle to balance her need for maternal love with her resentment of Asha is a reflection of the larger issue of fragmented identity, which occurs when tragedy shatters a person's sense of self. The book, therefore, illustrates how trauma, if untreated, may permeate all facets of a person's existence and result in a difficult-to-break cycle of emotional upheaval.

Trauma can also materialise in the sexual sphere, which further erodes the characters' sense of identity and agency. Asha is shown as having difficult and shame-filled relationships with her sexuality, which is a result of the moral policing she endured as a young child and her lack of fulfilling

intimacy with her husband after marriage. “my dad hasn’t touched her, you know, sexually, in fifteen years”(p. 26).<sup>[1]</sup> This assimilation of contradictory beliefs about sexuality distorts Asha’s understanding of her own body and desires, which contributes to her self-destructive tendencies. Her struggle with sexuality is not just individual, but it emphasises the broader societal constraints placed on women’s sexual autonomy and identity. The result of this distorted understanding of sexuality leads to Asha’s distorted relationship with her daughter. Noomi, too, struggles with her sexual identity, often viewing it through the prism of her mother’s trauma. She feared becoming like her mother, using sex as a salve for wounds that refused to heal. “Fear, it seems, like a common cold, can be contagious” (p.53).<sup>[1]</sup> This fear demonstrates how deeply ingrained Asha’s trauma is in Noomi’s understanding of her wishes. Thus, the book explores how trauma may change a person’s connection with their body, making it both a source of power and vulnerability, using sexuality as a vehicle.

The theme of ageing is closely related to Asha’s trauma and addiction. “When speaking of an aging parent’s use of alcohol and medications, many people commonly mistake addiction for pleasure”. However, the use of alcohol is mostly an escape route for traumatised people to get temporary relief from the emotional pain that they are going through. The effects of Asha’s addiction, both physical and mental, are becoming more noticeable as she gets older. “In a very recent study, individuals (mean age 58.3 years) with a history of heroin dependence showed poorer health outcomes compared to the general population” (p. 541).<sup>[2]</sup> This thorough description not only illustrates the physical effects of drunkenness but also serves as a metaphor for Asha’s emotional load. Her ageing process reflects the cumulative effects of unresolved trauma and addiction in addition to being a biological phenomenon. The deterioration of Asha’s physical and mental state is a metaphor for the breakdown of family relationships, and the pervasiveness of trauma passed down through generations.

Therefore, ‘A Mirror Made of Rain’ provides a compelling exploration of addiction, trauma, and sexuality, all of which are intricately interwoven into the fabric of Asha’s life and the lives of those around her. The novel challenges traditional

narratives of addiction by situating it within the context of gendered expectations and intergenerational trauma. Through the portrayal of Asha’s struggles and her complex relationship with her daughter, Patel invites readers to confront the uncomfortable truths about how trauma is inherited, re-enacted, and, ultimately, transformed into a form of resistance. The intersections of addiction, sexuality, and ageing in the novel not only illuminate the personal dimensions of trauma but also underscore its broader social and cultural implications.

### **Gendered experiences of addiction and its consequences**

Naheed Phiroze Patel explores how cultural norms and societal expectations impact the experiences of women who struggle with drug misuse in ‘A Mirror Made of Rain’. The book takes a gendered approach to portraying addiction. Being a mother and an addict has a double stigma for Asha, the main character, making her more vulnerable to criticism and scrutiny. Asha’s drinking is viewed as a moral failing rather than a sickness or a sign of more serious mental anguish. This perception can be seen in how those around her react to her drinking habits, especially after she had lost her baby, who lived for just a week. “She was never right after that. They’d told her- the doctors, your grandparents-that it was her fault... Lily Mama told her she’d lost the baby because her mind wasn’t strong enough to keep him” (p. 81).<sup>[1]</sup>

Asha uses alcohol as a way to express her agency in a culture that constantly regulates the behaviour of women, as well as a way to get away from the confining duties that are placed on her as a woman. Therefore, it is possible to see her drinking as a defiant act-a rejection to live up to the idealised version of women that rejects her uniqueness and voice. However, this defiance comes at a price. As Asha battles with her addiction, she finds herself further isolated and distanced from her family, especially her daughter, Noomi. The novel illustrates how Asha’s gendered experience of addiction exacerbates the distancing between mother and daughter, feeding a vicious cycle of emotional neglect and bitterness. Noomi’s observation, “Ma, no one hates you more than you hate yourself” (p.8)<sup>[1]</sup>, reveals the conflicting emotions that define her perception of Asha.

While society rejects Asha as a fallen woman, Noomi is forced to negotiate the complex emotional terrain of loving someone who is essentially wrecked and unable to offer the security and care expected of a mother.

### **Intergenerational trauma and the transmission of pain**

One of the main themes of the novel includes the generational transmission of trauma, especially how unresolved pain and emotional scars are passed down from mother to daughter. Asha's relationship with her mother is fraught with tense and unspoken grievances. Her mother's cold behaviour and emotional lack left Asha with a sense of inadequacy and self-loathing that she tries to overcome. She carried her mother's disdain like a scar, a reminder that she would never be good enough, never be loved enough. "My mother didn't talk much about her parents,... because as a child, she had to sleep with her fingers in her ears to block out the sound of her father whipping her mother with the metal part of his suspenders" (p. 59).<sup>[1]</sup> This scar, symbolic of the emotional wounds inflicted during childhood, becomes the root of Asha's self-destructive behaviour. Asha's connection with Noomi, who unintentionally becomes the target of her mother's emotional instability, is a manifestation of her unresolved trauma. Asha's childhood experiences of instability, neglect, and dread are mirrored in Noomi, implying a recurrence of trauma that imprisons mother and daughter in a never-ending cycle of pain. No matter how far she ran, she could never escape her mother's shadow. "My whole childhood I'd believed that if Asha disappeared, somehow all our troubles would disappear along with her" (p. 68).<sup>[1]</sup> The fact that emotional scars become ingrained in a person's personality as a result of intergenerational trauma is highlighted by this phrase.

The novel further explores how intergenerational trauma disrupts the formation of healthy maternal bonds. Asha's inability to process her trauma renders her incapable of providing emotional support to Noomi because she thinks her family hates her. "You both hate me. You want me to disappear, don't you?" (p. 95).<sup>[1]</sup> The detrimental effect that trauma has on a person's ability to love and care for others is highlighted by this question,

which eventually causes a disintegration of family bonds. In turn, Noomi internalises her mother's disregard and grows to feel unworthy and self-conscious, which affects how she interacts with other people. Patel highlights how the unintentional transmission of unresolved emotional baggage, rather than deliberate effort, is what perpetuates the agony cycle by portraying the ripple effects of trauma.

### **Sexuality and trauma: The body as a battleground**

According to studies, those who had been shamed because of their sexuality had greater levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms than people who had not, which is in line with Hatzenbuehler's (2009) research on the negative effects of stigma and discrimination on mental health.<sup>[3,4,5]</sup> In 'A Mirror Made of Rain', sexuality is influenced by trauma and social norms and is shown as a place of both power and vulnerability. Growing up, Asha was given contradictory signals about her sexuality, which contributed to her tumultuous relationship with it. "Asha's mind is shattered, Jung said. Whatever it reflects will always appear as distortion" (p. 275).<sup>[1]</sup> Asha's perception of her desires and agency is distorted by this conflicting notion of the female body as something to be both abused and protected. Asha experiences emotional abuse and humiliation, which exacerbates her battle with her sexuality and drives her to participate in self-destructive sexual behaviour. Her relationships are characterised by a dread of being abandoned and a frantic need for approval. Therefore, Asha's sexual interactions are more about playing out the rejection and unworthiness she internalised from her mother than they are about being in love. Her sexuality turns into a battlefield where she tries to achieve closeness and also ruins it, illustrating the intricate relationship between trauma and identity.

Noomi, too, struggles with her sexuality, which is the result of her mother's traumatic experiences. She feared becoming like her mother, using sex as a means of escaping pain rather than embracing pleasure. This fear is an indication of how deeply Asha's suffering has influenced Noomi's view of her own body and desires. "In rural Kamalpur, Noomi Wadia is being watched closely by her friends and extended relatives who are looking for

any indication that she would follow in the footsteps of her disgraced alcoholic mother". (p. 97).<sup>[6]</sup> The larger topic of intergenerational conflict, where the daughter must deal with the mother's unresolved concerns in order to form her own identity, is embodied in Noomi's battle to identify her sexuality outside the shadow of her mother's pain. Patel examines how trauma alters the relationship between the body and the self by using sexuality to illustrate how the body can be a source of agency as well as a place for self-punishment. Restoring their bodies becomes, for Asha and Noomi, the same as restoring their identities, and this is a difficult journey full of obstacles.

### Ageing and the physical manifestation of trauma

"Addiction makes the old, older" (p.13).<sup>[7]</sup> The physical and psychological effects of addiction and trauma are closely related to the issue of ageing in 'A Mirror Made of Rain'. Asha's quick physical decline, which represents the cumulative effect of her unhealed emotional scars, coincides with her decline into alcoholism. "She looked concussed, as if the alcohol had struck her like a mallet" (p. 6).<sup>[8]</sup> This description is a metaphor for the emotional deterioration that follows unresolved trauma in addition to capturing the physical effects of Asha's addiction.

Asha's body, which is scarred by trauma and addiction, is becoming a bigger prison for her as she gets older. Her physical degradation is a mirror of the emotional breakdown that has characterised her life, not merely something that happens to her biologically. "The inflamed joints of her knees made her wince with pain" (p. 278).<sup>[9]</sup> Asha feels a distancing from her own body and identity, a disconnection that is indicative of the broader theme of ageing as a process of disintegration and alienation. In the context of the book, ageing is portrayed as a kind of retribution for Asha's self-destructive decisions and a sobering reminder of the unavoidable effects of her addiction. However, it also presents Asha with an opportunity for some reckoning—a chance to face the suffering from which she has long escaped. "A mother is the first mirror in which we see ourselves. But what if the mirror you look into is broken? You might see yourself always in pieces" (p.272).<sup>[10]</sup> This epiphany implies a glimpse of self-awareness, an

understanding that her life has been influenced not just by her own decisions but also by the pain she received from her mother.

### Breaking the cycle: Resistance and transformation

'A Mirror Made of Rain' presents the hope of ending the cycle of trauma and addiction via self-awareness and facing one's suffering despite its depressing portrayal of these conditions. "...prevention is the most effective intervention approach for intergenerational trauma transmission" (p. 11).<sup>[8]</sup> The book closes on a vague note, implying that although trauma may never completely go away, it may be recognised and, in doing so, its grasp lessened. In order to achieve self-realisation, Noomi must embrace love, face the effects of her mother's suffering on her own life and make the decision to identify herself independently of that past. "Love squeezed my heart" (p. 155).<sup>[11]</sup> This statement demonstrates Noomi's will to end the trauma loop, push back against the past, and forge her route. Asha has undergone a slight metamorphosis, but it is clear from her willingness to face her own grief inadequately. "You must speak life into children" (p. 284).<sup>[12]</sup> This brief period of love and introspection points to a change in Asha's perspective on her trauma—a step toward acceptance as opposed to flight. Thus, the idea that trauma alters identities and relationships but not need to define them is the novel's conclusion. By depicting Asha and Noomi's experiences, Patel emphasises how crucial it is to face and comprehend one's grief in order to release it from its grip. Although the process is not absolute nor linear, it does provide some hope in the otherwise hopeless world of trauma and addiction.

### Conclusion

By exposing the layers of sorrow, guilt, and desire that characterise mother-daughter relationships, Naheed Phiroze Patel's story makes a strong case for how trauma embeds itself in family structures and feeds a never-ending cycle of emotional anguish. In the end, the book forces the reader to face the painful truths of trauma and addiction, highlighting the fact that these conditions are not only personal maladies but also pervasive social ills. One of the main points of contention in this study



is that 'A Mirror Made of Rain' depicts addiction as a gendered reaction to trauma rather than just a physical illness. "Gender is a significant consideration because of the PTSD statistics showing that women are more greatly affected than men".<sup>[9]</sup> Alcohol becomes a self-medication for Asha, a way for her to block out the hurt and feelings of inadequacy that have been ingrained in her since she was a little girl. However, it is also a kind of defiance-a rejection of the patriarchal rules that define gender, parenting, and womanhood. Asha's addiction is seen negatively by society, which treats her as a social outcast and a failing mother. Asha's battle with addiction serves as a vehicle for addressing the gendered norms that are placed upon her. Her drinking is a response to the unachievable expectations of feminine behaviour rather than merely a personal shortcoming. However, as the novel shows, Asha's resistance to these expectations through her addiction also works to keep her trapped even more. Her alcoholism is seen as a moral defect that prevents her from being a respectable lady and a good mother, which reinforces the patriarchal narrative that women who behave differently from norms are not deserving of compassion or assistance. Noomi feels a strong connection between this concept and how she views her mother and herself. The social perceptions that shape both of their lives are the source of Noomi's conflicted feelings toward Asha, which manifest as both love and hate. Noomi worries that she will end up like Asha, that the suffering and anguish will show up in her own life and send her down a similar destructive road. "A mother is the first mirror in which we see ourselves. But what if the mirror you look into is broken?" (p. 272).<sup>[11]</sup> This statement illustrates how trauma, particularly when combined with addiction, turns into a gendered legacy that moulds the characters' perceptions of their responsibilities as women in their families and society, in addition to how they see themselves.

Through her narrative, Patel paints a psychological picture of how trauma is passed down through generations and reenacted. The survivors of three different kinds of trauma were examined in a study published in 2007 in which the evidence of trauma was found not only in the children of survivors but also in their grandchildren.<sup>[10]</sup> The unresolved pain Asha bears from her mother's violence and neglect has a significant impact on how she interacts with

Noomi. Both conscious and unconscious trauma are transferred, as evidenced by Asha's incapacity to provide Noomi with emotional stability and support. "Approximately one-third of all individuals who were physically abused, sexually abused, or extremely neglected will subject their offspring to one of these forms of maltreatment"(p.190).<sup>[11]</sup> Asha's difficulty expressing love and affection serves as an example of how trauma inhibits emotional expression and builds an impenetrable wall between mother and daughter. Noomi, on the other hand, internalises the anguish that her mother experienced and sees Asha's emotional detachment as a mirror of her shortcomings. This internalisation leads Noomi to question her self-worth, feeding a cycle of self-doubt and emotional instability. "I had very few happy memories with Asha after the age of six" (p. 157).<sup>[11]</sup> Noomi's sense of unworthiness and fear of abandonment are direct results of Asha's inability to break free from the trauma of her past. This pattern of inherited suffering becomes a distinguishing characteristic of the mother-daughter bond, demonstrating how trauma is not only a personal tragedy but also a familial and generational issue.

Another significant aspect of this paper's analysis is the exploration of sexuality as a site of both trauma and empowerment in the novel. "Their (abused girls) social development tended to be maladaptive, with early and risky sexual behavior and high rates of revictimization by both casual and intimate partners"(p.259).<sup>[12]</sup> Asha's conflicted relationship with her sexuality is shaped by the moralistic teachings of her mother, who instilled in her a sense of shame and fear regarding her body. This contradictory message distorts Asha's understanding of her sexuality, leading her to view her body as both a source of power and a tool of self-punishment. Her sexual encounters, therefore, are marked by a sense of disconnection and self-loathing as she struggles to reconcile her desires with the internalised shame she feels. Noomi's sexual identity, too, is influenced by her mother's trauma. She fears that her own body will become a site of pain and rejection, much like her mother's. This fear reflects the deep-seated impact of Asha's trauma on Noomi's perception of her sexuality. Nevertheless, towards the end of the novel, Noomi's journey towards self-awareness includes a tentative reclamation of her body and desires.

Unlike her mother, who remains trapped in a cycle of shame and self-destruction, Noomi begins to explore her sexuality on her terms, seeking to understand her body as something that belongs to her rather than as a weapon or a curse. Through the lens of sexuality, Patel's narrative highlights the complexity of trauma's impact on identity formation. The process of reclaiming one's body and desires is depicted as a form of resistance against the internalised shame and fear that trauma instils. Noomi's attempt to redefine her sexuality outside the shadow of her mother's trauma is emblematic of her broader struggle to break free from the cycle of inherited pain and forge her path. The theme of ageing is closely related to the scars left by trauma, both noticeable and concealed. Years of alcohol misuse have exacerbated Asha's physical decline, which serves as a sobering reminder of the physical toll trauma has on the body. "Addiction and substance abuse, prevalent conditions worldwide, contribute to accelerating ageing and age-related diseases" (p. 37).<sup>[13]</sup> This means that trauma is not just an emotional experience but also physical. Asha's body bears witness to the accumulated consequences of self-destructive conduct and unresolved anguish as she matures. The ageing process is used throughout the book as a metaphor for the inevitable effects of trauma. Asha's psychological collapse parallels her physical deterioration, indicating that the longer trauma goes untreated, the more profoundly it penetrates a person's identity. However, being older also allows Asha to come to terms with her history and, in flawed ways, look for some resolution. Even though it is brief, this self-reflection moment shows that Asha's understanding of her experience and herself has changed. Ultimately, *A Mirror Made of Rain* presents a weak hope for ending the traumatising cycle. Noomi's path to self-realisation is seeing how her mother's suffering affected her own life and making the decision to face it rather than run away from it. "They (traumatised people) fear losing control and ending up on the losing side once again".<sup>[14]</sup> Therefore, Noomi expresses her will to identify herself independently of the tragedy her mother endured and to create her own identity and destiny.

Asha has gone through a gradual shift, as seen by her willingness to confront the anguish from which she has long retreated. "I heard Asha whispering words like 'good', 'strong', 'clever' in her

(granddaughter's) little ear (p.283).<sup>[1]</sup> This moment raises the prospect of healing, although a limited one. It implies that even if the effects of trauma could never completely go away, there is a slim chance that understanding and acceptance might occur. Ultimately, the book ends on a note of uncertainty, admitting that trauma may be understood, faced, and, to some extent, transcended, even if it may never be eliminated. Patel highlights that the road to recovery is not simple nor certain by depicting Asha and Noomi's interwoven paths. Although trauma has lasting effects, it should not define a person's whole life. While escaping its hold is not without difficulties, there are times when resistance, self-awareness, and transformation occur. As a result, *A Mirror Made of Rain* offers a compelling story of resiliency and the potential to redefine one's connection with suffering, implying that although trauma alters identities, it need not govern them.

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