



## The Experience of Bereavement in Sorayya Khan's *We Take Our Cities with Us: A Psychosocial Analysis*



<b>Sara Anam</b>	M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
<b>Rana Abdul Munim Khan</b>	Lecturer, Department of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.
<b>Shahbaz Khalid</b>	Lecturer, Department of English, Riphah International University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

**Abstract:** *This study examines the potential for caregiving to enhance an individual's social standing. They inflict suffering under the guise of providing aid to others. Some individuals strive to maintain their strength. Individuals who are inhuman exhibit a lack of emotional warmth. Loss examines the conventional practices of indigenous communities. This research project seeks to shed light on life and human behaviour for interested readers, researchers, and students. Family life can be demanding at times. It is inconceivable to lose loved ones. Sorayya Khan brilliantly portrayed the ugliness of society as well as its greatest difficulties. Her books, novellas, and autobiographies all continue to make an impression. The author's "We Take Our Cities with Us" is a study of grief theory. The story begins by introducing the protagonist, her Dutch mother, and her ancestry. There will be an analysis of the book based on the tenets of anthropology and philosophy.*

**Key Words:** Bereavement, Human Behavior, Ethical Morals, Mourning, Life, Death, Love

**Corresponding Author:** Shahbaz Khalid (Lecturer, Department of English Riphah International University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: [Shahbazkhalidoo4@gmail.com](mailto:Shahbazkhalidoo4@gmail.com))

### Introduction

Humanity has achieved a superior position in the hierarchy of living beings by virtue of possessing a compassionate nature and an innate capacity for love and empathy towards other organisms. They exhibit empathy towards others and endeavour to alleviate their suffering. Likewise, individuals derive pleasure from the well-being of others and actively engage in efforts to amplify it to a significant degree. However, on occasion, a

reversal of this dynamic occurs, and one individual becomes the adversary of another. As a result, individuals may attempt to appropriate the joy of others, seeking to acquire possession of their possessions and transgressing the bounds of human decency in pursuit of their own interests. At that particular moment, individuals fail to distinguish between the characteristics of a human being and those of a monster. As a consequence of this predicament, societal destruction ensues and individuals

endeavour to safeguard their lives, assets, dignity, and even their cherished ones from the pernicious allure of fellow human beings. The events of September 11, 2001, serve as a poignant example of this phenomenon, which remains indelibly etched in the memories of the families who bore witness to this tragedy. Moreover, to bear the loss of the death of our parents more specifically the death of our mother is just like cutting ourselves into numerous pieces and then losing many of them (Khan, 2022; Van Parijs, 2022). "Bereavement" is an important as well as proximal approach to discussing such type of flaws in society. This theory has revolutionized English Literature and provided stories and novels with a new way of describing and explaining the most important as well as devastating phenomena of society.

Sorayya Khan is a well-known writer of her era. She was born in Europe and brought up in Lahore, however, later they shifted to Islamabad, also known as the capital of Pakistan. After that, she went to Syracuse and Ithaca, New York and then she beautifully describes the birth of her brown brothers in the world's leading country America and at last went to Amsterdam and Maastricht. Her novels and short stories are full of attraction, moral lessons and refreshing doldrums for readers along with researchers to analyze her work. "We Take Our Cities with Us" is her newest novel which is full of food for researchers. The whole novel is a clear depiction of the expertise of the writer in explaining the most awful situations of the present world in a beautiful way.

The protagonist of the narrative "We Take Our Cities with Us" is portrayed as an American family, who is accompanied by her Dutch mother. The individual has eloquently expressed a bittersweet sentiment regarding their tendency to develop an emotional attachment to their environment, only to inevitably relocate to a new setting. The

novel's essence is encapsulated by the portrayal of events such as the 9/11 incident, the passing of the protagonist's mother, and her subsequent decision to relocate to Pakistan with her family. The narrative also sheds light on the detrimental societal phenomenon, which can be aptly elucidated through the "Bereavement" theory, as evidenced by the portrayal of the demise of the "Dutch mother" (Nonaka, 2020). The narrative in question depicts a pervasive atmosphere of sorrow and mourning throughout the novel. In addition to the passing of the "Dutch mother," the protagonist also experiences the loss of cherished locations where she had previously engaged in play, education, and personal growth. From childhood to parenthood, the individual's journey has traversed numerous cities and countries, imbuing her heart with a deep affection for the locales where she has experienced the most cherished moments of her life. Consequently, she persisted in grieving for the unforeseen losses. The sole favourable aspect of the novel pertains to the return of "Sorayya Khan" to the locations where she had previously been absent. Thus, the narrative serves as a lucid representation of the chosen theoretical framework employed for the analysis of the data. There is very less literature that is available to highlight the awful situation of society although it is the utmost need of the present era as people that remain indulged in the waves of sorrows and grieves are increasing day by day. Furthermore, "Bereavement" is the most marvellous theory to enlighten and analyze the work of various authors who tried to step ahead by reshaping society with the provision of moral and esthetic stories as well as novels. Therefore, the current research article is highly significant for covering all the research gaps along with opening new windows of work for other researchers. By reading the article booklovers may support and pick up various positive aspects of the stories and can enhance their knowledge

with the detailed analysis of the above-mentioned novel.

## Literature Review

The theory of bereavement, also known as grief theory, has been a topic of research in various fields, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Several studies have explored how individuals experience and cope with the loss of a loved one and how grief can impact their psychological and physical health. Bereavement literature is an autobiographical genre that has grown in popularity since the 1980s. Autobiographical writing is never simply a recitation of personal history, but rather a commentary on what happened, what it means, and how it affected the writer's life and personality.

[Giddens](#) (1991) contended When writing autobiographically, especially in grieving memoirs, the writer strives for a reflexive awareness of their own identity and life story. [Freud](#) (1917) introduced "Mourning and Melancholia" "The two methods are consistent with two opposing theories of sorrow, one of which holds that the job of the bereavement is to divert emotional energy away from the object of love and towards another (Giddens, 1991, p.51).

According to [De Man](#) (1979), the reader is given a personal account of the battle to make sense of things, but ironically the writer's search for the inner truth can only be communicated to readers through clichéd, even clichéd, metaphors and literary devices. [Boston](#) (1994) anticipated at a certain stage of the grieving process, when recovery suddenly seems conceivable, bereavement literature is often created (Boston, 1994, p 163) [Thompson](#) (2007) remarked Because of the intensity of these recollections, mourners try to take charge of the moment and enjoy the deceased's fleeting presence without having to deal with the painful reminder of loss. It's not always easy to maintain control, though; objects could appear unexpectedly and

engulf the mourner in a wave of nostalgia and sorrow.

According to [Prodromou](#) (2012), a growing market for bereavement literature has been attributed to the idea that contemporary grieving can be an isolating process and that reading grief memoirs provides access to people in similar circumstances for those who are grieving. One could counter that these writings provide their readers with the same kinds of joys as popular romances by idealizing human relationships.

It is crucial to make it clear that the grief theory, often referred to as the theory of mourning, is a more general idea that has been researched in a number of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and anthropology. The subject of bereavement and sadness has frequently been a theme in writing, especially in the category of "grief literature." Literature that tackles loss, bereavement, and the grieving process is referred to as grief literature. Novels in this genre frequently feature characters who are dealing with the emotional, social, and psychological effects of losing a loved one. , In the history of grief literature, It is found in works like [Homer's](#) (1598) "The Iliad," which explores the grief and mourning of characters like Achilles and Priam. In his

[Lewis](#) (1961) examined bereavement. "A Grief Observed," In this book, Lewis examines his feelings of loss after the passing of his wife, Joy Davidman. Lewis talks about his difficulties dealing with his loss and the effects of mourning on his faith and worldview. [Blair](#) (2000) I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye offers a comforting hand to help guide From the initial weeks to the longer-term emotional and physical impacts, I Wasn't Ready to Say Goodbye offers a consoling hand to help you navigate the grieving process. The fallacies surrounding the grieving process are then exposed, along with the truth of what actually transpires as you endure the suffering.

[Didion's](#) (2005) "The Year of Magical Thinking," Didion examines the year that followed her husband John Gregory Dunne's unexpected passing in her book. Didion writes about her personal experience with loss and how it affected her sense of identity, her relationships with other people, and her capacity for daily living. "I did not believe in the resurrection of the body but I still believed that given the right circumstances, he would come back." (Didion, 2005,p 150). The sense that the dead are present or likely to return is beginning to fade for most writers like Didion and Khan by the time they publish their memoirs, but even after the signs and portents are explained, some writers continue to believe that this episode of "disordered thinking," this thirst for deciphering symbols and coincidences, has given them a glimpse of a different kind of reality, one that may be more accurate than our day-to-day perceptions.

The literary work authored by [Devine](#) (2017) titled "It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand" is a notable contribution to the field of grief and loss. Devine offers a novel and insightful outlook on the process of bereavement and the manner in which we provide assistance to individuals who have experienced a calamity. Megan's writing exhibits a remarkable level of lucidity as she delves into the tacit aspects of bereavement, affection, and convalescence, owing to her dual role as a clinician and a witness to her significant other's inadvertent submersion. The individual refutes the societal expectation of returning to a conventional and content existence, opting instead for a more advantageous and balanced approach.

[Starr](#) (2022) conducted a comprehensive investigation to assess the influence of traumatic events on the social conduct of individuals and determined that such effects are not limited to a single individual or family. The ramifications of inequity,

brutality, and subjugation have a profound impact on the entire community, subjecting them to the most harrowing experiences of existence. Unemployment can lead to individuals experiencing a loss of dignity, identity, and accountability, as poverty and hunger become pervasive issues. The individual experiences a pervasive sense of obscurity and disillusionment throughout various aspects of their existence. The experience of losing loved ones can have a profound impact on individuals, leading to a transformation from ordinary citizens to those who are despondent or even engage in criminal behaviour. Hence, it is imperative to take action towards promoting sustainability and fostering societal harmony on a global scale.

In 2013, a scholarly investigation was conducted on the literary work entitled "My Feudal Lord". The literary work portrays the individual experiences of Tehmina Durrani, who encounters various challenges within her domestic sphere, stemming from her spouse. The subject of the sentence is subjected to harsh treatment and servitude in her domestic setting by her spouse, Ghulam Mustafa Khar. The author portrays her existence as that of a destitute being who is unable to communicate her feelings and emotions to her spouse. The author additionally offers a critique of her spouse, a prominent political figure who champions the rights of the public, yet has failed to provide his wife with the appropriate level of consideration and respect. The primary purpose of her novel is to draw attention to the hardships and challenges faced by women in developing nations such as Pakistan.

An in-depth analysis suggests that love constitutes the most crucial characteristic of any given community, and serves as a fundamental metric for individual achievement. The author expounds upon the instance of affection shared between Uma and Wiltshire in his article. The speaker

asserts that despite the efforts of malevolent individuals to undermine their social and personal well-being, they remained united. The antagonist, the Case, employs coercive tactics to compel the entire community to terminate their business transactions with Wiltshire, ultimately leading to his attempt to dismantle Wiltshire's family. Despite any obstacles, Wiltshire's unwavering love for Uma propelled them to continue their life journey together. The individuals in question maintained their conviction that following this brief period of adversity, a time of tranquilly and contentment will ensue, and all will be restored to a state of normalcy. As a result, they overcame animosity and attained the joys of existence.

The subject of bereavement and sadness has frequently been a theme in writing, especially in the category of "grief literature." Literature that tackles loss, bereavement, and the grieving process is referred to as grief literature. Novels in this genre frequently feature characters who are dealing with the emotional, social, and psychological effects of losing a loved one.

According to researchers, reading works about loss can be beneficial for people who are grieving themselves. Reading about characters who are experiencing similar things may be reassuring, validating, and community-building. Additionally, reading books about loss can give readers insight into their own emotions and coping mechanisms. Overall, study on the topic of bereavement is still significant in many disciplines, including literature. Novels that deal with the themes of grief and loss can be a great resource for people going through their own grieving as well as helping us comprehend the grieving process.

The genre of mourning literature experienced a surge in popularity during the 20th century, with numerous authors making significant contributions to this field. Prominent figures in this particular domain encompass Virginia Woolf, Joan Didion, C.S.

Lewis, and J.D. Salinger. Scholars and literary enthusiasts persist in analysing and appreciating the literary oeuvres of these authors, who individually approached the subjects of sorrow, bereavement, and lamentation with their unique styles. Sorayya Khan is a prominent author who addresses the profound societal phenomena of warfare, terrorism, unjust and intolerable conduct within society, as well as the impoverished and sorrowful circumstances of those affected (AlMasarweh, 2022; Dikici, 2022). According to her perspective, the conclusion of wars, conflicts, and other oppressive events has resulted in the loss of lives, loved ones, and overall happiness for individuals. Individuals encounter various socioeconomic and political challenges in each academic setting, which significantly impact their perspectives and behaviours.

## Research Objectives

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1. To conduct an investigation that how Sorayya Khan depicts the emotional anguish and sorrow that individuals experience when confronted with the loss of their loved ones.
2. To investigate the author's exploration of individuals' connections with urban environments in the literary work, with a focus on the philosophy of grief.
3. To examine the implications of persistent cruelty, unjust actions, and dishonourable behaviour in societies.

## Research Questions

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1. How does Sorayya Khan portray grieves and sorrows that a person has to pass through when she/he faces the loss of their loved ones?
2. How does the writer explore a person's relationship with cities in the novel, examining bereavement philosophy?
3. What are the consequences that arise from the prolonged prevalence of cruelty, unjust behaviour, and

dishonourable conduct within societies?

### Significance of Study

The importance of this study is to highlight the repressed feelings and experiences of the Protagonist who is despairing in the face of inevitable social. The importance of psychoanalysis in comprehending grief and sadness stems from its ability to provide a more comprehensive knowledge of the psychological and emotional processes that occur during times of loss and mourning. This article also focused upon the lives of diasporic people who are deeply compressed under the burden of alienation and rootlessness. Grief, according to psychoanalytic theory, is a natural and necessary response to loss, including a complex interaction of conscious and unconscious psychological forces.

### Theoretical Framework

The research area of this article is related to the qualitative framework as it is comprised of the study of human nature and life attributes. Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler are a few literary theorists who have written a lot about grief and loss in literature. I've chosen Barthes' grief lens for this article. The work of French literary critic and philosopher Roland [Barthes](#), (2010) who studied semiotics and the connection between language and meaning, is perhaps best recognized. In his book "Mourning Diary," he discusses his feelings of loss following the passing of his mother.

The literary work comprises Barthes' personal musings and reflections on the grief he experienced subsequent to the demise of his mother in 1977. The entries in the diary, which cover a duration of two years, offer an unmediated and comprehensive perspective on Barthes' affective condition during that period.

Barthes grapples with the challenges of

bereavement and the struggle to come to terms with the passing of an individual close to one's heart in the journal. The author conveys profound emotional distress and a sense of vacuity through his written work, often accompanied by feelings of indignation and bitterness that are commonly associated with bereavement. The author additionally scrutinises the impact of his mother's demise on his perception of his own mortality and the inevitability of death. Barthes reflects on the process of grieving and the various phases of sorrow, including denial, anger, bargaining, despair, and acceptance, throughout his diary. The author additionally addresses topics such as linguistics, cognitive retention, and the role of artistic expression in facilitating recovery from bereavement.

"The pain of mourning is unique; it is in fact an entire world, with its own terrain and topography, its own languages and customs, its own rituals and taboos." (Barthes, 2010. "The Mourning Diary") is an incredibly emotional and deeply intimate portrayal of one man's journey with loss and sadness. It acts as a reminder of the universality of human suffering and provides insight into the inner workings of the mind during a period of extreme emotional turmoil. Thus, in accordance with the definition of qualitative analysis put forth by Strauss and Corbin (1998), we employed this methodology to elucidate the lexicon and expressions utilised within the chosen literary work. The concept of "Bereavement" theory is utilised to shed light on the most devastating aspects of societies in relation to the aforementioned novel. This theory is highly supportive for explaining the aches, sadness and cheating behaviour of human beings towards their fellow men that result in the creation of sorrows, pains and grieves.

### Data Collection

The process of gathering information involves two distinct sources, namely primary and secondary data sources. The

initial source pertains to Sorayya Khan's remarkable novel, as listed below:

The phrase "We take our cities with us" is a statement that suggests the idea of carrying one's sense of place and belonging wherever one goes.

The aforementioned source comprehensively covers all relevant papers and research articles that provide support in elucidating the research theme, which pertains to the background of "We take our cities with Us" by Sorayya Khan. In addition, this research was facilitated by the utilisation of diverse libraries and accompanying notes, which were consulted repeatedly to enhance comprehension and understanding of the publications and novel.

### Data Analysis

By utilising the methodology of "Bereavement" and employing a qualitative analysis approach, it is possible to analyse our research data in the following manner. In the story "We take our cities with us", the narrator explains the nature of human beings as well as her observing power towards the surrounding. She explains how people see the world with love and gratitude, however, when someone denies to own them the condition of sorrow and grief can never be explained in words.

"One afternoon when I was in high school, a one-page letter arrived for her from Amsterdam. In the official letter.....when he deserted his dying wife for a longtime mistress and,

(Text citation from "We take our cities with us" page no 48)"

Barthes (2010) explained that "Grief is not something that can be fixed or cured; it is something that must be carried, like a heavy load." The narrator feels dead and buried beneath the thousand layers of the soil after being realized that her mother is passing through the unbearable loss of her husband. She has explained beautifully that it is never

easy to bear the dishonest behaviour of husbands who indulges in relations with someone else. Furthermore, the chronicler explains the level of her pains by saying that the eyes of her mother were more than red in color and that remained for many days as she was not ready to bear this attitude of her husband. In the end, she said to her children that their father is dead, although she was well aware that he is alive, he is not dead. But this sentence came out of her mouth as she was dying by herself with the sorrows and pains that our father gave to our mother.

"In my senior year of high school, when it came time to fill out the college applications, I needed a category that describes what I was and asked, "Mummy, what am I?"

What does it matter? My mother responded when she looked up from Ragtime or Shogun or whatever she was reading then. When I sat next to her waving an application, she said, mixed, of course. And that was that.

Only there was no such category on the form. Neither was there a slot for Pakistani Dutch or Dutch Pakistani. So I gravitated to "others" which is where I still live. (Text citation from "We take our cities with us" page no 53)"

The preceding paragraph, sourced from "We Take Our Cities With Us," elucidates the preminent characteristic of "Bereavement" in relation to madness and/or insanity.

Barthes (2010) posits that the experience of grief involves navigating two distinct realities: one in which the beloved individual existed and another in which they are no longer present. The protagonist undergoes a series of life stages and subsequently experiences a sense of deviance in nearly all facets of existence. She experiences a range of mental and physical hardships and conflicts. The chronicler has disclosed a notable shift in her ability to cope with various circumstances, leading to difficulty in self-identification. For her, it has consistently

been a matter of uncertainty to ascertain or respond to inquiries regarding her identity. There appears to be a lack of effort in comprehending the fact that she is the offspring of a Pakistani father and a Dutch mother. The individual consistently harbours contemplations of establishing residency in a particular country that would serve as a defining characteristic of her identity, potentially alleviating the emotional distress she experiences. Moreover, the narrator is currently facing challenges in carrying out her routine tasks with confidence and is experiencing difficulty in completing her college application form with a sense of assurance. The individual in question appears to be preoccupied with feelings of sadness, excessive rumination, and other manifestations of psychological distress, indicating that she is not in a state of well-being and may be experiencing a range of mental health issues. Thus, based on the aforementioned examples, it can be inferred that the novel in question is greatly influenced and captivated by the elements of "Bereavement." The fundamental elements of the narrative of "Sorayya Khan" encompass all the significant characteristics of "Bereavement." The literary works of the author are characterised by prominent themes of mortality, morbidity, terror, madness, and decay, which are evident throughout her stories, novels, and other written pieces. This distinct feature is what distinguishes the body of work known as "Bereavement" upon initial examination.

"Now that your father isn't here, you speak to me like this? He has nothing to do with this, Mother, I said because she hated to be called Mother, He'd been dead for months, and I was right. My voice was raised but not that much because Mohammad was washing dishes in the kitchen and, as if I'd suddenly made him arbiter of my relationship with my mother, I was afraid he was listening. (Text citation from "We take our cities with us" page no 77)"

The aforementioned citation exemplifies the concept of love and consequently elucidates the anguish of physical separation from one's beloved. Moreover, it is evident that love possesses a supernatural force. The author posits that separation from loved ones constitutes a formidable challenge capable of dismantling entire communities. Nevertheless, the potency of love supersedes all obstacles. The author adeptly elucidates that the possession of love's potency enables one to perceive illumination amidst obscurity. Nevertheless, the aforementioned context elucidates the genuine essence of love. The author eloquently asserts that love is a profound force that possesses the capacity to overcome any adversity and to contend with the entire world for the betterment of the well-being and serenity of those we hold dear. In contrast, if an individual professes love towards another but lacks the capacity to safeguard it, the author posits that such a sentiment is not genuine love but rather a mere circumstance of passing time.

"My mother is always sick when she visits my dream, which is how a year later, the night before I read the letters. She wears a flowing hospital gown that swallows her disappearing frame and she doesn't smile, not even when we're on Wahringer Strabe seating in a café I don't recognize. (Text citation from "We take our cities with us" page no 107)"

The above-mentioned text citation clearly elucidates the situation when her mother was ill and she was wishing that she may not die. The narrator is unable to bear the pain and sorrow that the death of her mother has brought to her. Barthes (2010) projected that "The pain of mourning is the price we pay for loving deeply." She is unable to cope with the true situation and she remains thinking too much that she may see her mother in her dreams, however, she is not fine. As she was full of pains and hardships in her actual life, she saw her the



same even in her dreams. She always wishes that she may find the time again and maybe be nicer and kind to her mother but he is helpless. She can't do anything except regret and misses her.

## **Conclusion**

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This study has analyzed the repressed emotions of grief, sorrow and experiences in Sorayya Khan's novel we take our cities with us (2022).this research also explored that people who are experiencing grief and pain go through a wide range of emotions, and the intensity and duration of these feelings can vary from person to person. Grief frequently results in a profound sensation of grief and sorrow. It is common to experience great loss and lament the loss of a significant person or object. feelings of despair, helplessness, and hopelessness, can be a symptom of bereavement. It can be extremely painful, making it challenging to envision a life without the cause of the misery. Even when surrounded by others, grief can cause people to feel alone and alienated. A sensation of detachment from the outside world and other people may result from the loss of a loved one. The protagonist and other characters are feeling guilty or regretful, wondering whether there was anything they could have done differently or feeling accountable for the loss. Managing these

emotions can be challenging and may call for assistance. this research also concluded that misbehaviour, high voice talk with parents and oppression are the incidents that destroy the families, engulf the loved ones, and family members and shatter the foundation of peace and harmony. The main claim made in this study report is that repression results from people controlling their emotions and desires as a form of self-defence. Either negatively or positively, it results in the characters being repressed. All major and minor individuals in this study, including the novel's protagonist, have struggled through a variety of restrictive situations throughout their tumultuous lives. Due to the general environment of fear and panic, they must endure such dismal and embarrassing circumstances by limiting their feelings and wants. Sometimes, cheating and deceiving others give the destruction to the sustainability of a peaceful and happy community. In our novel, the narrator also explained the social behaviour of common people. Firstly, her deceiving behaviour toward her father and then the incident of 9/11 destroy the happily living family. The death of the "Dutch mother" and deprivation from the smile of her mother in her dreams has made her the most helpless person. She sees all her garden in the form of her family has become the prey of destruction and thus; she has nothing except crying and mourning.

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