**A Traumatized Nation**

**The worst thing is that we cannot see anything at the end of this dark tunnel.**

[Zara Maqbool](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/zara-maqbool)

February 22, 2024

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns), [Newspaper](https://www.nation.com.pk/newspaper)

We are a resilient nation. We have fought wars with enemies across borders and within the country. We are currently fight­ing inflation, injustice, corruption, violence, and the list goes on. We have experienced unimagina­ble pain with a terror attack like the APS School massacre or witnessed gross in­justice every other day where the crimi­nals get away and the victims disappear in oblivion. The fact of the matter is that most Pakistanis experience helplessness daily and despite all odds, continue to hope for a better future and stability across the board.

It’s this hope that motivated people of all ages to come out of their homes and vote to exert their dem­ocratic right to elect their government. People trav­eled all over the country to vote from the constitu­ency they could exercise this right from. This country has been experiencing collective depression for a long time now. We are de-motivated and have given up so many times trying to accept the reality of, ‘this is Pakistan. What do you expect?’ Despite resigning to the bitter reality of belonging to a country where there is no law and order and most importantly in­justice, people put their fears aside and surrendered to residual hope that ‘things will change.’

[Thousands in Gaza suffering 'cruelty of hunger and malnutrition': UN](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/thousands-in-gaza-suffering-cruelty-of-hunger-and-malnutrition-un)

I don’t have anything to add to what has happened in the elections in 2024. We are all once again wit­nessing the law of the jungle and once again we feel hopeless and defeated and awaiting our fate of more instability and state chaos than ever before. The real­ity is that we are a traumatized nation. We feel help­less and disempowered and this collective trauma where holding a Pakistani passport means, we will continue to drown in this corrupt country where a few mighty and strong setups will do as they please for their vested interests and we can’t do anything that holds any potential for things to change.

I can smell the trauma and pain in the air. I see it on people’s faces. I hear it in their voices. It’s trickling down to personal lives where the helplessness to the state and its unethical and unjust ways have started to affect the mental health of individuals and affect­ing their lives. There is anger and frustration and im­mense sadness and we are all triggered all the time and deflecting our pain onto our loved ones.

[18 students held in Punjab University clash](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/18-students-held-in-punjab-university-clash)

Emotions attached to a traumatic event will find a home. Road rage, crimes, violence, and drug addic­tions, dysfunctional interpersonal relationships are some of the areas that are growing as avenues for these collective unresolved traumatic emotions. Most of us even in social settings are simply discussing the state of our affairs and so are nervous systems are con­stantly hyperactivated and we are in chronic stress. This trauma of existing in Pakistan is affecting our mental and physical health and we all have our fight, flight, and free responses to it. The worst thing is that we cannot see anything at the end of this dark tunnel. Hope is important and yet we are so scared to hope.

PTSD is post-traumatic stress disorder. But in Paki­stan, we are not experiencing PTSD but going through active trauma. We are paralyzed by fear. Fear of electric bills, unsafety, knowing that even if we are wronged, the law will support the money makers, knowing that our freedom of speech is an illusion. For another country having no internet access for a day may mean nothing but for us, it was yet another reminder that we have no autonomy in this country and we can only do our best to endure whatever comes our way. Pak­istan became independent in 1947 but I believe that we have a false sense of independence that has no standing in real terms and I feel it ever before.

[Two killed in petrol agency fire incident](https://www.nation.com.pk/23-Feb-2024/two-killed-in-petrol-agency-fire-incident)

We are in pain. We are hopeless and hurting. We are Pakistan.

**Zara Maqbool**
The writer is a BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psycho-therapy) accredited individual and couple psycho-therapist based in Islamabad. She can be reached at zaramaqbool@yahoo.com