



**BEREAVEMENT AND DISASSOCIATION THROUGH DUAL PROCESS MODEL:  
AN ANALYSIS OF *THOSE CHILDREN***

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**Abstract**

*This thesis explores the literary representation of disassociation and other grief coping strategies in Shahbano Bilgrami's *Those Children*. Using Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement and Disassociation as an analytical framework and Kubler Ross's Five Stages of Grief as a theoretical framework, the study explores how characters experience and express loss within their socio-cultural contexts. Through textual analysis and thematic interpretation, the research examines how the novel constructs emotional and narrative landscape of grief and recovery. The analysis reveals that the novel portrays grief not as a linear psychological process but as fragmented experience shaped by identity, memory and belonging. In *Those Children* it presents an internalized narrative of childhood loss and detachment. The novel highlights moments of emotional disconnection and oscillation between confronting and avoiding grief, aligning with the dual process model's framework. By situating these narratives within broader conversations about disassociation and other grief coping strategies, the study contributes to an interdisciplinary understanding of disassociation and other grief coping strategies in literature*

**Keywords:**

Bereavement, Coping, Socio-cultural, Oscillation, Grief, Disassociation

**INTRODUCTION:**

Disassociation and related grief coping strategies are common during bereavement, and they can be a normal part of the mourning process. Different grief coping strategies can be triggered by grief, especially if the grief is recent or if there is an unresolved past trauma related to loss, abandonment, or anxiety (George A, 2004, p.20-28).

While disassociation and related grief coping strategies can be distressing and impact the grief process, these are not necessarily bad or wrong. In fact, some research suggests that negative disassociation at the beginning of bereavement can be associated with minimal grief symptoms over time (Stroebe, M., Schut, H., & Stroebe, W. (2007).

The phenomenon of grief and related grief coping strategies also find their representation in the literary works all around the globe and owing to their importance need to be scrutinized from different lenses in order to get a better understanding of the on going cognitive and social makeup affecting and getting affected by these phenomena. The themes of disassociation and related grief coping strategies are also obvious in *Those Children*. The current study aims to explore *Those Children* from the the lense of disassociation and other grief coping strategies used by the protagonists.

**Statement of the Problem:**

Bereavement, disassociation and other grief coping strategies are very prevalent features in human life, resulting in a number of significant psychological and physical changes.



The themes of bereavement and other grief coping strategies have been discussed in *Those Children* by Shahbano Bilgrami very effectively.

Despite that the novel still remain to be explored through the lens of disassociation and other grief coping strategies. Thereby, the current study aims to explore *Those Children* from the the lense of disassociation and other grief coping strategies used by the protagonists.

**Research Aim:**

The current study aims to explore *Those Children* from the the lense of disassociation and other grief coping strategies used by the protagonists.

**Research Gap:**

The novel *Those Children* remains to be explored through the perspectives of disassociation and other grief coping strategies.

**Research Objectives:**

- To identify the loss-oriented coping strategies deployed by the characters in the selected novel.
- To analyse the restoration-oriented coping strategies deployed by the characters in the selected novel.
- To examine how the cultural and social context in the novels influence the grief-management strategies employed by the characters.

**Research Questions:**

- What are the different loss-oriented coping strategies deployed by the characters in the selected novel?
- What are the different restoration-oriented coping strategies deployed by the characters in the selected novel?
- How does the cultural and social settings of the novel influence the grief-management methods adopted by its characters?

**LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The exploration of disassociation and other grief coping strategies in *Those Children* reveals how loss affects individuals at personal, social, and cultural levels. Jalil, Rakhshanda, in her article “Infinite Vision of Faith” published in *Outlook Magazine* (2017), highlights the theme of pluralism and religious diversity in *Those Children*. She argues that “elders in the novel are in contest with each other about the issues related to the differences in faith, which results in a division between Ferzana’s maternal and paternal families”. (p. 35). This conflict is evident in *Home Fire* when Aslam, Ferzana’s elder cousin, questions her religious identity: “Bibi, learn something about your Deen” (Bilgrami, 2017, p. 99). Such social and religious clashes contribute to the overarching theme of disassociation and other grief coping strategies in the novel. Barzegar, Abbas, in his article “At Cemeteries,” published in *Al Jazeera* (2020), explores the Sunni-Shia divide and suggests that “at cemeteries, we all say the same prayers. There is no scorecard for pain. Everyone’s truth is real” (Barzegar, A, 2020). This aligns with the portrayal of religious tensions in *Those Children*, where religious identity plays a crucial role in shaping the characters’ struggles with grief and belonging.

John Bowlby, in his book *Separation: Anxiety and Anger* (1976), describes the conditions of such children who lack enough parental care. He says: “Babies are born with an innate behavior to attach with the caregiver. For survival of human beings, attachment is important” (p.216). If children are separated too long, they still crave the love and attention of



a parent. When it disappears, they look for a lot of reassurance and get upset when it is not coming. After the demise of the mother, the next figure a child seeks attachment with is the father. Fathers play a significant role in such chaotic situations. In the case of Ferzana's father, he became so miserable after his wife's loss that he was unable to stabilize his own tensions. Bilgrami uses the phrase "pathetic figure in his white kurta-pyjama" for Ferzana's father (Bilgrami, p. 45). The main reason behind this detachment is that adults also suffer from painful loss. They try to cope with their own grief and are unsure of how to talk to children about death. They are worried about taking care of children alone.

Ammara Khan, in "Home Truth" (DAWN, 2017), critiques *Those Children* by stating that the novel does not fully represent Pakistan's ideology but rather focuses on "a child who strives to adjust in a city which is unknown to her" (Khan, A, 2017). This aligns with Ferzana's sense of detachment after her migration to Pakistan, reinforcing the theme of disassociation. Adikari, Arnav, in "Inside the Longlist of the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature" (*The Wire*, 2017), examines *Those Children* as a narrative of displaced children grappling with grief and identity. He writes that "Ferzana, upon entering Pakistan, struggles to find roots for herself" (p. 6). This sentiment is reflected in her observation: "We existed in a void, suspended between a past that had crumbled and a future that was a stranger to us" (Bilgrami, p. 103). Adikari, Arnav, in "Inside the Longlist of the DSC Prize for South Asian Literature" (*The Wire*, 2017), examines *Those Children* as a narrative of displaced children grappling with grief and identity. He writes that "Ferzana, upon entering Pakistan, struggles to find roots for herself" (p. 6). This sentiment is reflected in her observation: "We existed in a void, suspended between a past that had crumbled and a future that was a stranger to us" (Bilgrami, p. 103). Sahu, Monideepa, in her article "As the Kids See It," (2008) discusses the characterization in *Those Children*, stating that "some characters are extremely desi for some readers while the same characters are quirky for others" (p. 17). She further explores how the migration of Ferzana's family deepens their emotional struggles and exacerbates their sense of loss. The psychological impact of grief and trauma is further explored by Abdulkadir Ünal in his article "The Question of Diasporic Trauma in Kamila Shamsie's Home Fire" (2022), who posits that *Home Fire* "depicts a struggle to reconcile with the past of the characters with both Pakistani and British nationality" (p. 140). Muneeza Shamsie, in her book *Hybrid Tapestries: The Development of Pakistani Literature in English* (2017), examines *Those Children* in the context of historical trauma. She states that "the mention of 1971 and Dhaka seems to connect the novel to the past events of Pakistan and Indo-Pak separation" (p. 256).

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

##### **Research Design:**

This research follows a qualitative design, since grief, disassociation, and coping are complex psychological and emotional processes, a qualitative approach is the most suitable method for this study.

##### **Data Collection:**

The primary source for this study is *Those Children* by Shahbano Bilgrami. This novel is chosen because it directly explores themes of grief, disassociation, and coping. In addition to the novel, secondary sources such as academic articles, books, and literary critiques provide further understanding. The data collection process begins with a close reading of the novel, identifying key passages that highlight grief, emotional struggles, and coping mechanisms.



Detailed notes are taken on character development, emotional responses, and elements that reflect the psychological impact of loss.

**Data Analysis Method:**

To examine how grief, disassociation, and coping are portrayed in *Those Children*, this study uses textual analysis and thematic analysis. Textual analysis focuses on how language, symbols, and emotions are used to convey grief in the novel. This involves carefully examining the words, phrases, and dialogues that reveal the characters' inner pain and emotional chaos. The study also looks at how grief is expressed through actions and interactions, such as how the characters react to loss and how their relationships with others are affected. Additionally, literary techniques such as metaphors, imagery, and symbolism are analyzed to understand how bereavement is portrayed beyond direct descriptions. For example, certain objects, places, or recurring images in the novels may serve as symbols of loss, longing, or emotional detachment, adding depth to the characters' experiences.

Alongside textual analysis, thematic analysis is used to identify recurring ideas and emotional patterns in the novel. This involves categorizing key themes such as loss, isolation, memory, and healing to understand how different characters experience and process grief. By comparing the emotional responses of protagonist of the novel, the study explores how grief manifests in different ways and how coping mechanisms vary from person to person. Some characters struggle with accepting loss, while others gradually find ways to move forward. These themes are then related to psychological theories on grief, particularly Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief Theory and Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement, to explore the deeper meaning behind the characters' emotions and behaviors.

**Theoretical Framework:**

Grief, disassociation, and coping are complex emotional experiences, to explore how these themes appear in *Those Children*, this study uses Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief Theory. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief remains one of the most widely recognized theories of bereavement, outlining the emotional stages individuals often go through when coping with loss. These five stages are:

- Denial – Refusing to accept the reality of the loss.
- Anger – Feelings of frustration and resentment over the loss.
- Bargaining – Attempts to change or reverse the loss.
- Depression – Deep sadness and withdrawal from normal activities.
- Acceptance – Coming to terms with the loss and adjusting to a new reality.

This perspective help explain how the protagonist in the novel react to loss, the struggles she faces, and the ways she tries to cope. The protagonist goes through different emotional stages of grief. By using this psychological theory, this study provides a clearer understanding of how grief is portrayed in literature and how different people experience loss in different ways.

**Analytical Framework:**

This research uses Dual Process Model by Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut to present a more flexible and dynamic approach to grief compared to earlier models. Unlike traditional models that suggest a linear progression through grief, this model recognizes that individuals oscillate between two types of coping mechanisms:



- Loss-Oriented Coping: When individuals focus on the emotional pain of the loss, remembering the deceased, and feeling deep sorrow.
- Restoration-Oriented Coping: When individuals focus on adapting to life without the deceased, engaging in daily activities, and seeking distractions.

#### **DATA ANALYSIS:**

This chapter explores the portrayal of grief in "Those Children" by analyzing the characters' emotional journeys through the framework of the Stroebe Dual Process Model and Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief. Through close reading of the texts, the chapter identifies key instances where characters exhibit behaviors consistent with the loss-oriented and restoration-oriented processes of the Stroebe model. In *Those Children*, the death of the mother casts a long, lingering shadow over Ferzana and her siblings. Their grief is not verbal or emotional but is instead expressed through silence, avoidance, and the inability to process loss. The loss-oriented coping in the novel demonstrates the emotional withdrawal and denial shown by the children, especially in Ferzana's recollections.

For instance, Ferzana describes how they dealt with their mother's death in submissive ways, "In the months after she had gone, we tried, like shipwrecked sailors, to construct a convincing replica of the existence we had left behind in a house that quickly began to resemble a deserted island." (Bilgrami, p. 136). This metaphor of being shipwrecked emphasizes the children's emotional unresponsiveness while also highlighting a grief that detaches rather than connects. Their coping remains in the loss-oriented category, as they mimic normal routines while avoiding any confrontation with their grief. Their father's inability to provide emotional support further establishes their suffering, as seen in the passage, "Baba often stood by his desk... quietly watched us fast-forward through the traditional grieving period of forty days." (p. 179)

Even religious rituals like Fatiha are reduced to routine rather than healing experiences. Moreover, Ferzana's experience of grief reappears years later, especially when she reflects on her mother's ambitions and the unexpected end of her life, "For an instant, I had allowed myself to see Amma not as my mother but as a woman whose life had been cut short... All that squandered possibility was more real to me now." (p. 212). This moment of reflection reveals depression and delayed processing, consistent with the fourth stage of Kübler-Ross's theory. The family's early refusal to speak about their mother, or even mention her name in front of others, aligns with denial, the first stage in the model.

Although loss dominates their early responses, *Those Children* also depicts gradual shifts toward restoration-oriented coping. Restoration, in Stroebe and Schut's terms, involves adjusting to the new reality, taking on new roles, and forming new attachments. In the novel, these are reflected in practical and emotional ways. One of the clearest examples of restoration is when their father remarries and the family dynamics begin to shift. Ferzana herself starts to take more responsibility and mature emotionally. She begins questioning adult relationships, understanding the complexity of loss from a woman's perspective, and analyzing her mother's choices, "When the time came for her to reclaim herself, she fell ill." (p. 107)

#### **FINDINGS:**

The analysis of *Those Children* reveals a number of grief coping strategies shaped by age, personality, family dynamics and cultural context. Responding to research question 1 and 2, the most important finding was that grief looked very different for each character. In *Those Children*, the main character showed signs of grief through silence, emotional pain,



withdrawal, or anger. But over time, some of them began to shift from focusing on the loss to adjusting to a new life. This movement between grieving and rebuilding is explained through Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model, which helped in identifying the emotional journeys of each character. The findings revealed that grief is not a straight line, and healing is not always complete. Some characters grow stronger while others remain stuck. This shows the importance of flexibility in coping and confirms the model's idea of "oscillation" between loss-oriented coping and restoration-oriented coping.

Ferzana, the oldest sister, takes on the responsibility of caring for her siblings after their mother dies. At first, she is confused and emotionally distant. She doesn't talk about her feelings much, but her actions show she is hurting. She often remembers her mother and struggles with the fact that life is moving on without her. This is loss-oriented coping that Ferzana focuses on the pain and memories of her mother.

The younger siblings also show grief in their own ways. Some use their imagination to create fantasy worlds, which helps them escape from the pain. This is a kind of disassociation or a way to block out the hard emotions they are not ready to face. Over time, they begin to return to normal life, showing a natural switch between grieving and healing.

Responding to research question 2, the characters' ways of grieving are not just personal yet they are also shaped by the societies they live in. The novel shows how culture and community expectations influence how people express or hide their grief.

In *Those Children* the family moves from Chicago to Karachi after their mother's death. The shift from a Western environment to a traditional Pakistani society affects how the children can mourn. In Pakistan, open discussion of emotions, especially for children, is often discouraged. This creates a sense of emotional silence in the family. Ferzana and her siblings are expected to be strong and not show their pain. This makes their grief more private and harder to express. Instead of openly crying or talking about their mother, the children learn to hide their feelings, which causes emotional detachment. Also, the absence of emotional support from adults, especially their father, deepens their grief. This adds to the burden on Ferzana, who becomes a parent figure before she is ready.

### CONCLUSION:

Grief is one of the most personal and universal experiences that can be represented through literature. In this study, the novel *Those Children* by Shahbano Bilgrami have been explored through the themes of disassociation and grief related coping strategies, through the help of Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief and Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement. Throughout the analysis in the earlier chapter, it became clear that the novel represent grief not as a one-time emotional reaction, but as an ongoing process. It is influenced by cultural expectations, family dynamics, social settings, and personal beliefs. The characters in the novel do not grieve in the same way. In the case of *Those Children*, grief is quiet, hidden, and private.

Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief explained how characters pass through denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. This theory was especially helpful in understanding the emotions that appeared at different points in each novel. On the other hand, Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model was useful in explaining how the characters moved back and forth between confronting their grief and trying to adapt to normal life. In *Those Children*, grief is portrayed in a quiet form. The story focuses on four siblings who lose their



mother and are moved from Chicago to Karachi. Their grieving process is shaped by the cultural expectations of their new environment and by the silence within their family. The eldest sibling, Ferzana, takes on the role of caretaker, suppressing her own feelings to support her younger siblings. The younger children retreat into imagination, using fantasy to avoid dealing with their mother's death. This disassociation shows how children often use creative means to protect themselves from overwhelming emotions.

By close reading of *Those Children*, it is clear that these novels do not offer quick resolutions to grief. Instead, the novel shows how grief can be confusing, exhausting, and deeply personal. It also shows that while loss changes people, it does not break them. Characters may feel lost for a time, but many find ways to keep going, and to rebuild.

Future research could continue this work by examining how grief is represented in other cultural contexts, or how children and teenagers are portrayed in grieving roles. It could also explore how gender, class, or political identity intersect with emotional responses to loss.

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