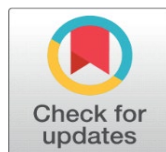
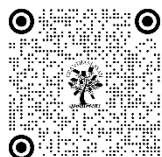


# FROM CONSCIOUSNESS TO UNCONSCIOUSNESS: A BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL STUDY OF QALA

Shohib Bashir <sup>1</sup>  , Binod Mishra <sup>2</sup>  

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, Roorkee, (Uttarakhand), India

<sup>2</sup> Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, (Uttarakhand), India



## ABSTRACT

The purpose of the 'Qala' movie is to diminish the cultural cleavage of gender that predicated the superiority of one gender over the other. The articulation and repetition of notions of gender are culturally constructed and enacted through the formulaic association of things and thoughts with active social participation. These interactions are spooned with anxieties and sufferings that change the whole course of 'Qala', an eponymous character's life upside down. Some questions that this article attempts to answer concerning the psychological condition of Qala are how performativity of male dominance blazes the spark of mental illness, how inferior complex and the issues of bad parenting add flame to the impairment, and how little incidents in her life assimilate negative emotions that lead to the breakdown of Qala resulting in her psychosis. The present article aims to trace the neurological nexus of thoughts by using Engel's 'biopsychosocial model'. This study suggests that biological, psychological, and social conditions played a dominant role in shaping the psychosis of Qala.

**Keywords:** Male Domination, Trauma, Psychological, Patriarchy

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### Corresponding Author

Shohib Bashir, [Shohib\\_b@hs.iitr.ac.in](mailto:Shohib_b@hs.iitr.ac.in)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Modernity brings numerous devastating repercussions to individuals and society. Stress, 'neurasthenia', and other mental health problems arise, not wholly but partially, from the factors associated with modernism, technology, and capitalism. Navin Kumar, in his book *Mental Health and Well-being* (2023), emphasises that "stress is developed through a transition between individual factors and environmental factors (p. 37). Lazarus (1966), on the other hand, defines "stress as a mismatch of the perceived demands of a situation and the individual's assessment of his or her resources to deal with these demands" qtd in [Kumar](#)

(2022), p. 22. Stress can be manifested in various forms depending upon the situation, thereby creating a state of a conundrum. Gender is one such important conundrum which gives rise to several cultural and social connotations of stress that abnegate the old notions of gender.

The cultural and social understanding of gender is based on the tradition that focuses on the biological anatomy of humans and associates the notion of superiority and subordination from the time of birth. This demarcation creates a certain kind of tension which situates males in the higher hierarchical level and ascribes women to a lower place in the structure. This reality is created through “language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social signs” Butler (1998), p. 270, which captures the essence of patriarchal structures. In the same way, through performative practices, Qala (baby girl) becomes the victim of a male-dominated society where she struggles to upstand women’s identity in the Indian music industry of the late 90s. In the account of the historical study, patriarchy possessed the “core value of control and domination in almost every area of existence” Khurana (2018), p. 116. Some questions that this article attempts to answer concerning the psychological condition of Qala are how performativity of male dominance blazes the spark of mental illness; how inferior complex and the issue of bad parenting adds flames to the impairment, and how little incidents in her life assimilate negative emotions that lead to the breakdown of Qala and finally to her suicide.

The eponymous character Qala is a girl child born in a reputed family and is blamed for killing her baby brother in her mother’s womb by absorbing all the nutrition. During her nourishment throughout childhood, she follows her mother’s way of receiving her affection and love. Qala starts chasing the dreams of her mother of being a legendary singer like her father. This paper traces the life events of Qala from her childhood to her death and from being an ordinary girl to a lady who wins the Golden Vinyl award. While analysing the movie, this study envisages a ‘biopsychosocial model’ of disease that plays a pivotal role in shaping the psychosis of Qala. This study proposes that aberration in mental states can be affected by the combination of biological, psychological, and social factors in the individual’s life. Additionally, this research suggests that her hallucination of seeing Jagan despite being dead (bio), her relationship with her mother (psychological), and her inner urge to become a leading singer in the male-dominated industry (social) culminates in a serious medical exigency that leads to the eventual psychosis of Qala. The critical events like Qala’s music rehearsal with her mother, her mother’s attachment and love towards Jagan, the reasons behind her urge to succeed only to seek attention from her mother, and finally, how all these factors lead to her downfall, have been examined to bring out a new perspective to the visual literacy.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

George W Engel’s biopsychosocial model provides a different perspective to analyses the role of psychosocial dimensions in Qala’s psychosis. Engel, in his classic article *The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine*, surpasses the old traditional medical model of disease, commonly known as the biomedical model. The primary impetus of this biomedical model is to view disease “with molecular biology (as) its basic scientific discipline” (p. 379). This model accounts for the somatic aberrations only and excludes the psychosocial dimension of illness. According to Engel, the diagnostic criteria of disease are not only based on the etiology of a biochemical and neurophysiological phenomenon but also “require consideration of psychological, social, and cultural factors” (2012, p. 280) plausible

for examining the disease. He brought the psychological and social detriments that modify the experience of illness in the development of the disease. [Baum & Posluszny \(1999\)](#), in their work, demonstrate that biological, psychological, and social factors intertwine with each other to impact health adversely (p. 139). The factors for human illness can be measured in proportions contributing equally to the development of disease. In other words, “biological, psychological, and social processes are integrally and interactively involved in physical health and illness” [Suls & Rothman \(2004\)](#), p. 119. In the case of ‘psychosis’ of Qala, biological, psychological, and social factors inadvertently play their role in developing aberration in her mental health. In other words, the development of disease, which is specified by biological science, contains impetus from psychological and social phenomena. Qala’s psychosis, which is considered as a disease by biological science, is the result of the combined effect of psychological and social impetuses. The manifestation of stress was spread in different dimensions of her life. We look at Qala’s life from three different perspectives and combine them to trace the factors behind Qala’s psychosis. The line of characterisation is shown through her hallucination of seeing Jagan, despite being dead as biological, her strenuous relationship with her mother as psychological, and her inner urge to become a leading singer in the male-dominated industry as a social aspect. This study, thus, uses the biopsychosocial model given by George Engel to demonstrate how these three factors affect her mental health and develop psychosis that ends up with her suicide.

### 3. DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOSIS: A BIOLOGICAL ABERRATION

Disorders in mental health may be the result of the phenomenology of social, cultural, psychological, or neurobiological experiences. The cognitive impairment in the brain is developed by the dysfunction of the biopsychosocial schemas. [Kuipers \(2006\)](#), p. 25. On the other hand, recent studies show the involvement of social phenomena such as urban upbringing, social isolation, and migration [Boydell et al. \(2004\)](#), p. 599 in aberrant brain development. The disruption of schemas generates a vulnerable predisposition that results in emotional changes and leads to different vulnerable complications. This research will try to relate the life events of Qala to the hypothesis that claims the reason for psychosis is mainly the poor understanding of the theory of mind, emotional instability, and an adverse social environment. The pathological condition of psychosis is not limited to these factors only, but we take these as the major reasons for the development of psychotic impairment in Qala.

Faris suggests that “any form of isolation that cuts the person off from intimate social relations for an extended period of time may possibly lead to any form of mental disorder” [Kohn & Clausen \(1955\)](#), p. 265. The upbringing of Qala in social isolation, her loathing relationship with her mother, the adoption of Jagan by her mother as her stepbrother, her zeal for fame and the misdeeds she commits are some significant events in her life that reshape her mental landscape. Furthermore, the emotions released by social incidents at their zenith interact with biological and psychological aspects to draw the occupation of illness. [Howes et al. \(2004\)](#), p. 10. The psychosocial schema plays a vital role in the development of the biological dimension of illness. The phenomenon defined under the ambit of physical and behavioural sciences characterises the biological aspect of the disease. She spent her childhood in solitary confinement while rehearsing tanpura and vocals. In the movie, it is evident that without her dissenting mother, there is no other person with

whom she shares her feelings and inner thoughts. The influence of the stored negative memory “leads to the anomalous conscious experience” [Garety et al. \(2001\), p. 190](#). There are some scenes in the movie where she puts letters under the secret box. This imagery is the validation of her unspoken and unaddressed thoughts and desires, which are significant in the proximal development of elements of neurotic pain. The glimpses of prodrome are noticeable in the body language of Qala when her mother taunts her for her unworthiness, unattractive looks and for not being talented. These triggering events fluster the emotional neuro architecture of her mind and lead to the disturbance in her cognitive dimensions. The moments especially when her mother says, “Qala kahan ja rhi ho, Jagan ke liye dhood le ke aao” (Qala, where are you going? Go and get some milk for Jagan) [Dutt \(2022\), 29:40-29:45](#), “I hope you did not put these ideas into his head” [Dutt \(2022\), 48:22-48:30](#), and so on. These events potentially connect with the arousal of anxiety and ended with the neurotic dysfunction. The introduction of Jagan into the family of Qala intensifies the terror and traumatic moments, which yield significant quasi-psychotic effects on her interior mind. The desire to bring the ‘Golden Vynyl’ to her house, which she thinks will help in bringing her mother close to her, becomes the cause of her consistently distorted visions. The very first time when Qala is standing before the medals and souvenirs, she sees Jagan (who was dead at that time) said her, “Apni dewaarun pe mere khawabun ki numaishh kar rhi ho” (Showing off my dreams on your walls? [Dutt \(2022\), 13:21-13-30](#), She is terrified with tremors, and she falls down immediately. [Close and Garety \(1998\)](#) find that hallucinations and delusions that are linked with episodes associated with the feeling of guilt and self-doubt (p. 193) act as a transmitter of psychotic relapse.

#### 4. MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP: DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOLOGICAL INSIGHT

In 1890, Willian James stated that Brain is “made up of nothing else than nervous arrangements, representing impressions and movements” [William \(1890\) \(p.18\)](#). In philosophy and biology, the term ‘mental life’ is associated with various threads of explanation, but the basic explanation associates it with thoughts and emotions. The construction of a panoply of mental life depends on various domains of day-to-day life events and deciphers the significant influence of the social environment. In the beginning of the movie, the tension in Qala's life is portrayed through narrow frames in a somber atmosphere. In one of the scenes, her mother is giving a lecture to Qala on her perspective future in a tight-angle shot, “*Samajti ho, Kahan Samajti ho par Samaj Jaooogi, Naam k aage Pandit lagna* Chahiye bhaini nhi (Do you understand? Well, how can you understand? But someday you will. Your name should have Pandit before it. And not Bai after it) [Dutt \(2022\), 09:30-09:40](#). Her relationship with her mother develops a certain kind of tenuousness that evokes negative emotions throughout the movie. These words affect her and leave a traumatic impression creating tension in Qala's mind since her very childhood. Thus, abnormal neurodevelopment processes might originate from traumatic events in childhood. These are the implications that her mother tries to teach her about the social structure of the society where the Pandit surname only comes after a male name. Urmila (her mother) wants Qala to achieve such heights of glory so that she will be given the title of Pandit, which represents legendariness. The long-suffering, voiceless, and innocent cuckoo girl gets stuck in the inextricable tapestry, where on one side, there is a long solidifying tenacious mien which symbolizes power, subordination, and corruption. On the other side, the edifice and importunity that shows terrible seriousness accrued with the specificity of her mother's desires.

Qala's train of thought adheres to the fragile mental landscape, which according to psychologists Smallwood and Schooler (2015), "is not always tethered to the here and now; rather, consciousness ebbs and flows" (qtd. In Scholl (2018), p. 42.

There are numerous incidents to expose toxicity in her relationship with her mother. In one such instance, while rehearsing with tanpura, she misses the rhythm and stops, and this makes Urmila Devi angrily spurt, "Tanpura neeche rakho, neeche rakho aqal main zero, shakal main zero, zero talent" (set the lute down, set it down now. Brains? Zero. Beauty? Zero, Zero talent). Dutt (2022), 17:56-18:15. According to Adler, there is a dynamic force behind all the activities of humans, from inferiority to superiority, perfection, and totality Jindal & Gupta (1965), p. 32. It is the dynamic force that urges Qala to strive for superiority so that her mother adores her. And this impelling force creates a state of a conundrum where she strives for superiority in her zealous path to musical glory at all costs. It is her obsession with her mother that becomes the cause of psychological tension for Qala. For instance, when Jaqan tells Qala about the Golden Vinyl, which Urmila Devi wants him to win, a significant change happens in her body language. She says, "Maa ko jo wo Sunhera award chahiye, Main la ke dunggi" (Golden Award that Ma wants, I'll get it for her) Dutt (2022), 43:45-43:50. She does everything that can be done to get this award without knowing the moral worth of her action. This continuous tension is gradually converted into traumatic experiences, and the experience of trauma creates a psychological vulnerability that leads to the development of psychotic symptoms. Therefore, stress and anxiety associated with Qala's life play an integral role in developing the biological aberration that develops as a by product of her obsession with her mother.

## 5. DOMINANCE AND SUBVERSION: SOCIAL ASPECT

The discussion of patriarchy as a social factor has not been neglected, as it serves as a prevalent theme of the film. The concept of patriarchy is associated with various underlying meanings depending upon the different manifestations. However, Anvita Dutt is very fastidious while drawing the contour to show how patriarchy manifests in the music industry of the 90s. In a very interesting way, patriarchal structures were inflicted on Qala through the intention of improvisation. But the question arises, improvisation of what and by whom? The irony of the situation is that it is Qala's mother who prioritises Jagan over Qala. It is part of the trajectory that shows on the one side that Qala's mother steadily perpetuated. And on the other side, gender disparity and objectification of women substantiate the impact of patriarchy on Qala's life. Kate Millett, through her *Sexual Politics* (1970), theorises patriarchy on the principle that "male shall dominate female" (qtd. In Beechey (1979), p. 69). In Qala's life, undoubtedly, it was his father's milestones that she strived to achieve. The standard of excellence and greatness was carried by her father, Dewan Manjushree. She attempts to get the Golden Vinyl only to maintain the dignity of her father's legacy. Finally, when she achieves the landmark set by the male-dominated industry, she is asked a question how she feels now, and she responds, "Thak ke ghar paunchy hun, aur Maa ne darwaza Khola hai, Ye Mere Pita ki Virasaat hai, aur Meri Maa ka Sapna" (Reached home tired and Maa has opened the door, this is my father's legacy and my mother's dream) Dutt (2022), 03:20-03:36, the above-quoted lines, it is not Qala who wishes to do something for her, It is her mother who controls the space through the tapestry of culture. She is struck between these lines of her inner self and an outer self where she wants to achieve all that her father once achieved and convinces her mother that she is capable of achieving.



Moreover, the struggle she undergoes while crossing the barriers created by the music director is of its kind. When at an event on the launch of Jagan, Sanyal Sahab asks Qala, “Kaise ho” (How are you), and she replies, “Aap mujhe dekh skte ho (You can actually see me?), I thought I was invisible” Dutt (2022), 51:01-51:10. These lines are vantage points that exemplify the gender disparity that existed in the music industry of the 90s. As Sanyal Sahab replies, “tumhe koi kaise andekha kar skate hai (How could anyone not see you, my dear) Dutt (2022), 51:12-51:16. The paragon of sexual objectification is indelible and acts as an operator of patriarchy in many settings as visible in the quoted scenes. This movie is full of such images that show how discriminatory acts are committed based on gender. But while fighting these social evils, Qala struggles with the inner consciousness that troubles her time and again. These social troubles appropriate the negative emotions in her interiority and significantly intensify the triggering flame that ends up in psychosis.

## 6. CONCLUSION

With the suicide of Qala, the story ends with a multifaceted opening. This makes room for an important medical reflection; that is to say, to what extent is the prior experiences cumulatively affect the health of the character? We propose a strategy that focuses on Engel’s ‘biopsychosocial model’ to evaluate the influences of these three dimensions on Qala’s health. It is crucial to consider her mental breakdown due to the agony of various events that happened in her life that serve as the basis for the biological origin of her illness. The childhood trauma and her contested relationship with her mother instigate the feeling of fear and inadequacy that occupy her psychological space. The most challenging conditioning for Qala is to break the prevalent patriarchy that always poses hurdles in her life. This pinpoints the collusion of the social dimension in her mental breakdown. The biological, psychological, and sociological factors serve as the basis for her mental breakdown and under the influence of which she commits suicide. Thus, this study concludes by stating that the biopsychosocial model is valuable for identifying the causes of illness through these three aspects. But this study limits itself to providing the essential ground of study, which falls into the area of medical humanities. However, Anvita Dutt has delicately addressed various other aspects which are prevalent and significant and left for further study.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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