



# The Act of Writing as Therapy: Storytelling and Memory in *The Blue Bedspread*

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Manuscript ID:  
BIJ-SPL2-JAN26-MD-145

Subject: English

Received : 03.09.2025

Accepted : 13.10.2025

Published : 31.01.2026

DOI: 10.64938/bijsi.v10si2.26.Jan145

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## Abstract

*The Blue Bedspread* (1999) by Raj Kamal Jha is a moving examination of trauma, memory, and the therapeutic power of narrative. The story, which is set on a single night in Calcutta, centers on an unidentified narrator who composes stories for his late sister's infant son who is up for adoption. By doing this, Jha presents writing as a healing tool that helps the narrator deal with loss, face repressed feelings, and preserve memories that may otherwise be lost. The child represents continuity as well as absence, emphasizing the human need to preserve ties to the past while dealing with loss. The relationship between memory, imagination, and identity is emphasized throughout the book. In order to achieve emotional control and self-understanding, the narrator manipulates painful events by fusing autobiographical truth with fiction and rearranging chaos into a logical story. Memory, closeness, and emotional fortitude are all reflected in symbolism, especially in the blue bedspread. The narrator's work exemplifies the power of literature beyond individual healing by promoting empathy, intergenerational connection, and social continuity. In the end, *The Blue Bedspread* sheds light on storytelling as an essential human activity that is relational, ethical, and therapeutic. Jha demonstrates how writing helps people deal with trauma, preserve memories, and find hope and continuity in the midst of life's significant losses by presenting literature as a channel for emotional survival, moral involvement, and resilience in addition to being an artistic form.

**Keywords:** therapeutic writing, trauma, memory, grief, narrative therapy

*The Blue Bedspread* (1999) by Raj Kamal Jha is a spooky, evocative examination of memory, trauma, and the human psyche. The story, which takes place during one night in Calcutta, centers on an unidentified narrator who composes stories for his deceased sister's newborn child, who is waiting to be adopted in the room next to him. This tale offers a moving reflection on grief, loss, and the healing power of narrative. Jha illustrates how literature may be used not only as a creative endeavor but also as a means of processing pain, facing suppressed emotions, and preserving memories that might otherwise be lost

through the narrator's writing. The story emphasizes the human desire for connection, comprehension, and significance even in the face of catastrophe by showcasing storytelling as a survival tactic and an emotional lifeline.

The idea that writing is a kind of therapy lies at the core of *The Blue Bedspread*. The narrator uses narrative as a tool to express complicated feelings right from the start. He creates a safe, imaginative environment for the youngster to confront his sadness, remorse, and sorrow by writing him "happy stories and sad stories." By doing this, the narrator



externalizes his inner distress, giving it a physical shape that can be thought about, comprehended, and eventually resolved. The advantages of expressive writing have long been highlighted by psychologists, who point out that it can assist people in processing trauma, controlling their emotions, and making sense of overwhelming situations. These psychological concepts are reflected in the storytelling process in Jha's book: the narrator turns personal suffering into narrative coherence by carefully choosing words, organizing sentences, and creatively framing events. Through this process, he is able to restore control over his emotions, which would otherwise be chaotic and uncontrollable. Writing becomes into a mirror and a shield, allowing the narrator to see, face, and comprehend his own sorrow while also shielding him from the debilitating weight of grief.

The narrative's reliance on recollection is among its most remarkable features. Fragments of the narrator's early years, family ties, and early loss experiences are preserved in his stories. In a way, writing serves as a way to preserve memories that could otherwise be lost due to time's eroding effects. These narratives serve as archives for the past, preserving memories and feelings that are essential to the narrator's identity. The child the stories are written for represents both continuity and absence—the possibility of living without the narrator's sister while also serving as a constant reminder of her passing. By writing, the narrator preserves his sister's memory while navigating the agonizing reality of loss. This dichotomy highlights a basic human need: to preserve ties to the past and to interpret events that have influenced one's identity. Thus, the act of preserving memory through storytelling is not just a means of remembering but also a crucial psychological survival strategy.

In *The Blue Bedspread*, symbolism is essential, especially through the blue blanket that serves as the title. The narrator's personal memories of the past are reflected in the blanket's gradual fading from its former vibrancy and vitality. It turns into a blank canvas for his creativity, a storehouse for memories and story projection. Jha uses the blanket metaphor to illustrate how memories and things can serve as pillars

to assist people go through sorrow and maintain their feeling of continuity. Intimacy, safety, and emotional defense are also symbolized by the blanket—the narrator's effort to provide a loving atmosphere for the child and, consequently, for himself. Broadly speaking, the blue bedspread represents the interaction between material things and emotional experiences, showing how physical objects can have significant symbolic meaning and aid in the healing process of the heart.

In the book, writing is also portrayed as a way to express ideas that cannot be spoken verbally. The narrator frequently discusses taboo, socially sensitive, or emotionally taxing subjects—truths and feelings that are repressed in daily life. Discussions on trauma, sorrow, and sexuality are frequently restricted by cultural norms in many Indian communities, which leaves people with little options for expressing their emotions. The narrator can access a safe, private place through writing where these emotions can be expressed and examined without worrying about criticism. This is similar to therapeutic expressive writing techniques, where expressing repressed feelings and ideas promotes self-awareness, coping, and emotional release. Through the stories, he is able to face challenging realities in a way that is both helpful and limited, ranging from personal vulnerability to dysfunctional familial relationships and mortality.

The narrative's blurred line between inventive fiction and autobiographical truth is another noteworthy aspect of Jha's work. The subjective character of recollection is reflected in the narrator's stories, which alternate between reality and imagination. Human memory is often influenced by emotion, perception, and interpretation, making it rarely objective. The narrator exercises agency over his past by rewriting events to make them emotionally understandable and narratively logical by fusing aspects of fiction with lived experience. Writing is naturally therapeutic because of this interaction between imagination and reality. He is able to reframe traumatic events, bring order to chaos, and deal with trauma in a way that feels secure, purposeful, and empowering thanks to the process.



In *The Blue Bedspread*, storytelling is also a highly relational activity. The narrator's writing is an act of love, continuity, and care even though the child may never have conscious memories of the stories. He uses storytelling as a means of establishing a connection with the child, his deceased sister, and the larger human experience. Here, writing moves beyond the individual and into the social and generational sphere, demonstrating the ability of narrative to promote comprehension, empathy, and kinship beyond emotional and temporal barriers. Jha's novel brilliantly highlights the fact that therapeutic writing is not just about self-healing but also about forming connections and maintaining relational legacies.

The emotional and moral aspects of grieving are also highlighted in the book. The narrator actively negotiates existential and moral issues through writing rather than passively reflecting on grief. He struggles with responsibility, guilt, and the constraints of representation and recollection. In this way, storytelling serves as a tool for self-reflection as well as an ethical act—an effort to stand in for those impacted by catastrophe and to bear witness to suffering. Thus, the story demonstrates how literature may act as a moral and emotional compass, providing comfort and understanding while guiding people through the difficulties of the human experience.

Writing, memory, and trauma are all intricately and subtly entwined throughout the book. Although the narrator's experience of loss is extremely terrible, writing helps him cope with it without feeling overtaken. He establishes a psychological space where trauma can be assimilated rather than denied or detached by organizing and narrativizing his suffering. This is consistent with contemporary psychology theories that emphasize the importance of narrative reconstruction in the healing process following trauma. He can tackle upsetting memories, delve deeply into emotions, and piece together disparate events to form a coherent sense of who he is through writing. In turn, the stories serve as memory banks, therapeutic tools, and examples of resiliency.

Additionally, Jha's storytelling style adds to the book's therapeutic value. He blends poetic imagination with sharp truth in his lyrical yet accurate

prose. The language flows naturally between the narrator's inner self and the outside world, reflecting the rhythms of thinking and emotion. Readers are drawn into the narrator's emotional environment by the rich sensory imagery, which includes the child in the adjacent room, the sounds and scents of Calcutta, and the texture of the blue bedspread. The novel's psychological realism is enhanced by this immersive narrative technique, which also strengthens the link between emotional processing and storytelling. Writing itself turns into a type of embodied therapy by addressing both the cognitive and perceptual aspects of experience.

The story also examines the universality of grief and the human need to find purpose in the wake of loss. The narrator's experiences are unique, yet the emotional truths they express are universal. Jha's focus on storytelling as a coping mechanism resonates with a wide range of people since loss, memory, and the pursuit of continuity are common human issues. Writing is shown as a basic human reaction to death and transience—a means of claiming continuity, maintaining identity, and navigating life's ambiguities. Thus, the healing practice of storytelling turns into a deep reflection on what it means to be human.

The novel's examination of identity development through memory and narrative is another significant aspect. The stories the narrator tells the youngster, his memories, and his interpretations of the past are all intricately entwined with his self-perception. He can resolve competing emotions, reflect on formative experiences, and express a cohesive sense of self through writing. Narrative serves as a psychological and existential tool in this situation. The narrator creates a persona that is robust, introspective, and able to deal with loss by actively using memory and imagination. This emphasizes one of the novel's main points, which is that storytelling is a tool for self-awareness, healing, and personal development rather than just a chronicle of events.

The book also discusses the moral and emotional obligations of storytelling. The narrator's stories are acts of kindness toward another person, not just personal exercises. He spreads the advantages of his



therapeutic writing by giving the child a loving, imaginative environment, turning personal suffering into an act of kindness and interpersonal connection. This ethical aspect emphasizes the moral and social importance of storytelling since it serves as a means of empathy, comprehension, and continuous transmission between generations in addition to being a means of self-healing.

Another recurrent theme is the interaction between voice and quiet. Writing gives voice to the unsaid in a society where tragedy, loss, and emotional vulnerability are frequently suppressed. By avoiding social norms and cultural taboos, the narrator's personal stories offer a secure and genuine platform for expression. This emphasizes a crucial component of therapeutic writing: it allows people to express experiences that could otherwise be socially suppressed, which promotes healing, insight, and emotional release. In addition to processing his own pain, the narrator underlines the significance of expression as a fundamental component of human existence by giving voice to the unimaginable.

In summary, *The Blue Bedspread* by Raj Kamal Jha is a profound examination of trauma, memory, bereavement, and the therapeutic value of storytelling. Writing serves as a therapeutic method for the narrator, allowing him to process unimaginable feelings, preserve memories, deal with trauma, and keep in touch with his own past, the child, and his deceased sister. Jha illustrates how writing may

function as a personal haven as well as a means of fostering relationships and intergenerational connections through the symbolic usage of items like the blue bedspread, the blending of fictional and autobiographical storylines, and the immersive, lyrical literary style.

The book sheds light on the transformational power of literature by serving as a reminder to readers that storytelling is an essential tool for human resilience, ethical reflection, and emotional survival in addition to being a form of artistic expression. Jha emphasizes writing's ability to offer comfort, promote comprehension, and create meaning in the face of life's most significant losses by portraying it as a therapeutic activity. Storytelling is shown in *The Blue Bedspread* as a vital human activity that enables us to face our history, work through our sorrow, hold onto our memories, and, in the end, discover hope and continuity in the midst of adversity.

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