

Chapter III

Divested of Innocence: Child Sexual Abuse and Trauma in Dina Mehta's

Getting Away with Murder

Children are innocent, undefiled, pliable, and virtuous, and are the future of human civilization. It is commonly believed that children know nothing and should be properly taken care of by adults. The undefiled minds of children can be crucial in determining their own progress as well as the progress of the nation. It is the responsibility of the adults to offer proper nurturing to the children, i.e., by providing them with education, moral values, and a safe space to live. Children should be fearless in speaking the truth and sharing their experiences, hopes, and desires. The children should feel “carefree, playing in the sun, not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul” (Pelzer 166). It is the primary responsibility of the parents and society to ensure a bright future for their children.

Though children are innocent, fragile, and powerless, it does not mean that they are helpless, and adults can exploit them as they please. Children are neither the possessions of their parents nor helpless objects of charity, but are living beings who need adult support to survive until they gain the basic knowledge of living. Kahlil Gibran, in his poem “On Children,” discusses how parenting should be and what is expected from a good parent. He says,

Your children are not your children.

They are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself.

They come through you but not from you,

And though they are with you yet they belong not to you.

You may give them your love but not your thoughts,

For they have their own thoughts.

Child abuse occurs when adults take advantage of a child's reliability and helplessness without taking them into account as fellow beings. It includes verbal, physical, and psychological abuse. The experience they learn from society should make them feel at ease and not cringe. But the abuse of children, specifically sexual abuse of children, bulldozes the future of their lives, and the impact of the heinous act creates a negative vibe among them.

Child sexual abuse is a serious and dehumanising offense that has been in society from time immemorial. Until the nineteenth century, it was not even considered a crime. Recently, that subject has been focused on seriously, and it is realised well that child abuse can mar the victims for a lifetime. Abuse may victimise children irrespective of their age, race, culture, and socio-economic background. The problem is compounded when the abuser is from the family itself. Researchers and social activists try their best to cut off this issue and help the victims overcome their horrible past.

Literature plays a crucial role in eradicating abuse by raising public awareness of the horrors of the act through writings on the subject. These writers have a significant impact on readers because many of these articulations are personal experiences, written as a testimony, or as a call to others who have undergone similar experiences to voice out and be heard. Thus, it offers solace to the survivor by offering light to their future. Writers are very careful in tackling this daunting, emotionally-charged subject. The writers look at the issues of child sexual abuse, its psychological impact on the victims, and how it affects the lives of the victims and the people around them.

Children's sexual abuse is explored in literary works such as Gabriel Tallent's *My Absolute Darling*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Laura Wiess's *Such a Pretty Girl*, and Mahesh Dattani's play *Thirty Days in September*. In these texts, the victims are young and immature; they are oblivious to what exactly happened to them. They are forced to be silent to cover the crime and injustice that had happened to them. The perpetrators are mainly family members, such as fathers and uncles, rather than strangers. The authors effectively convey the trauma that abused children experience as well as the consequences on their psyche. Dina Mehta is one of the writers who exposed the brutality of child sexual abuse in her play *Getting Away with Murder*. She illustrates how an unhealthy sexual relationship impacts her and those around her through the character Sonali.

Child sexual abuse is a form of abuse that involves a perpetrator approaching a child or a minor with a sexual desire or a threat, forcing or manipulating the child to be involved in sexual activities. Sexual abuse includes range of activities like "child's viewing sexual activity of adults (including exhibitionism, in which an adult exposes him/herself to the child(ren), accidentally or intentionally viewing adults having intercourse, and viewing sexually related materials such as movies or books)" (Conte 2). It also involves "fondling," "oral-genital contact," and "digital penetration," to intercourse between adults and children. Sexual abuse also involves "the use of children by adults in pornography. Sexual abuse is also sometimes thought of as sexual activity between same-age or near-age children and adolescents, as well as older adolescents and younger children" (Conte 2). According to Driver and Droisen, child sexual abuse is:

Sexual behaviour may involve touching parts of the child or requesting the child touch oneself, itself or others; ogling the child in a sexual manner, taking pornographic photographs, or requiring the child look at parts of the body, sexual acts are other material in a way which is arousing to oneself; and verbal

suggestions or comments to the child which are intended to threaten the child sexually or otherwise to provide sexual gratification for oneself. It must be defined by every circumstance in which it occurs: in families representative of all classes, races and social strata; in state-run and private institutions; on the street; in classrooms; in pornography, advertising and films. (4-5)

Fraser defines child sexual abuse as “the exploitation of a child for the sexual gratification of an adult” (qtd. in Kinnear, 2). In their article, “The Psychological Treatment of Sexual Abuse in Children and Adolescents: A Meta-analysis,” Julio Sánchez-Meca et al. state that child sexual abuse is the cause of asymmetry between the child and the abuser:

Child sexual abuse can be considered an activity aimed at providing sexual pleasure, stimulation or gratification to an adult, who uses a child for this purpose, taking advantage of their dominant position. It is also considered to be sexual abuse when there are circumstances of asymmetry between the victim and the aggressor ... when there is asymmetry of power, as the offender controls or has some kind of authority over the victim. (68)

Adults’ sexual activity with children arouses feelings of horror and disgust. It has been firmly condemned as a violation. The offenders never give importance to children’s emotions and concerns. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines child sexual abuse as:

the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a

child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. This may include but is not limited to: the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; the exploitative use of child in prostitutions or other unlawful sexual practices; the exploitative use of children pornographic performances and materials. (15-16)

Sexual abuse of children is a felony. In 2012, the legal system of India specially enacted “The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act” to protect children from offenders who sexually assault or harass children. It defines child sexual abuse as “a child as any person below eighteen years of age, and defines different forms of sexual abuse, including penetrative and non-penetrative assault, as well as sexual harassment and pornography” (Harit 4).

Child sexual abuse is rampant around the world and has become a huge problem in India, with an unusually high number of cases. According to data from the National Crime Record Bureau, 109 children were sexually abused every day in India in 2018. In 2017, 32,608 cases were reported, and in 2018, 39,827 cases were reported (“109 children”). The Ministry of Women and Child Development has released data on child sexual abuse cases reported online that between 1st March 2020 to 31st August 2020, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAS) received 420 child sexual abuse calls (“Cybercrimes”). Overall, the crime against children is on the rise and is a great disgrace to humanity, and it shows the brutal and disgusting nature of human beings who are toying with the feelings and lives of innocent children.

Children are subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation in all spheres, such as at school, at home, or in their community. Children are vulnerable to sexual violence since

they are weak and dependent. Their reliance on adults to meet their basic needs makes them helpless and unable to make decisions, and their weaker position becomes a potent tool for perpetrators to exercise their authority over children. Especially in a family structure, adults are in charge, so they want their children to obey. If innocent children disobey the will of adults, they are punished for their impertinence.

Power is a “degree of control exercised by certain people/ institutions/organisations over material, human, intellectual and financial resources” (Chaudhary, 40). Many individuals utilise power to dominate and oppress those who are weaker or lack power. From the radical feminist perspective, the sexual abuse of children is not merely an expression of sexuality but also a manifestation of power (Solomon, 1992). Excessive authority concentrated in a single individual ultimately results in corruption, as illustrated in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*. The pigs abuse their power and change the commandments according to their desires and actions. The androcentric society does the same; it gives power to men and allows them to determine the laws that benefit them while simultaneously discriminating against others, especially women and children. In the novel *1984*, O’Brien tells Winston what power means:

The party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in good of other; we are interested solely in power, pure power. What pure power means you will understand presently... we know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now you begin to understand me. (332)

Sonali, the protagonist of the play *Getting Away With Murder*, is the victim of child sexual abuse. With her father deceased and her widowed mother compelled to seek financial assistance from her brother, her maternal uncle emerges as a crucial support system for the family. Sonali's mother venerates him, viewing him as a figure of authority, and subsequently adheres to his directives without question. As a powerful patriarch, Sonali's uncle embodies an authoritative presence; however, rather than fulfilling his obligation to protect her, he exploits his position to violate her trust. Beginning at the tender age of eight, he subjects Sonali to his sexual exploitation, a situation that persists until his eventual death.

The refusal to acknowledge and the silence surrounding instances of abuse by victims and their families constitute significant factors contributing to the escalating incidence of child sexual abuse cases. A mere fraction of these cases have been reported, while many others remain unreported or undetected. The identification of this social issue is profoundly challenging until victims disclose their offenders. This assertion is corroborated by Jean La Fontaine in her book, *Child Sexual Abuse*, where she highlights that the silence of victims underpins the prevalence of unreported cases. Additionally, La Fontaine emphasises that the unequal power dynamics between children and adults contribute to the silencing of children. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, India, has reported that child sexual abuse is still a taboo in India. Parents often neglect to discuss sexual matters with their children during puberty, a critical period marked by significant physical and emotional transformations. This lack of dialogue can lead children to perceive the silence as an indication that such topics are taboo, fostering a sense of secrecy around sexual abuse. So, they fail to inform their parents when someone abuses them. The silence of children encourages the abuser to continue his/her crime without any fear of being caught.

Another reason why victims do not report the crimes is that they fear reprisals from family members, and that could create uproar in the family. To protect their family pride, the families refuse to let the children speak out about the trauma. Families of victims often strive to keep instances of abuse out of the public eye, a phenomenon that inadvertently facilitates the continued perpetration of such egregious acts by abusers. Sonali makes multiple attempts to communicate her distress to her mother; however, all her efforts are met with failure. Her mother tends to prioritise her son Gopal's assertions over those of her daughter, demonstrating a discernible bias in her attentiveness. This preference underscores the role of gender discrimination in exacerbating violence against women and girls. By neglecting the needs and concerns of Sonali, her mother leaves her daughter vulnerable, thereby jeopardising her future. Had she been more attentive and receptive to Sonali's plight, it is conceivable that her daughter could have been spared from enduring any form of abuse long ago.

Parents, teachers, caretakers, and relatives warn children to avoid strangers and refuse anything they offer since they believe and educate children that strangers can be sexual offenders. But in reality, "Children are usually abused by an individual known to them who wants continued access to them" (Heger, et.al 654). According to the data from POSCO, in India, in 2021, 97.1% of perpetrators were well-known to the children. The proportion of known offenders was 96% in 2020 (Pandit). Sometimes, family members of the children also become the perpetrators. Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), the largest anti-sexual violence organization, gives the statistics of perpetrators of child sexual violence in which "59% were acquaintances, 34% were family members and 7% were strangers" ("Perpetrators"). The criminals come from all walks of life and various socioeconomic levels, so it is impossible to say where they come from.

Family serves as the most secure and protective environment, and as J. K. Rowling observes, “Family is a life jacket in the stormy sea of life” (*Harry Potter*). However, intrafamilial child sexual abuse undermines this belief and fundamentally challenges the essential assumptions surrounding parenthood, children, and their relationships with adults. If the home is rendered unsafe, then no other location can be deemed sufficiently secure for the child. Engaging in sexual activities with children constitutes a violation of normative sexual behaviour, eliciting feelings of disgust and horror. This egregious conduct invariably involves children as victims, inflicting profound damage on their psychological well-being.

Distinguishing between abusers and non-abusers is exceedingly difficult. Many individuals assume that abusers exhibit overtly strange or violent behaviours; however, the reality is often quite different. Abusers typically conceal their predatory behaviour and present themselves as ordinary, often appearing kind and trustworthy. They cultivate trust with children before gradually initiating abuse. Victims are often subjected to intimidation and threats, which discourage them from disclosing the abuse. Additionally, emotional manipulation further exacerbates their sense of powerlessness, engulfing these young victims.

The sexual offenders make use of children’s ignorance about sex to manipulate them to be involved in sexual activities, which is called grooming. Grooming is a premeditated method used to propagandise the victims to associate with sexual abuse. McAlinden defines grooming as: “The use of a variety of manipulative and controlling techniques; with a vulnerable subject; in a range of inter-personal and social settings; in order to establish trust or normalise sexually harmful behaviour; with the overall aim of facilitating exploitation and/or prohibiting exposure.” (qtd in O’Leary et. al. 1). Gallagher

says grooming as “targeting and entrapment” (795). This method is used not only to facilitate child sexual abuse but also to conceal abuse that has already begun.

Offenders typically employ a range of strategies to groom their victims for sexual exploitation and suppress their voices, with emotional manipulation and verbal coercion being particularly prevalent. Sonali’s uncle exemplifies this manipulative behaviour, akin to Celie’s father, Alphonso, in *The Color Purple*, and Mala’s uncle in *Thirty Days in September*. These individuals utilise such tactics to conceal their malevolence from society while simultaneously silencing their victims. Sonali emerges as a passive character who lacks the agency to assert herself, both in her actions and in her speech. In contrast, Sonali’s younger brother, Gopal, has observed the abuse but is too immature to fully grasp its severity; nevertheless, he is aware that she has endured some form of injustice. He articulates how their uncle coerces Sonali into submission, compelling her to acquiesce without any form of resistance:

GOPAL (thickly). I guess there is no... less brutal way of saying that my sister was sexually abused ... from the time she was 8 years old. And Sonali was 12 when Uncle Narotam broke his head. So you can imagine ...night after night ... coming to her bed, the pious swine with sandalwood paste on his forehead and holy beads round his neck ... the pig! Sometimes I heard them. He ... threatened her into silence ... and submission ... the screams she swallowed must still be tearing her up inside ... And I did nothing to help her, nothing. (87-88)

Children are forced or manipulated, and eventually, their bodies are exploited. They are made to believe they are powerless because they lack the authority and freedom to stop the abuse. The abusers begin with touch and progress further. Finally, they become

more aggressive and demand more from the children. If the children resist, then they force the children to submit. Children experience acute physical pain because of sexual assault. Anger, humiliation, and dread aggravate their physical suffering.

The sexual offenders rationalise their acts by blaming the victims. They point out that children's silence while approaching has led to the misconception that children are ready to proceed with sexual activities. But the reality is that the children are clueless and are unaware of the abuse happening to them. Jean La Fontaine in her work *Child Sexual Abuse* says, "whether s/he (children) knows it is forbidden or not but whether s/he can stop it when s/he does not wish it to go on. The great majority of these children are not allowed to say 'NO'" (81).

Children do not accept or enjoy sex because they do not know what sex and sexual relationships are. They do not even know how to express their disapproval when someone touches them inappropriately. They feel awkward and do not know how to describe it. Their lack of knowledge and awareness makes them easy prey to the reprobates. Finkelhor says children are incapable and unaware of sexuality. In his opinion,

They are ignorant about sex and sexual relationships. It is not only that they may be unfamiliar with the mechanics of sex and reproduction. More importantly, they are generally unaware of the social meanings of sexuality. For example, they are unlikely to be aware of the rules and regulations surrounding sexual intimacy, and what it is supposed to signify. They are probably uninformed and inexperienced about what criteria to use in judging the acceptability of a sexual partner. They do not know much about the "natural history" of sexual relationships, what course they will take. And, finally, they have little way of knowing how other people are

likely to react to the experience they are about to undertake, what likely consequences it will have for them in the future. (qtd. in Angelides 148)

Karen L. Kinnear posits that children are inherently vulnerable and lack the agency to refuse sexual contact with adults. In alignment with Finkelhor's perspective, Kinnear contends that children do not possess the capacity to consent to sexual activities due to their lack of understanding regarding such matters.

There are no early indications to identify the sex offender because they are usually kind and affectionate to the children. No one can find the real intention behind the offenders. They seem worthy. When a person misbehaves with a child in public, such as hitting, beating, or touching the child with sexual desire, it is evident to the naked eye; but, when the person leers at the child lustfully or softly pinches her butt at home, it goes unnoticed. Most of the people are doing their filthy work quietly and cheerfully. They act friendly in front of the child's parents to gain their trust. After gaining and building trust with the members of the family, they feed on the powerless and defenceless children. These types of offenders are difficult to produce in institutions of justice.

Even when children disclose complaints to their family members, many individuals find it difficult to accept these claims. The initial response of parents upon hearing a child's complaint often involves scepticism, leading them to attempt to dismiss or silence the child's concerns. This lack of trust in children's narratives stems from a societal belief that children are inherently playful and that their statements should not be taken seriously. Consequently, the refusal of parents to validate the child's perspective creates an environment in which abusers are allowed to continue their criminal behaviour without fear of repercussions or accountability.

Generally, the children who are orphaned, abandoned, and raised by single parents become easy prey. Some parents are so busy in their lives that they need someone to take care of their children. The absence of parents sets free rein for the abusers. When the child has a single parent, he or she may have to depend on relatives or caretakers for support. Offenders manipulate their reliance on them to their own will. In Sonali's case, she is taken care of by a single parent who is a widowed mother and depends on her uncle for economic support.

Children have no choice but to resist the assault since they can never challenge the adults physically and mentally. Their inability to defend themselves becomes the most powerful tool for adults to effortlessly mistreat them. Finkelhor and Roland C. Summit firmly believe in the ideologies of radical feminists' analyses of power; Summit discloses that children have no power "to say no to parental figure or to anticipate the consequences of sexual involvement with an adult caretaker" (qtd. in Angelides, 149). They have no choice to oppose; instead, they submit to them quietly because they lack the power and knowledge to resist.

The risk factor of sexual abuse of girl children is higher than that of boys. This has been proved by the data provided by the National Crime Records Bureau. "In 2021, of the 33,349 incidents registered under Sections 4 & 6 of the POSCO Act (punishment for penetrative sexual assault and aggravated penetrative sexual assault), 33,036 involved girls and 312 involved boys" (Jameel). The sexual abuse of boys is also increasing, and the abusers are mostly men rather than women. Finkelhor says that the problem of child sexual abuse is directly related to the socialisation of men. One of the major causes of child sexual abuse is gender discrimination. Sons are preferred by families in this society more than daughters. Girls are expected to always remain submissive. Children are treated unequally because of their gender, leading them to believe that one gender is in hell and

the other is in bliss. God has created both men and women equally, but men constructed gender to create an imbalance and inequality between them and women.

Girls encounter numerous challenges throughout their lives. They often do not receive the same level of attention as boys and tend to have diminished power and influence within the household. The girl of today is the woman of tomorrow. If girls are provided with equal treatment to boys, they possess the potential to surpass men in the future, leading to significant transformations within an androcentric culture that may have detrimental effects on men. Consequently, from a young age, girls are frequently perceived as inferior and are inadvertently subjected to various forms of discriminatory behaviour aimed at perpetuating societal norms. Chatterjee highlights the stereotyping of girls in Indian society by describing them as “liability, unwanted, neglected and undernourished, underdeveloped, used and exploited” (qtd in Bhadra 66). Families often regard male children as more permanent, believing they will continue the family legacy.

Warner asserts that “child sexual abuse represents a key site in which unequal and gendered power relations are played out” (qtd. in Herman-Davis, 9). She contends that child abuse is intrinsically linked to gender, noting that girls are disproportionately affected compared to boys. Furthermore, she establishes a connection between adult rape and child sexual abuse, emphasising the oppressive nature of patriarchal society: “rape of some women and girls by some men served all men by keeping all women and girls fearful and subordinate” (qtd. in Herman-Davis, 9). This perspective suggests that some men perceive themselves as entitled to exert their power to derive sexual gratification from women and children, irrespective of the victim’s consent.

Solomon shares Warner’s belief that girls are at a higher risk of sexual abuse from an early age and for a longer period. Girls are not seen as children, but as women who will

be able to fulfil their sexual wants in the future. Child sexual assault is seen as a result of patriarchy by feminists. Because the girl child, as a female and as a child, holds the lowest place in the family, she is more likely to be sexually exploited by male adults than the boy child (Solomon, 1992). Florence Rush, feminist theorist and social worker, says:

Sexual abuse of children is permitted because it is an unspoken but prominent subordinate role; to feel guilty, ashamed, and to tolerate, through fear, the power exercised over her by men. That the female's early sexual experiences prepare her to submit in later life to the adult forms of sexual abuse heaped on her by her boyfriend, her lover, and her husband. In short, the sexual abuse of female children is a process of education that prepares them to become the wives and mothers of America. (qtd. in Driver and Droisen 23)

Sonali's mother, in *Getting Away with Murder*, pays more attention to her son, Gopal, because she thinks he was born with "an extra set of accessories," which she interprets as a boy. However, she has been using her daughter as a mouthpiece to "mouth her opinions" (59), which indicates she has been using her daughter as a means of obtaining the things she requires from her brother. Despite possessing the ability to protect her daughter, she chose not to exercise it, preferring to spend her time in the kitchen. According to Gopal, "Mother was corpulent and confined to the kitchen. She couldn't see beyond her nose—or was afraid to ..." (83). Gopal's statement indicates that his mother recognises the abuse but is reluctant to intervene due to her obligation to provide for her children. Similarly, Sonali's mother is unable to oppose her brother, who offers economic support, leading her to remain silent and overlook her daughter's suffering. Consequently, her brother remains unchallenged and persists in his abusive behaviour toward Sonali. Narotam is acutely aware that his sister will not confront him or take any action against him, as her financial dependency on him inhibits her ability to do so.

Despite their education and awareness, women continue to conform to prevailing stereotypes due to their conditioning to adhere to the counsel of their forebears. Sonali, an educated woman, perceives the birth of a daughter as a familial curse. The anxiety that she may replicate her mother's perceived mistakes traumatises her from considering the possibility of having a female child. Concurrently, the "fear of sexual violence is so ingrained within her psyche that it envelops all her existence with a kind of nightmarish force" (Chakraborty 10). Sonali harbours concerns that her mother-in-law would hold her in contempt, and she finds it disconcerting to feel inferior in the presence of her in-laws, particularly as each of her brothers-in-law initiates their "brood with a boy" (63). She is convinced that "women's inferior status is partially redeemed when she becomes a mother of sons" (78). This indicates that Sonali also participates in the perpetuation of patriarchal norms, as expressed in her conversation with Malu:

SONALI. If it's a girl I shall abort her.

MALU. My God! You too.

SONALI. You're looking at me as if I were a criminal.

MALU. I thought only ignorant women had this prejudice! Or deprived women, with drudgery as their lot, who are sucked into further poverty and debts when they spawn daughter— because girls need dowries before they can be off-loaded. But to someone like you, how can it matter if the first child is a boy or a girl?

SONALI. To me it's simply a family-planning measure. Must I be one of those desperate parents who breed error after error in their anxiety to trap the elusive chromosome? Do I have to produce a queue of superfluous daughters—when all that's required is a son. (62)

Children are unable to openly articulate their consent or attain independence; they are wholly reliant on adults for their survival, which can lead to feelings of confusion and distress. Child victims often take considerable time to comprehend the nature of their experiences. They require advocacy and support to foster hope and healing. The lack of guidance may compel them to internalise their trauma. Initially, the offenders may be perceived as trusted figures and providers of care; however, when they exploit their position, the child victim is rendered voiceless. The dominance of the perpetrators effectively silences the children.

Children are emotionally impacted by even minor sexual actions. Conversely, the severity of the psychological injury is influenced by the nature of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. Even into adulthood, the psychological trauma can remain profound. Some victims are only exposed to traumatic experiences for a brief period, while others, like Sonali, may endure prolonged exposure, despite presenting as seemingly normal and having ostensibly outgrown the experience. Nevertheless, even after a period of stability, she continues to re-experience the traumatic incident in her memories. This repetition of trauma, which Freud refers to as “traumatic neurosis” (Caruth 2), manifests through the survivor’s involuntary actions, underscoring the persistent and inescapable nature of traumatic experiences.

The trauma remains a scar in the minds of the victims and inexplicably persists in their lives, resulting in a lasting impact on their lives. The trauma may go unnoticed at first, but it haunts the survivor later on, as Caruth describes it as “unassimilated nature” (*Unclaimed* 4). Here, the trauma is a mental state rather than a physical injury. In her book, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as “a pathological mental and emotional condition, an injury to the psyche caused by catastrophic events, or by the threat of such events, which overwhelm an individual’s normal response

mechanism” (2). The trauma continues to haunt the victims. It never makes them feel pleasant and always makes them feel like living in hell. It pricks their mind and heart. William James rightly calls trauma a “thorn in the spirit” (*Recovery Network*). Peter A. Levine, therapist, and developer of somatic experiencing, in his book, *In Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, says trauma

does not reside in the external event that induces physical or emotional pain—nor even in the pain itself—but in our becoming stuck in our primitive responses to painful events. Trauma is caused when we are unable to release blocked energies, to fully move through the physical/emotional reactions to hurtful experience.

Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness. (xi-xii)

The trauma wreaks havoc in the lives of children, and because of sexual abuse, their outlook toward life becomes bleak. Their social skill is constricted and they remain lonely. Peter Levine points out that the survivor may remain ““stuck in a kind of limbo, not fully re-engaging in life.” In circumstances where others sense no more than a mild threat or even a challenge to be faced, the trauma-tized person experiences threat, dread and mental/physical listlessness, a kind of paralysis of body and will. Shame, depression and self-loathing follow in the wake of such imposed helplessness” (xiii). They lose their trust in people, and therefore, they never share anything with anyone. The separation from society and loneliness make them stick to or recollect their past experiences, and make them restless. They slowly lose their social bond and lead a lonely life. In the case of Sonali, she refrains from disclosing her experiences of sexual abuse to anyone and attempts to maintain distance from others. This behaviour results in her isolation from social connections and leads to a solitary life, during which she is compelled to revisit her past, ultimately keeping her in a state of restlessness.

The trauma haunts them even in their dreams, disrupting their sleep and a tranquil night. Sleep disturbances and nightmares are the direct result of trauma. The nightmare sends them to another horrific realm that is considerably worse than the real world, reminding them of the past that they wish to forget. Cathy Caruth says:

Dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeat-edly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situa-tion from which he wakes up in another fright. This astonishes people far too little. . . Anyone who accepts it as something self-evident that dreams should put them back at night into the situation that caused them to fall ill has misunderstood the nature of dreams.

(Trauma 5)

Sleep deprivation has an impact on the survivors' mood, behaviour, and, most importantly, their health. In his book, Peter A. Levine says that we usually "think of trauma as a 'mental' problem, even as a 'brain disorder.' However, trauma is something that also happens in the body." He shows "it happens first and foremost in the body. The mental states associated with trauma are important, but they are secondary. The body initiates, he says, and the mind follows" (xii). Sonali has nightmares that keep her awake for several nights. As a result, she is always dizzy, worried, and depressed, resulting in high blood pressure and a terrible headache.

To alleviate physical pain and stress, some individuals may resort to the consumption of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. Initial use of these substances often provides a temporary surge of pleasure and energy. However, these effects are short-lived and typically lead to an increased desire for more substances. Many individuals engage in such unhealthy behaviours under the misconception that they can escape the torment of their traumatic memories, achieving a state of detachment from their surroundings. For

instance, Sonali resorts to smoking whenever she experiences headaches or is reminded of distressing aspects of her childhood. Notably, she continues to smoke during her pregnancy, seemingly indifferent to the potential health risks for her child, as her frustration and physical discomfort overshadow her concerns. Despite Gopal's attempts to dissuade her from smoking, she consistently disregards his warnings.

The victims isolate themselves because of the betrayal they face during their childhood. Finkelhor and Browne talk about four traumatic dynamics: traumatic sexualisation, betrayal, powerlessness, and stigmatisation, which are the primary sources of trauma in sexually abused children. Betrayal plays a crucial role in it. Children feel they are betrayed by an offender who lies and manipulates them. They also believe that the family is responsible for their pathetic situation since it fails to protect them from the offender: "The degree of betrayal is also related to family's response to disclosure. Children who are disbelieved, blamed, or ostracised undoubtedly experience a greater sense of betrayal than those who are supported" (Finkelhor and Browne, 1985).

Sonali's trust is irrevocably shattered when her uncle sexually abuses her against her will. In an attempt to seek help, she confides in her mother; however, her mother completely neglects her concerns. As Jojo Moyes articulates, "Even if the whole world was throwing rocks at you, if you had your mother at your back, you'd be okay. Some deep-rooted part of you would know you were loved. That you deserved to be loved" (*One Plus One*). Sonali perceives her mother as her sole source of hope, firmly believing that her mother will provide the support she desperately needs. Unfortunately, the very individual who could have liberated Sonali fails to do so, leaving her feeling abandoned. This sense of abandonment is felt more acutely than the abuse itself. Like many victims, Sonali experiences profound betrayal from her mother, which ultimately erodes her ability

to trust others. Consequently, this betrayal instils a pervasive sense of hopelessness within her, rendering her unable to place trust in anyone thereafter.

Sonali never shares her feelings with others, not even with her close friends. She buries everything within herself. Her mother and uncle's actions make her lose faith in other people. She never discusses her childhood sexual abuse to anyone because she is ashamed of it. Further, she is scared that others may let her down or demean her character. The scandal, guilt, and fear keep her anxious and restless. She always has an invisible wall between herself and others. She distances and isolates herself from others as a way of protecting herself.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and emotional and mental health difficulties, such as anxiety and despair, are common among child sexual abuse survivors. PTSD, a new trauma paradigm, "results from a traumatic event; numbing of responsiveness to, or reduce involvement with, the external world; and a variety of autonomic, dysphoric, or cognitive symptoms" (Herman 84). Edward Rowan states that the survivors are "disconnected from the Present" and "continue to react to life experiences as if they were anticipating, experiencing, or responding to the earlier trauma" (qtd. in Chakraborty, 5). Cathy Caruth, in her book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, puts forth a precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder:

Contested, more descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams thoughts or behaviors stemming from the vent, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event.

(4)

Hallucination is an illusion that appears to be real but is generated by the mind. It may affect the five senses of the body. For example, one may hear the sound but no one would be in the room, or one may see the person but it is an unreal, fictitious image. Hallucination is defined as “percepts arising in the absence of any external reality—seeing things or hearing things that are not there” (Sacks). Cathy Caruth says, “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (*Trauma* 4-5). She further says, “overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (*Unclaimed* 11). The experiences of hallucinations reported by Sonali are articulated as follows:

SONALI (hysterical now). Stop it! Stop it! When I listen carefully to my thoughts, it’s my mother’s voice I hear! And I remember all the things she taught me. And I remember anger from the past (with one sweep of her hand she sends the coffee things crashing to the floor).

MALU. Sonali!

SONALI. But you don’t understand, I saw her!

MALU. Saw her!

SONALI. I saw her last night as I gazed into my eyes in the bedroom mirror, while Anil Snored in bed. My eyes disappeared frost, then my face ... and with an awful wild jumping of colours and voices the picture struggled up ... and I saw my mother in pain. But the worst thing still waits in the shadows for me—

MALU. What worst things?

SONALI. I don't know. I feel it gathering shape, a half-remembered word here, a gesture there, all coming together ... only it never does and I'm baffled and left with splitting headache. (64-65)

She articulates that the 'worst thing' in her life is her uncle. When she can no longer endure the situation, she employs her brother's toy cart to cause her uncle to tumble down the stairs. She undertakes this action solely to distance her uncle from her for a few days, thereby granting her a reprieve from pain and unwanted physical contact. However, the consequences exceed her expectations, as the perpetrator succumbs to his injuries a few days later. His death does not alleviate the suffering and humiliation she endured at his hands; the emotional wounds remain raw. She is unwilling to relinquish her pain and remains uncertain about how to heal her traumatised psyche. The psychological scars inflicted by this sexual abuse will haunt her for life. She experiences vivid visions of her uncle and perceives his presence: "Every time I took a bath I could hear him outside ... breathing ... waiting to look at me without my clothes on ... (screaming) get away from my door ... get away or I'll tell Anil you're hounding me ..." (66). Her cries for help encapsulate her feelings of uncertainty, fear, and frustration. This overwhelming shame leads her to regard herself as 'damaged goods.'

The traumatic sexual abuse experienced during her childhood significantly impedes her present functioning. The painful secret she harbours contributes to the development of dissociative identity disorder. In moments of solitude, she perceives herself as an eight-year-old girl, altering her voice to mimic that of a child. This child's voice articulates "the sufferings of her tormented soul and then regresses to her normal voice in a kind of incessant back and forth" (Sivapriya 110). The playwright conveys her troubled psyche through a poignant monologue:

SONALI. Dear God, I can't take more of this (she tries to light her cigarette, but hands shakes too much). Someone must help ... help me (moves to the mirror, stares into her face intently then begins to speak in a petulant 8-year-old voice as she regresses I time). Don't want to sit near him, mother. Don't like to be touched. Don't like to be tickled ... (looks away from the mirror and declaims in her normal voice). 'When you tickle us, do we not laugh?' (Back to the mirror, regressing.) Don't! Don't! (Laughs wildly as she squirms.) Your fingers are not kind, they hurt ... don't ... (squirming, laughing helplessly) ha ha. Stop it, Stop! (Low, on a note of pain and fear.) What are you doing to me, leave me alone (Hand to her mouth, she gags and retches, then turning away from the mirror, in her adult voice.) Dear God, I'm again circling round something alien and familiar... and my head hurts, it hurts ... (as she moves towards her bed she starts as she catches a glimpse of her Ma-in-law offstage at the door far left)

You have no other work, old woman, but to peep at me – like him! (66)

Similar to Sonali, Mala is sexually molested by her maternal uncle in Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*. When she tries to disclose the ongoing sexual abuse to her mother, she is similarly ignored. Mala's uncle, like Sonali's, warns her not to tell anybody about the incident because they will label her an awful girl, and encourages her to remain silent and keep the secret to protect her honour. This creates a scar in her psyche. As a result of this, she is involved in sexual affairs with several older men, which makes her think that she is regaining power. She believes that she lost her body in the past due to her powerlessness, and therefore, she now uses it to regain power. Mala understands her actions are immoral, yet she is unable to stop herself. The trauma has an impact on her sex life, which she cannot control. The following lines show Mala's mindset:

MALA. I know it's wrong. What I am doing is terribly wrong! But it means a lot to me. I like it. that is why I am a bad person. I have no character... In fact I like it best when I can time it so it lasts for thirty days. I even mark it on my calendar. After that, I have to – move on, if you know what I mean ... well it means that it is no longer satisfying to me, and I don't mean the physical part of it, although that is usually the main attraction for me ... sometimes I do, with right kind of people...the right kind of people are, let me usually older men...I think I like it – I don't know how to put it...when they – sort of – you know – use me...I can't explain it. (Dattani, 98)

Mala suffers from borderline personality disorder as a result of experiencing sexual assault and develops a sense of inner badness. As a result, she does not truly connect with her loved ones. Even though she is in a relationship with Deepak, she is not loyal to him. She always sees him as her uncle when they are having sex. She prefers to have relations with older men. This causes her to believe that she is a whore.

The survivors believe that their bodies have betrayed them and that they have been abused because they lack power and control over their bodies. To reclaim their power and authority, they engage in a variety of sexual acts or do whatever they want with their bodies. In *Thirty Days in September*, Malathi plans to reclaim her authority by engaging in sexual relationships with several men, whereas Sonali plans to reclaim her power by aborting the girl child:

SONALI. I believe it's my right to choose the sex of my child!

MALU. How? Sex detection tests don't guarantee you the birth of a son. All they do is instigate multiple murders.

SONALI. Murders! Aren't you being a trifle melodramatic?

MALU. Am I? I read a shameful thing the other day. Out of 69 abortions in one month in a high-class Bombay nursing home, 68 were of girl foetuses. So what would you call it?

SONALI. Call it what you like. It is till my body and my choice. A symbol of my emancipation. (63)

Sonali is afraid to have a girl child because of her traumatic past, sexual abuse by her uncle, and because of her mother's discrimination. When women fail to conceive or give birth to a girl child, they are blamed. Dina Mehta portrays this through her characters, Sonali and Raziya, Sonali's friends. Razia's marriage is shattered by her inability to bear a child. She goes through all kinds of treatments, but her husband does not, as it is a matter of his pride. To hide their faults, many men, like Raziya's husband, turn women into a "joke of nature—a barren woman" (77). Sonali, on the other hand, does not wish to have a girl kid because she believes that "women's failure to bear a son is just retribution for misdeeds in her past life" (63). Sonali's damaged psyche is shaped by the patriarchal directives that her mother has instilled in her.

Sonali exhibits a keen interest in determining the gender of her foetus and has expressed intentions to terminate the pregnancy should the foetus be female. She has previously exerted considerable effort to induce a natural miscarriage. For her subsequent pregnancy, she intends to undergo amniocentesis to ascertain the child's gender. In numerous regions globally, technologies such as amniocentesis and ultrasound have been employed to detect foetal anomalies. In India, these technologies have often been misappropriated to determine foetal gender, leading to the termination of pregnancies identified as female. To address this misuse, the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques Act was enacted on September 20, 1994. Nevertheless, instances of misuse continue to persist in

various locations, facilitated by medical professionals, as exemplified by Sonali's collaboration with her medical acquaintance Raziya.

Sonali knows that the test will affect her health as well as that of the foetus. Raziya says, "there are medical hazards connected with that test – like infection of the reproductive tract, foetal and placental trauma, respiratory dysfunction ..." (74). Even then, Sonali takes the risk as she does not care about her health or her body. So, many of the victims abuse their bodies or destroy their health because they think their bodies have already been betrayed by their submission to the offenders.

So, many women are afraid of the future of their girl children and do not want their daughters to suffer in the hands of husbands and in-laws like they have been subjected to. Babita Chugh, in her book, *Women and Crime*, states that "Mothers, sometimes, kill their babies as an act of "Mercy" that they may be saved from future excesses by husband in the form of domestic violence" (249). She also points out that the fear of sexual abuse of girl children is also a reason for female infanticide. Mothers want to save their daughters from all the sufferings that they have undergone.

Victims may sometimes be unaware that their actions constitute criminal behaviour. They tend to rationalise their decisions rather than acknowledge the illegality of their conduct. In the case of Sonali, upon learning the gender of her child, she opted for an abortion. While no mother desires to terminate her flesh and blood, Sonali proceeded with this decision. She terminated the life of her female foetus and justified her actions. The traumatic experiences of Sonali's childhood have led her to perceive women as being devalued by society. The stigma associated with being female and the shame stemming from past abuse compelled her to take the drastic step of ending her child's life. She believes it is her prerogative to choose the sex of her offspring.

MALU. What is? Female foeticide? My God, this is like something out of a black comedy. Mothers award the death sentence to their unborn daughters in the name of liberation. They thereby prove their women-power! Their omnipotence! They play God!

SONALI. Shut up! (Thumping the table.) To be born a girl is to be subject to violence and servitude! I know, I know! (63)

Sonali echoes Seth's sentiments in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Seth kills her daughter to protect the child from slavery and sexual predators. She does not want her daughter to be treated like filth by white men. She also justifies her act like Sonali. Seth says her daughter "had to be safe and I put her where she should be. But my love was tough and she back now... how if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her. When I explain it she'll understand, because she understands everything already" (236). Both Sonali and Sethe express a desire for their daughters to die, as they believe that "being alive was the hard part" (9) for them. The trauma of sexual abuse instils in them a sense of inferiority and worthlessness regarding their own identities. Stigmatisation, a significant factor contributing to trauma, encompasses the perception that one's gender is vulnerable. Although their actions cannot be justified in conventional terms, their perspectives offer a different interpretation. They perceive existence in this world as more burdensome than death, rationalising the act of killing their children as a means of shielding them from the horrors they have endured.

The impact of child sexual abuse significantly influences the daily lives of survivors. Individuals often struggle to establish and maintain intimate and trusting relationships. The reluctance to disclose experiences of sexual abuse to family, relatives, and friends fosters a sense of isolation and hinders access to supportive resources. For

Sonali, the trauma of her past impedes her ability to lead a normal life. Her harrowing experiences continue to affect her present circumstances. She is apprehensive about revealing her history to her husband due to fears of potential repercussions and social ostracisation. The stigma associated with her abuse leads her to believe that women are inherently unsafe in society, prompting her to terminate her pregnancy without her husband's knowledge. The presence of a child is pivotal in a marital relationship, as it symbolises the love shared between spouses. Anil desires to have a child, but Sonali's decision to abort is a source of disappointment for him, as she has unilaterally dismantled the tangible expression of their marital bond without his consent.

The first time she aborts, Anil forgives Sonali because he senses that something is troubling and haunting her. But when she tries to abort the second time, Anil bursts out, and he questions Sonali and asks the reason for aborting the child previously and hiding the fact that she is pregnant. But Sonali is not ready to give a proper answer to him, and she justifies her act, which makes Anil lose his temper and slap her.

ANIL. Don't talk like that! I will not have a repetition of what happened last year,
Sonu, you hear?

SONALI. I want her to die ...

ANIL. Stop that.

SONALI. ... to die, to die ... to—

ANIL. (slapping her): Stop it! God, I'm sorry, Sonu. Did I hurt you? (86)

Anil is a patient and understanding husband; however, he becomes frustrated when Sonali exhibits irrational behaviour. He struggles to empathise with her due to his lack of awareness regarding her experiences of abuse. Sonali's actions contribute to a rift in her

relationship with her mother-in-law. She frequently refers to her mother-in-law as a “witch” and shows her a lack of respect, primarily because she perceives her mother-in-law as resembling her mother. This resemblance fosters animosity, as Sonali harbours feelings of hatred towards both her mother and her mother-in-law. The betrayal she has experienced from her uncle and mother further complicates her ability to trust others. Consequently, she maintains strained relationships with those around her, including her friend Riza, who fails to provide support regarding her decision to terminate her pregnancy. Sonali is uncertain about how Anil discovers her intentions to abort their child; she suspects Raziya to be the source of this information, leading her to conclude that she can no longer trust her: “I do not trust Raziya any more” (85). Sonali’s trauma engenders a pervasive doubt towards others, which complicates her interpersonal relationships. The impact of Sonali’s sexual abuse extends beyond her own life to affect those around her, most notably her brother Gopal, who is a witness to the abuse endured by his sister.

Like Sonali, Gopal is similarly entrenched in the past. He experiences profound guilt for his perceived powerlessness and inability to defend his sister against his uncle during the period of her sexual abuse. This sense of inadequacy continues to torment Gopal, persisting into adulthood. He internalises the blame for failing to protect his sister during her abuse, a burden that continues to affect him in the present, as illustrated in his conversation with Malu:

GOPAL (hoarsely). I could have told her to ... kick where it hurts. To grow her nails and scratch out his eyes. Stick a ginger in her throat and make herself sick ... (as he speaks Sonali sits up in bed, unnoticed by the others) I could have yelled for Mother ... or played an alarm on my tin drum ... instead of hiding my face in the bedcovers to distance the nightmare ... (in despair) I was in the same room and I did nothing ... nothing! (88)

Sexual abuse not only has an impact on the victim but also on the witness. Gopal is a case in point. Exposure to sexual abuse at a young age gives an unhealthy message about gender and sexual content. His uncle's aggressive, inhuman behaviour towards his sister makes him believe that men can have sexual relations with many women and that women are obligated to provide it. It dramatically impacts his intimate relationships when he grows into an adult. He has sexual affairs with many women and is not sincere with Malini whom he is in love. He is not aggressive to women, but he is also not true to anyone. He has a concern for women and wants to prevent them from harmful practices like witchcraft, but also fails to understand their emotions and plays with them. He does not even feel guilty for his actions and always argues with Malu. He says, "that I screw every woman I meet because I'm sick and tired of an old hag like you" (84). Gopal's worse behaviour upsets Malu and creates a rift in their relationship.

Psychologist Judith Herman asserts that "Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (133). The psychological faculties that have been compromised and distorted by traumatic experiences can only be restored through the formation of relationships with others. These faculties include "the basic capacities for trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy" (133). Therefore, the family members and friends of victims should serve as a bridge to facilitate trust and encourage open discussion about their distressing experiences. In this context, Anil plays a pivotal role in aiding the restoration of Sonali's psychological capacities following a traumatic event that has left her deeply affected.

Anil exemplifies the qualities of an understanding husband, exhibiting awareness of his wife's compromised well-being and psychological distress. He provides her with the necessary space to articulate her feelings, demonstrates empathy toward her situation, and actively participates in problem resolution. Anil endeavours to comfort her while

facilitating a cathartic experience. His compassionate demeanour fosters an environment in which Sonali feels encouraged to place her trust in him. In this context, Anil assumes the role of a therapist, acting as a “witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor can speak of the unspeakable” (Herman 177). As Judith Herman posits, “the reconstruction of trauma places great demands on the courage of both patient and therapist. It requires that both be clear in their purpose and secure in their alliance” (177).

Anil’s actions facilitate Sonali’s willingness to disclose her past to him. Sonali responds, “Him, him” when Anil questions her on the painting. “You don’t know who I’m talking about? (Moves to the painting.) Here, the canvas is still wet from yesterday, here he is, the red monster” (86). She tells her husband first that her uncle is a monster. She finds it impossible to explain the most unbearable situations that she underwent in words, since they are emotional, so she paints them instead. When they cannot speak to describe the past, most victims adopt non-verbal means of expression, like painting or drawing. The “iconic” image symbolises the “visual nature of traumatic memories” (Herman 177). Sonali depicts his uncle as a crimson monster by painting him in the colour red. The picture is Sonali’s most influential first attempt to communicate her past, and she uses red to emphasise her uncle’s danger.

According to Herman, the abused child experiences feelings of “rageful and sometimes aggressive” emotions. This child attempts to resolve the conflict through a “hostile attack,” as it lacks the necessary skills to manage its feelings effectively. The consistent challenges faced by the abused child in regulating her anger further solidify her belief in her inherent negativity (104). Sonali recounts how she and Gopal conspired on two occasions to murder her uncle, Narotam. In one instance, Sonali deceives her uncle into falling down the stairs using her brother’s toy. She believes that this action would protect her from her uncle’s abuse. Although she can escape the immediate abuse, she is

unable to evade the shame of being a killer, a realisation that exacerbates her self-condemnation.

Sonali releases all that has been inflicting emotional pain upon her for an extended period, leading to her unconsciousness as she is unable to withstand the accumulated pressure. Anil seizes this moment as a purgatorial opportunity to assist Sonali in overcoming her phobia. Apart from Gopal, he recognises that no one is aware of the full extent of Sonali's suffering. In an effort to save Sonali from potential damnation, he pressures Gopal into revealing the truth about her experiences: "If you had watched her struggle to remember ... a battle fought behind her eyes ... bathing her face in sweat, dragging at the corners of her mouth, those frightful headaches ... Gopal?" (87). Ultimately, Gopal divulges the troubling history to all present.

Gopal initially hesitates to disclose the sexual abuse due to his fear of his uncle and his desire to protect his sister's honour. However, he ultimately realises that he cannot continue living a life shrouded in secrecy, as this will only exacerbate Sonali's condition. In a courageous act to safeguard his sister's well-being, Gopal decides to share the truth about their past. This decision brings him a sense of personal relief and happiness, alleviating the guilt that had been weighing heavily upon him.

Finally, Anil's positive and supportive behaviour towards Sonali has instilled a sense of hope within her, encouraging her to speak out about the crime, thereby alleviating her emotional burden. Anil acknowledges his wife's experiences and provides her with counsel to help her understand that the abuse she endured is not a reflection of her worth. Although Sonali may present as functioning normally, she continues to grapple with the trauma of her past: "I still have my moments of panic. Still look, sometimes, for the disgust in Anil's eyes – after all, he got landed with damaged goods – but all they tell me

is I've come home at last" (91). While family and friends can offer support to victims, the ultimate healing resides within the victims themselves. They need to cultivate self-belief and muster the courage to confront the world. They should not fear humiliation or criticism, as their victimisation is not a result of their actions.

She does not recover entirely but is still trying to begin a normal life. She changes the negative aspect of her mother-in-law. Additionally, she decides to stop the abortion process and gets ready to give birth to a girl child. Somehow, she musters her strength to love herself and society. She says, "nothing can change overnight, I guess, but we can be goddesses if we want it enough. Right?" (92). As Sonali points out, nothing changes in a day, but it does not mean that changes do not occur. The victims' willingness to make positive changes in their lives would assist them in leading a satisfying life, and the people around them would assist or serve as stepping stones to continue their tranquil lives.

To facilitate the recovery process, survivors of trauma must recognise that their victimisation is not a result of their actions. They must work to transcend feelings of fear and guilt, as they bear no responsibility for the circumstances they endured. The family unit should serve as a crucial support system, aiding survivors in their journey toward healing and reintegration into their lives. Moreover, it is essential for family members and the broader community to empathise with the survivors, assist them in processing their experiences, and advocate for the accountability of perpetrators, rather than perpetuating a culture of victim-blaming.

Primarily, traumatised people seek emotional support from families, lovers, and close friends to get a resolution from the trauma. In the aftermath of trauma, the families' main responsibilities are to help the victims rebuild their trust and to provide reassurance of their safety and protection. Sonali does not feel safe in her own house and fails to trust the family since her mother fails to defend her from the red monster, her uncle. So, this

leaves her in terror, and she feels lonely. She also craves sympathy, but she does not get it, making her survive the terror for many years. She would not have been traumatised for long if she had received emotional support from her mother. She, too, would have led an everyday life. Now she feels safe in the embrace of Anil and tries to overcome the trauma. Gopal is also free from guilt after disclosing the secret he had carried for a long time and he starts a happy life with Malu.