

## Trauma and Survival in Sujata Parashar's *The Temple Bar Woman: A Tale of Danger, Deceit, and Daring*

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### Abstract

Surviving trauma from an extreme incident, such as rape, includes numerous issues. Following rape, a victim must endure several physical and mental challenges. When physical wounds are involved, the psychological suffering is doubled. This study focuses on a survivor's struggle to get through the trauma in everyday life and the challenges she faces to cope with the trauma through the ideological lens of Judith Herman and other trauma theorists. It includes struggles due to self-blame, guilt and the societal pressure the survivors face after the rape. The study elucidates the arguments through Sujata Parashar's novel *The Temple Bar Woman: A Tale of Danger, Deceit, and Daring*. According to the novel's background, Radha, a rape survivor, primarily experiences excruciating physical anguish. As the physical wound heals, the psychological battle emerges quickly. After her physical damage heals, her mind begins to focus extensively on the mental trauma. In order to comprehend, the article closely examines the text to understand the challenges Radha faces following the rape and how she overcomes the trauma.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Survival; Rape; Struggles; Physical Wound; Sujata Parashar; India

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## Introduction

Trauma is an extreme experience brought on by a terrible incident, such as rape, that impacts the victim's ability to survive. Rape has a permanent psychological impact, unlike any other injury to the body. It actually harms a victim's physical and emotional health. It is so excruciating that, despite the fact that the rape only occurred once, the victim experiences the same level of suffering on a constant basis. Even years after the violent assault, recurring nightmares that recreate the same experience can be used to understand the severity of the aftereffects of rape. "Caruth explains that trauma is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time" (Balaev, 2018, p. 365).

The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that one in three women globally has been a victim of physical or sexual abuse at some point in their lives (WHO, 2024). With concerning rates of sexual assault against women, rape trauma is a major issue in India. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) reports that 31,516 rape cases were registered in India in 2022 (NCRB, 2022). Sadly, the reality is that only a small portion of rape instances are reported, meaning that the true figure is far higher. Long-term stressors, including poverty, bullying, or domestic abuse, can also cause trauma (Herman, 2015).

Surviving after the rape has always been the hardest task for a victim. For them, surviving is not just about the everyday needs such as food, water and shelter, rather it is about waking up every day to the trauma and living with fear, anxiety and self-blame. Before she starts her journey towards healing, a survivor has to face the bitter realities. Surviving after an extreme incident is different for each rape survivor. Not all survivors suffer in the same pattern. If it had been so, the healing also would have followed the same formula. This complexity makes rape victims' lives vulnerable.

A rape victim's survival involves more than just surviving and getting over her injuries; it also

entails overcoming nightmares, physical and psychological anguish, navigating society, coexisting peacefully with family and supporters, and other challenges. For the sufferer, each of the aforementioned tasks is extremely difficult. A victim's primary burden following a rape is guilt and self-blame. In order to begin the healing process, a survivor must first overcome her guilt, embrace who she is, and realise that she is no longer accountable for what happened to her. One such extreme experience is undergone by Radha, the protagonist from the novel *The Temple Bar Woman: A Tale of Danger, Deceit, and Daring*, who struggled to survive a gang rape. Radha lost her mother at birth and was raised by her father. Her father's love covered her so overwhelmingly that she never missed her mother. Her father is a man of his word. He is so concerned about his village. Coming from a privileged family, he contributes emphatically to his village. Following her father's social welfare work, Radha starts teaching in the school her father built to serve the needy and poor in their village. She enjoys teaching and being around the children. Her unique teaching methods and concern for children are why she is famous among students.

Life was delightful until one gruesome incident ruined her. She was abducted and gang raped by the son of a famous politician and his friends during a village festival. She was then sold to a brothel in a faraway city, unconscious and in a complete mess. Radha promised her father she would return home from the festival soon, but she never did. Radha suffered so severely that her physical and mental health had completely deteriorated.

She had been such a simpleton. A village teacher – Radha, not Radhika. Her beloved father had been so proud of her. However, that uncomplicated and pure life was not meant to last. Everything had changed for her on that unfortunate day when, despite her father's disapproval, she had gone to the *mela* with her best friend, though never return home. She would have perished but for her

determination to avenge her lost honour (Parashar, 2018, p.xvi).

Suffering is a very important part of survival after rape. The trauma that a survivor suffers through damages her mental health and destroys her physical strength. As Cathy Caruth says:

Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness (Caruth, 1996, p. 92).

This study looks into the selected text for Radha's struggle to get through the trauma in everyday life and the challenges she faces to cope with the trauma through the ideological lens of Judith Herman. It also stresses that, in order to support a rape survivor and help in their journey towards recovery, their struggles to survive the trauma should be understood by the bystanders.

### Literature Review

One of the most serious types of gender-based violence is rape, which leaves survivors with significant physical, psychological, and emotional scars. Trauma is a widespread and intricate problem that has an impact on people, groups, and society all over the world. Traumatic events significantly impact a person's relationships, overall well-being, and physical and mental health. In the context of trauma, survival is the capacity to manage, adjust, and bounce back from catastrophic events. Although suffering has been characterised as a common, even universal, the experience of rape victims differs greatly from suffering in other contexts and cannot be compared to that of non-rape victims (Messina-Dysert, 2012). With an emphasis on psychological impacts, societal and cultural factors, legal and justice systems, healthcare responses, intersectionality, media depiction, survivor narratives, and policy initiatives, this review of the literature synthesises studies on trauma and survival among rape survivors.

### Impacts and Dynamics of Rape: A Review of Mental Health and Relational Consequences

Rape has been linked to a number of mental health issues, including substance misuse, depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Koss et al., 1994). According to Campbell et al. (2009), survivors' relationships, self-esteem, and general quality of life may all be negatively impacted for some time by the trauma of rape. Radha was gang raped because she warned her perpetrators against bullying her in a village festival. In order to show their power against her they used rape as a tool of suppression. Research indicates that in times of conflict, a woman's body serves as a means of validating and reaffirming masculinity (Tembo, 2018). The intent of a rapist is to primarily inflict fear and terror on a victim (Jordan, 2005).

Women are considered the carriers of family honour, ethnic identity and reproduction. They are targeted because of the symbolic and social roles they occupy. Attacking women becomes a way to attack the group or country they represent. Apparently, a UN report titled *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, published on 15 July 2025, says:

Sexual violence continued to be used as a tactic of war, torture, terrorism and political repression, while multiple and overlapping political, security and humanitarian crises deepened. In addition, women and girls perceived to be associated with rival armed forces were targeted with rape and other forms of sexual violence in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Haiti" (Conflict –Related Sexual Violence, 2025, p. 7).

During the time of war, armed groups use sexual violence to punish perceived supporters of rival groups. UN reports confirm sexual violence is being used across multiple active conflicts globally, especially in Ukraine, Israel, Afghanistan, Iran and many other war zones.

Likewise, in the Manipur conflict, sexual violence has been weaponised as a strategy of demographic engineering, intended to forcibly

reconfigure ethnic composition. The ethnic conflict in Manipur, India, which erupted on 3 May 2023, is rooted in deep-seated disputes between the majority Meitei and minority Kuki-Zo communities regarding land rights, political representation, and Scheduled Tribe status. The crisis has been marked by the systematic use of sexual violence against women and children, a phenomenon that has characterised the conflict as a form of gendered warfare with profound humanitarian consequences.

### **Long-term Impacts of Sexual Assault: Trauma, Mental Health, and Survivors' Experiences**

Sexual assault can produce reverberations that persist for decades or have a permanent effect on a survivor's life, (Loya, 2014). Rape-related trauma can have a significant impact on women's mental health. PTSD, depression, and anxiety disorders are more likely to develop among survivors of sexual assault, according to research (Golding, 1999). Complex trauma, which entails numerous and recurring painful experiences, can also result from the trauma connected to rape (Herman, 2015). For Radha rape is particularly painful and causes her inner being to be wounded, which damages her connection with her inner self and causes ongoing suffering because of the taboo nature of the crime and the social reaction the assault causes (Messina-Dysert, 2012). According to research, the main reason why survivors' work performance declined was that they were unable to focus because of anxiety, PTSD, dissociation, or the proximity of the offender at work (Loya, 2014). In a similar context, F & J (2024) argue that trauma disrupts a person's sense of autonomy, self-worth, and embodiment, leading to long-term issues like anxiety, sadness, insomnia, and flashbacks. The study highlights coping strategies, including eating disorders and self-objectification, while also discussing how survivors' relationship with their bodies has altered (F & J, 2024).

### **Societal and Cultural Factors**

Rape and other forms of violence against women are frequently sustained by societal and cultural factors as in the case of Radha. According to research, violence against women is more likely

to persist in patriarchal communities and cultures that place a strong emphasis on traditional gender roles and power relations (Heise, 1998). Furthermore, a culture of silence and impunity may be facilitated by cultural norms and attitudes that trivialise violence against women or place the blame on victims (Lonsway & Fitzgerald, 1994). Rape is an act of dominance over the woman and a manifestation of anger. This violent conduct is carried out using sexual means because the attacker wants to control the woman while degrading and humiliating her (Messina-Dysert, 2012). It is commonly believed, according to research, that when the enemy violates a community's female members, the entire group feels violated. Given that hegemonic military logics interpret the violation of a woman's body as signifying a nation's loss, this concept is especially pertinent to the symbolic meaning of wartime rape (Tembo, 2018). In a similar way, Radha was subjected to humiliation, abduction, and gang rape by Vikram and his cohorts. Following the trauma, she remains hesitant to return to her paternal home, fearing the social stigma it would cast upon her family's honour.

### **The Multifaceted Impacts of Trauma: Mental Health, Relationships, and Survivors' Experiences**

Radha's physical and mental health is significantly impacted by traumatic events. Trauma can also impact a person's relationships, resulting in issues with intimacy, trust, and emotional control, as well as trouble establishing and sustaining close relationships (Briere & Scott, 2006). The rape also affects a survivor's economic status. The pre-existing financial circumstances of survivors may influence their choice of work and heighten their chance of losing their jobs (Loya, 2014). Clarke's portrayal of a rape survivor's identity crisis after the rape serves as an example of the mental, emotional, physical, and several other difficulties that survivors have (Clarke, 2008). Seemingly, Brenda Downing highlights the significance of exploring beyond psychological impacts as she examines the embodied, long-term ramifications of rape trauma (Downing, 2018). Likewise and as

mentioned above, in addition to their physical and mental health, survivors' interpersonal connections with friends, family, and other individuals are impacted by the aftereffects of trauma, such as depression, PTSD, rape trauma syndrome, and other related conditions (Chaudhury, 2017). Furthermore, survivors' lives are left in ruins due to the rape and posttraumatic stress disorder. In their quantitative investigation, Moor et al. (2013) show that survivors of rape have symptoms such as PTSD and increased self-blame.

### **Coping with Trauma: Strategies for Survival and Healing**

In the context of trauma, survival is the capacity to manage, adjust, and bounce back from catastrophic events. In Radha's situation, even though she struggles initially after the rape, she learns to manage her physical and mental suffering and bounce back to normalcy as a strong politician. According to research, a number of coping strategies, such as meaning-making, self-care, and social support, can help people survive (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). It has been demonstrated that social support, in particular, is essential for promoting healing after traumatic events by offering a feeling of comfort, safety, and connection (Hobfoll et al., 2007). Numerous coping strategies, such as self-care, social support, and meaning-making, have been found to help Indian women survive (Bhaumik, 2022).

### **Interventions and Support**

The prevalence and severity of violence against women remain deeply concerning. In most cases, survivors can access supportive resources and effective remedies without hesitation. Radha finds Rakshit's home safe and begins her rehabilitation from there. Rakshit's intervention in Radha's life brings a ray of hope for her recovery. Research findings suggest that PTSD and depressive symptoms can be lessened with trauma-informed care that recognises the trauma connected to violence against women (Harris & Fallot, 2001). Furthermore, survivors can receive vital help and resources from advocacy and support services, including hotlines and shelters (Campbell et al., 2009).

Victims feel that reporting an assault is useless due to the way people treat those who do disclose and the silence that follows, especially when others are incredulous (Garrett & Hassan, 2019). According to research, survivors reported a great deal of stress and difficulties navigating relationships with friends, family, romantic partners, emergency medical personnel, and investigators in the year following the assault (Buchbinder et al., 2021). Therefore, the researchers highlight the psychological and emotional impacts of rape and call for systemic changes and better support networks. In doing so, these researchers highlight the need for feminist social work to tackle these issues (Adigüzel & Cankurtaran, 2024).

We argue, therefore, that systemic, legal, and social problems that obstruct justice and healing compound the pain of rape. In summation, research on trauma and survival among rape survivors, with a focus on psychological effects, societal and cultural aspects, legal and justice systems, healthcare responses, intersectionality, media representation, survivor narratives, and policy initiatives, highlights the complexity of trauma and survival while reiterating the need for all-encompassing, survivor-centred therapies. This study examines Radha's battle to deal with the trauma in her daily life and the difficulties she encounters in doing so. It encompasses difficulties brought on by guilt, self-blame, and social pressure that survivors experience following the rape. It also emphasises the difficulties a rape victim suffers in her day-to-day survival and the anguish she endures following the rape.

### **Methodology**

By analysing the chosen book, *The Temple Bar Woman: A Tale of Danger, Deceit, and Daring* by Sujatha Parashar, employing concepts of 'Complex PTSD', 'The Trauma Triangle', 'Establishing Safety', and 'Dialectic of Trauma', this research seeks to address the trauma and survival following rape. The concepts are explained below:

## Trauma as an intricate entity

### Complex PTSD

The idea of complex PTSD, acknowledges that traumatic events can be complex and multidimensional. Dissociation, emotional dysregulation, and physical problems are some of the symptoms of complex PTSD. Herman proposes to call it “complex post-traumatic stress disorder” (2015, p. 119). The responses to trauma are best understood as a spectrum of conditions rather than as a single disorder. They range from a brief stress reaction that gets better by itself and never qualifies for a diagnosis, to classic or simple post-traumatic stress disorder, to the complex syndrome of prolonged, repeated trauma” (Herman, 2015, p. 120). In his book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, Bessel van der Kolk emphasises that trauma is warehoused in the body of a victim and distresses the brain function, memory and emotional regulation. “Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort” (Kolk, 2014, p.97).

### The Trauma Triangle

The victim, offender, and bystander make up the trauma triangle. Herman contends that every one of these roles is essential to the trauma experience. She says “...Not only the helpless rage of the victim in terror of death but also the displacement of his (the victim’s) rage from perpetrator to caregiver” (Herman, 2015, p. 138). In a similar context, Ronald J. Berger and Searles (1985) in their work *Victim-Offender Interaction in Rape: Victimological, Situational, and Feminist Perspectives* talks about talked about a more nuanced and just approach that recognises the complexity of victim-offender dynamics.

### Survivorship and Coping Mechanisms Post-Assault

#### Establishing Safety

For trauma survivors, creating a sense of safety and security is crucial, according to Herman. This entails establishing a safe, encouraging environment devoid of hazards. According to Herman, “establishing safety begins by focusing

on control of the body and gradually moves outward to control of the environment. Because no one can establish a safe environment alone, the task of developing an adequate safety plan always includes a component of social support” (Herman, 2015, p. 160). In this context, Kolk (2014) says that the persistent feeling of insecurity can result in dissociation, emotional numbness, and the avoidance of physical sensations for each victim. Safety for victims is about regaining their inner sense of peace and control, not only about exterior protection.

### Dialectic of Trauma

Herman argues that the dialectic of trauma is a dynamic ongoing process. Trauma survivors may struggle to reconcile conflicting feelings, ideas, and experiences, oscillating between the dialectic’s poles. She explains the concept as:

[A]n experience of overwhelming danger, the contradictory responses of intrusion and constriction establish an oscillating rhythm. This dialectic of opposing psychological states is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the post-traumatic syndromes...The dialectic of trauma is therefore potentially self-perpetuating (Herman, 2015, p. 48).

This study is a qualitative textual study focusing on the struggles of a rape victim in the selected text, *The Temple Bar Woman: A Tale of Danger, Deceit, and Daring*, illustrating her ways of survival following the catastrophic event. The difficulties a rape survivor encounters in overcoming the trauma of the abuse are also highlighted in the research. In doing so, this study offers a deep comprehension of the psychological and emotional challenges encountered during the survival of the rape victim in the selected text via the prism of Judith Herman’s trauma theory, along with concepts from Bessel van der Kolk. By analysing the story as a qualitative textual study, the analysis highlights the survivor’s resiliency and difficulties in finding a way to heal, illuminating the intricacies of trauma and survival after rape. In addition to highlighting the long-lasting effects of sexual assault, the study provides insights into

the social and individual aspects of surviving rape trauma in day-to-day life.

### **Enduring Psychological sequelae after rape**

There are numerous prerequisites for survival. Following an extreme incident, the survivor must endure a great deal of mental and bodily upheaval. When physical wounds are added to mental challenges, the struggle is compounded. Herman points out the impact a traumatic event can cause on a survivor as follows:

[U]nlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe (Herman, 2015, p. 33).

According to the novel's setting, Radha's first challenge is the excruciating pain she experiences in her body. The psychological battle is experienced only during or after physical recovery. In reality, Radha experiences what Herman refers to as "complex PTSD." She experiences both somatic problems and emotional dysregulation as a result of the rape. Radha suffers greatly from these complex repercussions right after the rape. After the physical wound heals, the mind focusses a lot on the mental trauma. Herman quotes on 'survival' after an extreme incident as,

the critical picture of a person has been reduced to elemental concerns of survival is still frequently mistaken for a portrait of the victim's concerns of survival is still frequently mistaken for a portrait of the victim's underlying character (Herman, 2015, p. 117).

For Radha, surviving trauma occurred on multiple levels; prior to anything else, she had to heal her bodily wound. The healing process parallels her battle with the psychological trauma. "As long as you keep secrets and suppress information, you are fundamentally at war with yourself...The critical issue is allowing yourself to know what you know" (Kolk, 2014, p.250). The effects of sexual violence on women

are quite diverse and intricate; a variety of circumstances, including age, the type of assault, the connection with the offender, and other people's support, may affect how women react to sexual victimisation (Shackel, 2010, p. 495).

### **From Safety to Danger**

Radha came from such a secure home and was lavished with attention from her father. Until she was viciously gang-raped, nothing must have disturbed Radha's happiness. The rape incident is depicted by the author in dramatic detail, with every act of savagery being documented. "He roughly pulled her towards himself, lifted her forcefully and made her sit on his lap... Radha did not know what to do. She struggled in his arms and mustering all her strength she hit him with her legs. But he was too powerful for her. Unable to bear it anymore, she closed her eyes tightly shut and continued to fight him relentlessly" (Parashar, 2018, p. 26). Radha had no way to feel comfortable in any setting following the horrific rape. The credibility of a rape survivor is severely damaged by perpetrators, who also put their safety at risk. The survivor's fragmented memory and language are crucial in exposing them as unstable and dishonest, and the perpetrators greatly contribute to their untrustworthiness. Herman explains this cruelty of the perpetrators as follows:

In order to escape accountability for his crimes, the perpetrator does everything in his power to promote forgetting. Secrecy and silence are the perpetrator's first line of defense. If secrecy fails, the perpetrator attacks the credibility of his victim. If he cannot silence her absolutely, he tries to make sure that no one listens. To this end, he marshals an impressive array of arguments, from the most blatant denial to the most sophisticated and elegant rationalisation (Herman, 2015, p.8).

One of the novel's kinder characters, Rakshit, chooses to take Radha home with him after he understands her predicament in the brothel house. Even Rakshit's home, which is extremely secure and offers a certain sense of protection, was unable to reassure her of the danger she felt

while she was in the brothel. Habiba, the owner of the brothel house, gave Radha the name "Radhika," which Rakshit is also accustomed to. Due to the 'complex PTSD' that Radha suffers, her name itself serves as a reminder of the horrible rape that took place. These minor, unimportant elements caused her worry and made her feel uncomfortable constantly. The experience of rape has the power to both question and destroy a woman's identity, beliefs about the world, and way of being in it. It also destroys the sense of security and invulnerability that most individuals, who are not affected by suffering, crime, death, etc., function in. Her reason for existing has completely changed because of surviving the horrific event. She used to be calm and have a carefree, joyful life, but now she lives just to die. Following this horrific event, Radha lost her father. She had no reason to live except for him. For Radha, the other reason to live might be to find tranquillity, something she currently lacks entirely. Following the gang rape, she lost faith in safe spaces because they all posed a threat to her peace. Additionally, a threat focuses one's attention on the current circumstance. Furthermore, fear can alter normal perceptions; individuals in danger are often able to ignore discomfort, exhaustion, or hunger. "We now know that trauma compromises the brain area that communicates the physical embodied feeling of being alive" (Kolk, 2014, p.3). Lastly, a threat arouses strong emotions of rage and terror. These alterations in emotion, perception, arousal, and attention are typical adaptive responses. They prepare the endangered individual for intense action, such as fighting or fleeing.

Due to the 'complex PTSD' that Radha suffers, she has to encounter nightmares and flashbacks too. "When Radha regained consciousness, she found herself slumped on a side with her head resting against one of the back windows. The rough jolts confirmed her fears that she was not dreaming. Her ordeal was real and that she was still in the captivity of her kidnappers" (Parashar, 2018, p. 27). Regaining consciousness after the violent incident surprises Radha by shaking off the mental and physical stability of a survivor. She experiences abrupt flashbacks to the same

incident that include intense bodily and psychological pain, even days after the rape. She is plagued by the nightmare for the rest of her life. The nightmare does not act like a typical dream; rather, its severe negative repercussions shatter the survivor's mental health.

### **Guilt and Shame**

After a severe event, particularly a rape, guilt and shame are inevitable. Despite the fact that Radha did not contribute to the rape, society blames the survivor for luring the attacker into the act. It is irrational for the criminals to feel no remorse after committing such a horrible crime, and for society to condone this by condemning the victim for being present at the scene of the crime when it occurred (Berger & Searles, 1985). The act of publicly recording agony elicits judgment from viewers, and the results of these judgments define and influence how people view the identities of victims of sexual assault. In certain cases, even the justice system fails to understand the victim due to its lack of coherence in its description of the events. Even the well-informed judges fail to understand the survivor's cognitive disability. "In contrast, 'trauma narratives' are often regarded as more 'authentic' than popular cultural representations because they engage directly with the complex and inherently problematic nature of memory and reconstruction" (Doane, 2004, p. 523). Survivors' innate inability to articulate the terrible event they witnessed causes them to feel guilty and blame themselves. Their survival is further jeopardised at this point when the legal system, which should be their strongest support network, is unable to comprehend and believe in them. Even beyond her resistance, Radha gave up at one point and shut her eyes tightly at least to avoid witnessing her own rape. "She tried to move but was severely bruised. There was unbearable pain between her legs. She noticed that she had been carelessly covered with an oversized coat...The coat wasn't big enough to either cover her shame or her grief" (Parashar, 2018, p. 27).

The rape was not nearly as fatal to Radha as her helplessness. Due to "complex PTSD," Radha's mental strength was stifled by the helplessness

and impotence she experienced at the moment of the rape. The unclean touches of the criminals made her feel extremely disgusted, but her helplessness made her feel much guiltier. She held herself responsible for the rape. She attributed it to her circumstances and her disobedience. Despite her background as a schoolteacher, she was not a visionary. She also became enmeshed in her own shame and self-blame for the rape, for which she bears no responsibility. She was helpless because of her shame and remorse. She has grown weaker, and she feels more helpless. She was overwhelmed with anger and grief to exact revenge on her abusers as an excessive reaction to her helplessness.

### **The Misinterpreted Character**

The survivor will be mentally and physically exhausted after the extreme event. It is inconceivable to misinterpret the survivors' fundamental personalities in this circumstance. Because of the misunderstanding of their basic character, the survivors' recuperation is hampered. "A significant portion of the social science literature on rape, as already discussed above, has been marked by misogynist assumptions and a tendency to blame women for their own victimisation" (Berger & Searles, 1985, p.9).

We reiterate again that the character Radha from the chosen text provides insight into the same circumstance. Born into an affluent family, Radha is a charming, gentle, and innocent village teacher who runs a school for the locals. Radha is adored by everyone because of her wonderful upbringing. She finds herself in a brothel house for the first time after the horrific gang rape. Even though Radha is slowly getting over her physical and emotional pain, she is deeply troubled by the way her character has been misinterpreted. "Sometimes survivors are treated more harshly than those who abused them" (Herman, 2015, p. 116). Habiba Khan, the owner of the brothel in the text, views Radha as a resource for her business and refers to her by slang terms like "chokri." "Trauma is disabling and that it is interpreted as disabling is collapsed in a public discourse, but always in ways that

stigmatize and disable women and add to marginalization of disabled people" (Larson, 2018, p. 686). Radha found the treatment she received in the brothel intolerable. Even though she had quality treatment at first, as she recovers, things change. She feels compelled to engage in sex work. The obstinate brothel owner sees Radha as a possible asset to her establishment. The idea that she is being viewed as a sex worker is unacceptable to Radha. This is where her underlying character is misinterpreted, which makes it harder for her to survive and worsens her trauma recovery. "Feminist analysis links victim-offender interaction in rape to the structural dimensions of sexual inequality and gender-role socialisation" (Berger & Searles, 1985, p.9).

The experience of rape can profoundly unsettle and even shatter a woman's sense of self, her fundamental beliefs about the world, and her ways of inhabiting it. It ruptures the basic assumptions of safety and invulnerability within which most people who have not encountered such violence, suffering, or threat are able to move through their lives (Clarke, 2008). When Radha visits Rakshit's home, her persona is once more misinterpreted. Because Radha is a kind-hearted woman who loves children, but she was rigid to Rakshit and his daughter at first. Even yet, Rakshit treated her kindly. Rakshit and her daughter showed her respect and treated her well. Rape turned her generosity into retaliation; it totally destroyed her identity.

Radha is brutally raped, causing her body to be torn to bits. The rape results in 'complex PTSD', and she experiences an identity crisis just after the rape, and like other rape survivors, she worries about the humiliation she will cause to her family and herself. As a rape survivor living in a brothel, Radha believes there is no way out and that she would never be able to live a normal and happy life again. She desperately requires outside assistance to survive because she is unable to handle herself. Radha understands that whatever treatment she receives from them should be paid for in full by working as a prostitute in a brothel. In this case, she finds it difficult to even survive. Gaining a

comprehensive knowledge of all the challenges faced by a rape survivor is quite difficult. Despite their intricacy, there are not many significant issues to resolve. The act of rape invariably involves physical struggle.

Radha would find the guilt of not being able to protect herself from the rape more intolerable than the horrific event itself. Even though she made numerous attempts to get away from her attacker, she was unable to prevent her rape. Indian author, rape survivor, and social activist Sohaila Ali claims that in return for her boyfriend's life, she was asked to cooperate with the criminals (Abdulali, 2018). She became depressed when she discovered that she would have to quit fighting the criminals and work with them in order to save her life and her boyfriend's. She claims that she actually cooperated with them and got numb to whatever they were doing to her. She also claims that this does not imply that she enjoyed having sex with them, but rather that at the time, life was more significant than the stereotypically emphasised virginity in society. Sohaila anticipated a critical response to this statement as well, but she clarifies that she was the one who experienced everything, not other people. Because she understood that the only way she could survive was at the mercy of her criminals. Radha experiences the same suffering as Sohaila had. One of the criminals was ashamed of his heinous deeds and felt sad for Radha. Regretting his actions, he tried to help her, on which the author elaborates.

The physical torments that Radha endured both during and after the rape demonstrated her helplessness to stop her attacker. She was inspired to exact revenge for her rape after realising her physical helplessness. Radha lost her independence, identity, and control over her body as a result of the rape. She must remain in a vegetative condition for a while. She lost her autonomy, to put it simply. Herman explains this condition as follows:

In the most severe cases, the victim retains the dehumanized identity of a captive who has been reduced to the level of elemental survival: the robot,

animal, or vegetable (Herman, 2015, p. 94).

As discussed above, when Radha was far from home, her father passed away. He had been the one constant presence in her life, and his loss left her feeling unbearably suffocated. That single, devastating event seemed to unravel her entire world. She carries a deep sorrow for the harm caused by the perpetrator. And when she learned that her own circumstances had indirectly contributed to her father's death, she was overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness so profound that even grieving felt impossible. "Pain defined Radha's eyes. Her father's face flashed in front of her eyes as silent teardrops poured forth, wetting her cheeks. It could not be, her heart said. Her father could not go without saying goodbye to her. He was a healthy man. How...Why? She was too overwhelmed to figure out the answers" (Parashar, 2018, p. 104).

After being raped, Radha had no peace and had to deal with dreams and nightmares. She must relive the past every day and night, and it haunts her with its frequent revisits. Following the rape, the process of healing the physical and emotional injuries did not begin right away. Like many rape victims, she must endure these recurring flashbacks and nightmares. Every nightmare causes the body as well as the mind to suffer. The psychological scars cause the body to experience nearly the same anguish even after the physical wounds have healed. This is demonstrated by the fact that Radha's psychological injuries cause her physical healing to be delayed.

### **Identity Crisis**

The next challenge that a trauma survivor faces as a result of rape trauma is an identity crisis. It is rape's largely undetected impact. Rape survivors typically experience family abandonment due to societal preconceptions and humiliation, and they also fear returning to their families because of self-blame. "Calling someone who discloses rape a liar suggests derogatory assumptions about mental illness that make it difficult to talk about trauma and mental disability" (Larson, 2018, p. 691).

The worst consequence of trauma is that a small percentage of rape victims are coerced into sex work. The majority of the sex workers at the brothel establishment "Temple Bar" are compelled to work there because of their poverty and rape, as the author demonstrates in the text. Rape even leads the survivors to kill themselves. The preconceptions that society places in front of survivors contribute to their identity issues. They are now referred to as a burden and a disgrace. They are never accepted for who they were prior to the rape. Norms surrounding sexuality are shaped by misogynist presumptions about womanhood; these views of women as dishonest are rooted in the enduring notion that women's minds are fundamentally unstable and subpar compared to men's. Because of these stereotypes, survivors have a severe identity crisis. Thus, it becomes more difficult to survive an extreme event, like rape.

Destroying oneself is the next survival challenge. Feeling guilty and unable to defend herself from the rape, Radha tries to rip her skin away with her sharp nails. She also avoids eating, which delays her recovery. She gives her rehabilitation far less attention. More than society, Radha despises herself. She claims that she still feels unattractive and filthy even after taking multiple baths. She hates being a rape survivor. She even believes that she would find peace if she died.

Fighting the trauma is the most crucial step in survival. The survivor then 'establishes a safe environment', where she can regain her physical and emotional strength. The survivor discovers who she truly is at this stage of survival and begins to live in peace. After the retaliation is over, the peace begins to reign. For Radha, seeking revenge for her rape is the first step towards finding peace. Only after revealing the identity of her attacker does Radha get past her identity dilemma. By exposing the rapists, Radha battles and overcomes her trauma. Each survivor's experience is unique. Some would view it as a way to punish the offenders, while others would view it as a way to forgive. All the survivors cannot be satisfied with a common sentence or pardon for the rapist. Survivors'

recovery is always greatly aided by bystanders. In fact, their assistance promotes the healing process. In such cases, survivors expect the bystanders to simply be there, to support them without showing sympathy, to pretend as though nothing happened to them, to keep things as they were, and to avoid asking questions.

### **Survivorship and Coping Mechanisms Post-Assault**

The grave event destroyed her happiest time in life, when she was only concerned with teaching the kids their lessons and what to wear to school the following day, not with the psychological and physical scars from a gang rape. Even though Radha has nothing to do with the rape, she still has to deal with all of the fallout. Since every action has an opposite reaction, according to Newton's third law, the hardest scars left behind are the result of rape. Mental and bodily traumas are interwoven when battling with rape survivorship. In this context, it could be argued that the survivor's body never forgets the violent event that occurred in the past (Kolk, 2014). For a survivor, every physical wound that becomes a scar serves as a memory of the terrible event. The extraordinary effect of the scars is that they inflict the same pain in the survivor as they faced during the violence. The survivor continues to have panic attacks and other mental reactions as a result of the resurfacing of the frightening memories. As Herman (2015, p.119) argues:

In survivors of prolonged, repeated trauma, the symptom picture is often far more complex. Survivors of prolonged abuse develop characteristic personality changes, including deformations of relatedness and identity (Herman, 2015, p.119).

In a similar vein, Radha's physique serves as a reminder of the gang rape she experienced. The incident completely tore down her identity, so that she merely survived to avenge her rapists. In the aftermath of the rape, Radha felt stripped of all anchoring purpose. The violence left her profoundly isolated, as though every source of support had fallen away.

### The Dilemma of Telling and not Telling

When discussing trauma victims, it is crucial to address the dualistic nature of trauma, which Herman extensively discusses in the concept of 'Dialectic of Trauma'. The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (Herman, 2015, p.1). It is difficult for Radha, being a rape survivor, to put her bodily and mental pain into words. The dualistic aspect of trauma enters the picture following a severe incident that breaks her psyche and language. Because she wants to discuss the extreme occurrence with her roommate in the brothel house, and then they are perplexed and do not want to bring it up again. Their credibility is damaged by her hesitancy to speak up and its dualistic nature, on which Herman (2015, p.48) demonstrates:

In the aftermath of an experience of overwhelming danger, the two contradictory responses of intrusion and constriction establish an oscillating rhythm. This dialectic of opposing psychological states is perhaps the most characteristic feature of the post-traumatic syndromes (Herman, 2015, p.48).

Referring to rape survivors as "liars" makes them appear more incapacitated and runs the risk of making them appear unreliable when discussing their actual physical experiences. The difficulty of speaking up is a crucial aspect of trauma that has been discussed and developed by trauma theorists such as Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman, and others. As Larson (2018, p.694) put it:

Whether or not their disclosure deals with trauma or pain, the choice to disclose forces them either to deny disability, in the case of survivor discourse, or risk being labelled as more disabled, as demonstrated by rape-hoax narratives (Larson, 2018, p. 694).

Understanding the struggles Radha faces as a survivor is crucial to better understanding them. However, it gets more difficult when she is unable to understand and express what has

happened to her. Because understanding and empathy require effective communication. To put it another way, calling people who report rape and sexual assault liars exposes a conceptual heritage of crazy that persists even though the medical world no longer employs the term "hysteria." By implying that a woman is not of sound mind, calling her a liar places mental illness outside the bounds of accepted social and mental norms (Larson, 2018, p. 692). In a similar way, Radha could not speak out because of the tension between her desire to deny the terrible events and her desire to publicly declare them. Her strong and uncontrollable emotions make her an unreliable communicator even when she does speak up. Therefore, it is crucial to understand and emphasise the inevitable and natural consequences of the terrible incident. Generally, when a loved one rejects them and does not trust the survivor, it doubles her trauma.

Bystanders' understanding of the dualistic nature of trauma prevents survivors from experiencing an added trauma since they are spared the hardship of being unreliable. "This is most apparent in the way traumatized people alternate between feeling numb and reliving the event. The dialectic of trauma gives rise to complicated, sometimes uncanny alterations of consciousness, which George Orwell, one of the committed truth-tellers of our century, called "doublethink" (George Orwell introduces the concept of "doublethink" in his dystopian novel, 1984) and which mental health professionals, searching for a calm, precise language, call 'dissociation'" (Herman, 2015, p. 1). According to Freud, the terrible incident is only traumatic when it is remembered and returned to; while the survivors are impacted by the extraordinary occurrence, their condition deteriorates with each visit. It is crucial to speak up to escape the grip of recurring returns. Even when communication is hampered by the dualistic nature of trauma, survivors are encouraged to speak up effectively by bystanders' attempts to understand them despite their broken language. Because mutual understanding between the speaker and the

listener allows even the unspoken to be understood.

### **Scars and Survival**

Survivors deal with many issues. The worst scenario is for the offenders to brutally murder some of the survivors. Those who are left to live must endure severe physical and psychological suffering in order to survive the rape. The challenges include social, mental, and physical in nature. Radha frequently suffers from dissociation and a severe fear of dying. These physical reactions are normal. Fear-induced paralysis does not imply that the victim or survivor does not necessarily want it to happen or give her consent, even if she decides that it is safer not to physically oppose in the given circumstance (Chaudhury, 2017, p. 3). Most importantly, the survivors sustain serious bodily harm right away following the rape, like Radha. Despite being invisible, mental scars cause permanent trauma and have a greater impact on survivors than physical scars. Like physical trauma, mental trauma can cause physical discomfort in the body of the survivor. Larson (2018) in her review article talk about how the author of the book they reviewed armoured herself from the effects of rape. Instead of using conversation to convey Radha's mental struggle, Parashar uses her character description to highlight how innocent, weak, stubborn, and unpredictable her behaviour is. Radha triumphantly conquered her humiliation and endured her suffering.

### **Bystanders' Role**

Indirect exposure to the trauma of a rape victim can cause emotional and psychological pain for the victim's family. This occurrence serves as a crucial reminder of how sexual abuse affects not only the primary survivor but also those closest to them. Despite the fact that Radha's father could have no way of protecting her from rape, he also falls into the trauma triangle, on which Herman elaborates, "the victim's greatest contempt is often reserved, not for the perpetrator, but for the passive bystander" (Herman, 2015, p.92). When family members see their loved one suffer and find it difficult to support them, they frequently deal with strong

feelings, including guilt, helplessness, rage, and despair. These emotions may eventually show themselves as PTSD-like symptoms, such as worry, hyper vigilance, and emotional weariness. Despite not knowing about her rape, Radha's father was often ill and experienced guilt trips because of her absence. He raised his daughter alone and is regarded in the village as a nice and powerful father. He could not stand the loss of his wife, but he could not stand the kidnapping of his daughter. It progressively deteriorates his health till death finally knocks on his door. Had Radha's father learnt about her rape, he would undoubtedly have become angry and hopeless. His death would have been accelerated by his sense of helplessness.

As communication breaks down or becomes focused just on the trauma, family relationships may also suffer. "It is not only the patients but also the investigators of post-traumatic conditions whose credibility is repeatedly challenged" (Herman, 2015, p.9). The shame associated with rape in society makes this trauma even worse since families are frequently subjected to criticism, blame, or social exclusion. Naturally, Radha's father would have provided her with excellent care and aided in her early recovery from the trauma if she had gone back to him following the rape. At the same time, external pressure might worsen his feelings of helplessness and humiliation, which could hinder Radha's and the family's ability to heal.

At other times, however, the survivors hold the family and other bystanders accountable for their misfortune. The chosen novel effectively illustrates Herman's "trauma triangle" theory, as rape survivor Radha turns her ire from the attackers to the onlookers. She believes her group rape was committed by her buddy, who brought her to the event. Even though her father forbade her from attending the festival, her buddy obtained his consent. As a result, Radha holds her friend and father responsible for her rape. For similar situations like this, Herman (2015, p.9) contends that:

To hold traumatic reality in consciousness requires a social context that affirms and protects the victim and

that joins victim and witness in a common alliance. For the individual victim, this social context is created by relationships with friends, lovers and family (Herman, 2015, p.9).

They want bystanders to agree with them as well. The least that the survivors want from the bystanders is to be with them and trust them, not calling them liars. Following their admission that they were unable to shield the survivors from the horrible act, the survivors also desire to be placated by the spectators. Ultimately, by admitting they are not at fault, the survivors overcome their sense of helplessness in the face of the offenders. To realise this, survivors require a secure setting free from significant danger, where they can always rely on someone to support and stand by them. Radha decided not to return to her father as she does not want to give her father any guilt or helplessness as a bystander.

### **Establishing Safety**

Even beyond all the struggles for survival, Radha manages to speak up about her rape, which became possible for her in a safe environment like Rakshit's home. After rescuing Radha from the brothel, Rakshit does not disturb her by asking her about her past, where she comes from or any other tormenting questions to her. A safe environment for a rape survivor like Radha is a place where she finds no threat of any more such extreme incidents, and a reminder for the same. "Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying lives" (Kolk, 2014, p.77). A controlled and safe environment fosters the healing of a rape survivor. The survival and healing happened in parallel to Radha. The society and the bystanders are very important in creating a safe environment for a rape survivor. A survivor begins the process of healing in a safe environment by regaining trust in bystanders, as Radha did, and gaining trust in Rakshit. They should not be judgmental or try to have control over the survivor; they should simply listen to the survivor. Just as Rakshit simply stood by the

side of Radha, all the bystanders stood by her for the survivor without questioning her. The society, too, should lend its ears to a rape survivor and trust her without judging her; that is where the survivor begins her journey towards healing.

### **Conclusion**

Mobilising ideas from Herman, Van der Kolk on 'Complex PTSD', 'trauma triangle', 'Dialectic of Trauma', and 'Establishing safety' the study discusses the struggles Radha faces post-rape to survive and recover. Radha, being a rape victim, finds it difficult to survive a terrible occurrence since it completely destroys her physical and mental well-being. The physical and psychological damage from rape takes a lifetime to heal, in contrast to other bodily wounds. The physical brought on by unforeseen circumstances like floods, car crashes, and so forth. The concept of 'complex PTSD' helped enormously to understand the complex psychosomatic struggle that Radha faces. Van der Kolk's concept of Somatic memory explains the struggles Radha faces in her body as a result of rape trauma. Due to the confusing effects of trauma, the concept of 'trauma triangle' played a crucial role in understanding the reason why Radha displaced her anger on the rescuer, Rakshit, rather than the perpetrators. Because mental trauma recurs with the same damage to the psyche, it takes a very long time to heal, even though physical wounds heal over time.

The greatest challenge she faces will be resuming her previous routine. She lost her former personality in the effort to survive the rape and attempt to live a regular life again, but she also reinvented herself as a new, resilient, and indestructible version of herself. Radha never wants to give up, even though surviving a severe event like rape drains all of her energy and social well-being. Some survivors dispute in their homes, while others do so in courtrooms. In a safe environment, Radha's former self is revitalised, like an eagle regaining its power, when she chooses to persevere, to realise that whatever she is going through is not her fault, and to refuse to accept responsibility for it. Radha is now prepared to live for herself, better

than before. Future research could engage more deeply with specific psychosomatic approaches to understanding trauma. At the same time, rape trauma must also be situated within its broader political and economic determinants.

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### **Ethical Approval**

It has been declared that there are no human subjects in the study “Trauma and Survival in Sujata Parashar’s *The Temple Bar Woman: A Tale of Danger, Deceit, and Daring*”. The literary work *The Temple Bar Woman* (2018) is the sole subject of this study’s analysis; no sensitive information, human subjects, or personal data are gathered or used. Consequently, ethical clearance is not obligatory.

### **Conflict of Interest**

We declare that we have no competing interests. This article has not been submitted to any other journal and has not been previously published. We also declare that we have not received any financial support, and there is no financial conflict.

### **AI Statement**

The authors declare that QuillBot was used for enhance language, preserving the original idea, concept, and theorisation.

### **Author Contribution Statement**

Jove Jerina formulated the idea, selected the source and drafted the manuscript, while Dr

Chithra G K further developed the idea, reviewed the manuscript and edited it.

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Informed Consent is not required for this manuscript as it does not deal with any human participants.

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