

Women Transcending Trauma through Positive Coping in Dina Mehta's *Getting away with Murder*

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Abstract

This research examines how far Indian women's modern theatre reveals women's experience with different forms of patriarchal abuse triggering their psychological trauma within modern India and how far some women manage to cope. The paper employs a psychoanalytic approach in analysing the female character, Sonali, in Dina Mehta's *Getting away with Murder* (1989). Sonali has been subject to traumatizing physical and emotional domestic violence at the hands of some male and female family members holding patriarchal ideology. The paper attempts to investigate how far Sonali shows a shift from early negative coping with trauma to an eventual ability to adapt marked by varied signs of positive coping. She is aided by psychosocial or emotional and social support of trustworthy family members and friends. Sonali eventually reveals psychosomatic stability symptoms, or physical and respective emotional signs of positive coping as seen in her calmness, self-control, and less or no intrusion of traumatic memories. Sonali also manifests cognitive signs of positive coping exemplified by acquiring positive self-image and acceptance of giving birth to a girl. Finally, Sonali's positive coping is traced in her communicative and interpersonal patterns showing better self-expression, especially through abreaction, as well as her socializing and reconnecting with others.

Keywords: Women's Theatre – Modern Indian Theatre – Indian Women – Patriarchal Violence – Female Trauma – Negative and Positive Coping – Psychosomatic Signs – Cognitive Signs – Behavioural Signs – Interpersonal and Communicative Signs □

تجاوز المرأة للصدمة من خلال المواجهة الإيجابية في مسرحية 'الهروب من القتل' لدينا ميها

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□ الاستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث دور المسرح النسوي الهندي الحديث في إبراز تجارب النساء مع الأشكال المتعددة للعنف والإيذاء الذكوري المتسبب في تعرضهن للصدمة النفسية في المجتمع الهندي الحديث ومدى تمكن بعض منهن من التأقلم. يتبنى البحث نهج التحليل النفسي لدراسة شخصية 'سونالي' في مسرحية 'الهروب من القتل' (1989) لدينا ميها وكيف تتعرض هذه الشخصية ونماذج أخرى من المرأة الهندية الحديثة للعنف الذكوري الجسدي والعاطفي في كل من السياق الأسري والمجتمعي مما يجعلهن عرضة للصدمة النفسية. تتعرض سونالي للعنف البدني والنفسي الأسري المستباح من قبل المجتمع الذكوري الهندي على يد بعض أفراد الأسرة من الرجال والنساء. فبينما تفشل بعض النساء في التأقلم، يستكشف البحث مدى تطور شخصية سونالي وتحولها من المواجهة السلبية الأولية للصدمة، إلى التمكن مؤخراً من التأقلم والمواجهة الإيجابية للصدمة، مصحوباً بإظهارها لعلامات متعددة للمواجهة الإيجابية للصدمة. تتمكن سونالي من التعايش مع واقع تعرضها للصدمة، وخاصاً بفضل الدعم النفسي والاجتماعي للأهل والأصدقاء المقربين. تتمكن سونالي بالنهاية من إظهار أعراض استقرار سيكوسوماتي، تتمثل في أعراض بدنية وأخرى نفسية مصاحبة للمواجهة الإيجابية للصدمة مثل الهدوء النفسي والتحكم بالذات وانخفاض أو تلاشي معدل إعادة معايشة تجربة أو ذكريات الصدمة. وكذلك يظهر على سونالي أعراض

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إدراكية للتأقلم الإيجابي مع الصدمة تتمثل في تبنيها لنظرة نفسية إيجابية وتقبلها لفكرة إنجاب الإناث. وأخيراً تبدو مواجهة سونالي الإيجابية للصدمة جلية في ظهور علامات التأقلم الاجتماعي والحواري في التواصل مع الآخرين، التي تكمن في إظهارها لقدرة أفضل على التعبير عن النفس، وخاصة عن طريق التفريغ النفسي، فضلاً عن قدرتها الأفضل على التواصل وإعادة توطيد أواصر العلاقات مع الآخرين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المسرح النسائي - المسرح الهندي الحديث - المرأة الهندية - العنف الذكوري - الصدمة النسائية - المواجهة السلبية والإيجابية - أعراض سيكوسوماتية - أعراض إدراكية - أعراض سلوكية - أعراض اجتماعية وحوارية .

Women have always been subject to different forms of violence or abuse within patriarchy. The article of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical or psychological harm or suffering to women” (qtd. in Sinha et al. 135). Violence or abuse against women not only affects their physical health, but it also affects their mental and psychological health. They experience “depression, fear, anxiety, sexual dysfunction, neurosis, and obsessive behavior,” (Sinha et al. 136) as well as “post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) self-harming behaviours and suicidality” (Abrahams 23). Therefore, experiencing chauvinistic patriarchal abuse renders women liable to go through psychological trauma.

Violence perpetrated against women takes the forms of domestic or structural abuse taking place within a patriarchal society (Carlson 291). Parul Sinha et al. maintain that within a domestic environment, a “woman has to face violence ... be it from her parents, her husband, later in life by her son and other relatives” (135). Family and domestic settings are also very often used as tools of maintaining patriarchal social order, as well as practising subjugation and control over women. Hilary Abrahams maintains that women undergo “manipulation and control,” which their domestic abusers “exercise over every aspect of their lives and thoughts” (19). Thus, domestic violence, especially sanctioned within patriarchal society, is a major cause of women’s psychological trauma.

Although some women fail to overcome their trauma, other women manage to adapt and show a shift from negative to positive signs of coping. Positive coping with trauma paves the way for healthy or “normal functioning after excessive stress that challenges individual coping skills” (qtd. in Agaibi and Wilson 197). Women showing positive coping manifest a higher ability to survive or rehabilitate and to face negative feelings and memories related to their early abuse. Moreover, these women “struggle to achieve some measure of healthy functioning in the world and in their interpersonal relationships” (Chu 111). They start showing a

number of physical, psychological, cognitive, interpersonal, and communicative signs of positive coping with the traumatic experiences they have had.

The primary environmental factor enhancing positive coping with trauma is “the ability to utilize social and interpersonal support” (Chu 111), and being involved in healthy interpersonal relationships with family, friends, or therapist. Receiving external psychosocial, or social and emotional, support provides traumatized women with new relationships based on “mutuality and collaboration ... rather than the control, aggression, exploitation, abandonment and betrayal” that distinguish abusive interpersonal relationships causing trauma (Chu 121). Accordingly, psychosocial support provides women with trustworthy partners who would share their feelings and ease their pain. This enables women to regain self-confidence, rebuild their personality, achieve self-assertion, and heal. Moreover, the new relational models provided by psychosocially supportive others allow traumatized women to learn to start trusting others and to feel connected to them.

This paper discusses the female character, Sonali, in the play *Getting away with Murder* (1989) by Dina Mehta (also Deena Mehta, born 1961). Mehta is an Indian woman playwright, novelist, short story writer, and editor. She has won two awards from the Sultan Padamsee Playwriting Competition in 1968 and 1978. The publisher of the collection of plays *Body Blows: Women, Violence, and Survival* notes that Mehta focuses on “various kinds of violence and abuse that women face,” adding that her play *Getting away with Murder* focuses on violence against women as “one of the most important and problematic issues of our society” (The Cover). Indu Pandey names Mehta as one of the women playwrights “who are remembered for their remarkable contribution,” as they “have introduced new subjects affecting the feminine psyche in their works” (50). Therefore, Mehta’s works serve as a good material to analyse women’s psyche and their reactions to psychological trauma stemming from patriarchal abuse.

Mehta’s Sonali exemplifies Indian women who have gone through traumatizing physical and emotional violence within their domestic life. While showing initial negative signs of coping with trauma, Sonali lately manages to surpass her traumatic experiences and show signs of positive coping. Accordingly, this paper adopts a psychoanalytic study of Sonali in *Getting away with Murder* in order to shed light on the extent of patriarchal violence and injustice perpetrated

against a modern Indian woman as Sonali, which, in turn, result in her psychological trauma and how far she shows successful adaptation.

Sonali in *Getting away with Murder* is a middle class pregnant wife, who has always suffered psychologically as a result of being raped as a child for years by her uncle. Her former plight as a child is made worse by her mother's passivity, submissiveness, silence, and unjust favouring of her son, Gopal, at Sonali's expense. As an adult, Sonali believes that the reason why she has experienced all this sexual and emotional abuse is that she is born a girl. That is why she insists on doing a prenatal sex detection test and foeticide for her unborn baby foetus if it proved to be a female so as to spare her daughter the same horrible fate as hers. Scene five is a confrontation scene, where Sonali, aided by her brother, Gopal, her husband, Anil, and her friend, Malu, remembers all the truth about her uncle's rape, as well as her plan to murder him to put an end to his abuse. In the last scene, Sonali shows noticeable character development. She does not do the sex detection test, accepts her pregnancy, and looks forward to giving birth to her daughter.

As a child, Sonali has been subject to domestic physical abuse at the hands of her uncle. Turning to an adult, Sonali still cannot overcome the traumatic memory of being subject to continuous sexual harassment at the hands of her middle-aged bachelor uncle from the time she was a child of eight and till the age of twelve with his death. Through Sonali's inner dialogue, the audience realizes the extent of physical abuse committed against her:

SONALI. Your fingers are not kind, they hurt. . . . Stop it, stop! . . . Every time I took a bath I could hear him outside . . . breathing . . . waiting to look at me without my clothes on . . . (Mehta 1.3.66)

Besides peeping at her, it is implied that her uncle has repetitively abused her body sexually and even raped her. Sonali remembers begging him not to touch her and to stop his acts that physically hurt her. Towards the end of the play Gopal admits:

GOPAL. . . . my sister was sexually abused . . . from the time she was 8 years old. And Sonali was 12 when Uncle Narotam broke his head. . . . night after night. . . coming to her bed . . . (2.5.87-88)

Though she is only a child, Sonali has had to undergo domestic sexual harassment for four years. Recent studies emphasize the "harmful, long-term effects" of "adult/child sexual encounters within the family" (Irvine 1459). In addition, Maria Crosta et al. maintain that early traumatic experiences, as well as physical and sexual abuse at a young age are associated with "lower resilience and decreased

tolerance of negative affects later in life" (sic; 27). Thus, the uncle's physical abuse make Sonali critically liable to experience trauma that extends till adulthood.

Sonali is also subject to other forms of physical violence validated by patriarchal society. Being a wife who lives within the boundaries of a patriarchal culture, Sonali experiences beating once by her husband, Anil, as he slaps her in disagreement with her words. More shocking is Sonali's reaction as she welcomes the act of slapping as Anil's right. She considers her submission to such physical violence as a sign of her being a good wife. Sonali reasserts:

SONALI. I'm your wife. Mother told me that just as a scorpion . . . lordly men desire to sting their women—and a good wife always lets her husband do so. I've been a good wife to you, haven't I? (Mehta 2.5.86)

Patriarchy encourages men to exercise physical abuse against their wives, and teaches the latter to submit to such violation and even accept it as an indication of their being good wives. Besides, this is an illustration of how Sonali's mother acts as an agent enforcing hypocritical patriarchal tenets through teaching her daughter to submit to such physical abuse to be accepted by community.

Moreover, Sonali is subject to different forms of domestic patriarchal emotional violence at the hands of her family members. First, Sonali experiences traumatizing emotional abuse at the hands of her uncle. Linda Williams states that abuse by "a perpetrator with a close relationship to the child" is linked with increased "psychological distress" (1174). Gopal, who was a little child then, remembers the emotional blackmail that his uncle has committed against his sister. The former speaks of the many times he heard their uncle "threatened her [Sonali] into silence . . . and submission" (Mehta 2.5.88). Beside his physical exploitation, Sonali's uncle emotionally abuses her through forcing her into silence and compliance against her will. Carol Barringer argues that a female survivor of childhood sexual abuse fears to "speak of her abuse" as she cannot "defy her perpetrator's threats" (qtd. in Naples 1166). Therefore, being a victim of sexual violence and emotional blackmail at the hands of an elder family member, Sonali is made to suffer from complex emotional pain or post-traumatic stress disorder. As a result, many years later as a married woman, Sonali still cannot forget the emotional pain she has been through, arising from her uncle's threats. He also intimidates her into muteness to his physical assault with the false claim that she is the reason why he always falls to the ground by stumbling over her toys, while in

fact he is always drunk and the toys are her brother's. She repeats her words previously said to her mother:

SONALI. 'Jack fell down and broke his crown . . .' But he always falls over things, Mother, when he comes home smelling like that! And it wasn't my toy he tripped over. (Mehta 2.5.85)

Furthermore, Sonali's uncle forces her to submit to his rape as he is the one who provides lodging to her family after her father's death and who could easily kick them out of his house in case she screams or speaks of his abuse. Thus, having to bear with her uncle's emotional blackmail and harassment for years has rendered Sonali victim of complex psychological trauma.

Sonali's mother is another agent of patriarchy that exerts traumatizing domestic emotional abuse targeting her own little daughter. Victoria Banyard et al. maintain that abuse or maltreatment, especially within a negative family environment, renders a child vulnerable to trauma and long-term negative consequences ("Understanding Links" 312, 318). Sonali's mother shows traditional patriarchal prejudice against Sonali, being a female, in favour of her brother and son, being males. Sonali regrets, "[m]y mother never loved me. She had eyes only for Gopal . . . and for him," indicating her uncle (Mehta 2.5.86). On the one hand, Sonali complains that her mother used to control her as a child, limit her freedom, and overwork her, rather than Gopal. She remembers:

SONALI. . . . [Mother] turned me into her satellite: I had to run her errands, mouth her opinions, feel her feelings. Of course, Gopal escaped all that because he was born with an extra set of accessories. (1.1.59)

Sonali hints at the fact that Gopal is spared all tasks as he is born male. She also remembers how Gopal has been a spoilt child, possessive of his toys and has "never been taught to share," (2.5.89) which is another illustration of the mother's favouring of her son, whereby the mother teaches the boy to be superior, while the girl is taught to be subservient and deprived of equal rights as her brother.

On the other hand, Sonali's mother favours the uncle at the cost of her daughter. First, the mother orders Sonali to pray for the uncle and remember his kindness daily despite Sonali's complaints of him. Sonali recalls:

SONALI (*laughing nervously*). Not like the portrait of Uncle in Mother's house, is it? She put fresh flowers before it every day and Gopal and I were urged to remember his kindness and pray for him. (2.5.86)

The mother's gesture of putting daily flowers in front of her brother's portrait is a metaphorical act comparing his portrait to that of an idol to be glorified. This gesture and urging her children to give due respect and prayers to their uncle daily reveal how she is one of those society members upholding hypocritical patriarchal ideals giving honour to fake idols and encouraging their corruption. As a result, the mother never takes Sonali's complaints of the uncle's evident harassment seriously or takes any action against him. Sonali recalls complaining to her mother, "[d]on't want to sit near him, Mother. Don't like to be touched," (1.3.66) however his physical abuse has continued taking place for four years. Crosta et al. argue that emotional neglect of a victim facing stressful and threatening situations leads to the victim going through psychic traumatic consequences (27-28). Banyard et al. states that sexual abuse often occurs within "a larger family context," where children "fail to find a secure base in their parents" ("The long-term" 698). Therefore, being an instrument of patriarchy abusive of women through her chauvinism, lack of emotional support, and emotional neglect, it can be claimed that Sonali's mother has indirectly allowed the uncle's abuse of her daughter.

Moreover, the mother's passivity and submissiveness imposed by patriarchal restrictions have also indirectly permitted the uncle's rape of her daughter. The mother gives in to her marginalized and inferior status as seen in Gopal's remark, "[m]other was corpulent and confined to the kitchen. She couldn't see beyond her nose—or was afraid to . . ." (Mehta 2.4.83). She submits to patriarchal physical and mental confinement, and is satisfied with her domestic imprisonment within the kitchen. She also succumbs to being bound by the ignorance, weakness, and vulnerability imposed by patriarchy that renders her unable or afraid to face the ugly truth or bear its consequences. Thus, the mother's passivity and silence over the abuse perpetrated against her child can be considered a metaphorical acceptance of such a crime and a subtle permission for it to continue taking place.

Another glaring example of Sonali's mother's emotional abuse is the way she has always regarded Sonali guilty and responsible for things that she has not committed without showing any forgiveness. Sonali complains to her mother, "You always blame me, Mother, never Gopal" (2.5.85) and remembers how her mother "never forgave" her (2.5.87) for her uncle's tripping over the toys, though they are Gopal's, and never listened to her self-defense. All these are reasons why Sonali regards her mother as a "martinet" (2.1.74) or a source of emotional violence and oppression as she neither shows Sonali any love, emotional support,

understanding, nor tolerance. Sonali sums up the reason behind her suffering that “[t]o be born a girl is to be subject to violence and servitude!” (1.1.63). In other words, being a female, Sonali has undergone traditional physical and emotional violence at the hands of male and female family members, both representing the traditional sexist patriarchal mentality which accepts such abuse and causes her to go through severe psychological trauma.

Sonali shows some initial psychological and psychosomatic or respective bodily signs of negative coping with trauma that she manages to overcome towards the end of the play marking her success at positive coping. One major psychosomatic manifestation of trauma is the frequent reliving of a traumatic memory or “compulsion to revisit the traumatic experience,” which is either complete and inclusive of all the traumatic sensations or fragmented and partial (Noy 214). Joanne L. Freed remarks that one defining characteristic of trauma is the “uncontrollable recurrence of events too horrible either to be fully experienced by the survivor at the time those events occur, or to be incorporated into his or her memory of the past” (409). Being unable to react positively to a traumatic experience is accompanied by repetitively going through the same memory especially in a fragmented manner by re-living some negative aspects apart from the others such as seeing images and re-experiencing the same feelings without being able to remember details, hear voices, or remember associated thoughts. In fact, “fragmentation” or “dissociation” occurs as a “defensive” mechanism to alleviate “the intensity of the pain and anxiety” associated with past traumatic memory (Noy 223). Although a woman’s mind protects her from reliving the whole experience by suppressing some of its aspects or sensations, the whole idea of reliving a complete or partial traumatic memory is a sign of failed coping.

Having been a child victim of sexual abuse that has driven her to commit murder, adult Sonali is plagued by going through her past traumatic experiences over and over again, especially in a fragmented way. Banyard et al. explain that women survivors of childhood sexual abuse show a number of psychological and somatic PTSD symptoms, as well as high dissociation or fragmentation (“Understanding Links” 313). Accordingly, Sonali relives the rape scene experienced in her childhood with its acts and feelings, and repeats the dialogue to herself in the same childish tone of voice as a sign of her failure to cope positively with the traumatic experience. As Sonali is hit by the traumatic memory, she:

(moves to the mirror, stares into her face intently then begins to speak in a petulant 8-year-old voice as she regresses in time . . .) (Mehta 1.3.66)

Here, Sonali goes back in time to her childhood and imagines seeing the past horrible sights in the mirror. Sonali's memories are never comprehensive or fully-realised through her senses or cognitive and communicative faculties. Instead, the intrusion of her traumatic memories is always fragmented. Williams lists the causes of dissociation, fragmentation, or forgetting some details related to their traumatic memories. These are going through "more violent episodes of abuse," "younger age," "longstanding or repeated ordeals," "relationship to the offender" or "[a]buse by known perpetrators," as well as their highly disturbing or frightening content, all of which are valid causes in Sonali's case (Williams 1168, 1174). She undergoes severe dissociation and haziness of memories as she has been victim of repeated physically and emotionally painful acts in her childhood at the hands of her uncle and mother. Her dissociation or fragmentation is evident in Anil's words:

ANIL: 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 . . . (Mehta 2.5.87)

Sonali tries to remember the buried truths of a memory she can partially conceive. She finds difficulty in visually perceiving a harsh scene hidden at the back of her eyes and in uttering words concealed at the corners of her mouth or brain. Sonali asserts the same idea of being haunted and baffled by fragmented past memories:

SONALI. . . . But the worst thing still waits in the shadows for me—

.....

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 a splitting headache. (1.1.64-65)

She only has a vague memory of the rape and murder scenes with incomplete words, gestures, and sensations, which she refers to as "something alien and familiar" (1.3.66).

Accordingly, Sonali's traumatic experience has rendered feelings of excessive fear and anxiety that affect her psyche. J. D. Bremner et al. hold that "[c]hildhood abuse has been associated with a range of adverse psychiatric outcomes, including depression . . . , anxiety . . . , dissociation . . . , [and] post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (1-2). Being struck by her incomprehensive memories of her childhood,

Sonali shows anxiety and fear about the hidden seemingly horrendous truth that she tries to remember in vain as seen in the following excerpt:

ANIL. You're shivering. Are you cold, Sonu?

SONALI. I feel . . . something in the shadows . . . waiting to pounce on me . . . pushing and clawing . . . my head hurts. It hurts . . . (*she falls into a faint*)

.....
(*gazing into the mirror*). I'm lost Something dares me to look back but the shadows are closing in . . . (*turns away with a cry*) (Mehta 2.5.87-88)

Sonali compares this ugly truth to a monster waiting in the shadows or lurking in the dark getting ready to attack her. The reason why she cannot fully grasp all the aspects of the traumatic experience is her fear of such horrific truth, the harm it will cause her, as well as her inability to confront it. Similarly, Raziya and Malu describe Sonali's fear of this missing ugly truth:

RAZIYA. . . . Perhaps something buried in Sonali's mind is waiting to be disinterred?

MALU. . . . She herself talked, of a truth hiding in the dark, gathering strength enough to surface, coming to a point . . . then blanking out.

RAZIYA. Because she fears it . . . (2.1.73)

Thus, fragmented intrusion of traumatic memories is Sonali's mind shield against the unbearable past reality, and the most prominent psychological sign of her negative coping with trauma.

Sonali's fear and anxiety about the hidden traumatic truth have their toll on her physical health as well. Banyard et al. emphasize that trauma occurring at an early age leads to complex PTSD, which is manifest in "affect arousal, dissociation, [and] somatization" ("The Long-term" 698). Therefore, as seen in the previous excerpts, Sonali's fear and anxiety associated with her fragmented memories are accompanied by several somatic or bodily signs of negative coping with the trauma experience. Sonali complains on different occasions of feeling frightful headaches, splitting headache, and hurting head. Other psychosomatic signs that highlight Sonali's failed adaptation with trauma traced in the quotes above are her crying, excessive sweating, cold shivering body, and falling into a faint.

Furthermore, as a grownup, Sonali still cannot get over the past rape bodily pain, as well as the anxiety and fear of being forced to submit to an unfamiliar violent act that harms her body. She recalls her uncle's rape and her desperate pleading to him to leave her. She reenacts parts of the scene before the mirror:

SONALI. Don't! 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. . .*) (Mehta 1.3.66)

Sonali's physical and emotional pain is seen in the way she remembers begging her uncle to stop his abusive incomprehensible acts. She goes through the same sensations of helplessness, pain, and fear that are evident in her tone of voice. Sonali also shows terror and worry about the uncle's revenge if she draws others' attention by screaming. Gopal describes the emotional and bodily agony she still goes through as a result of the uncle's threatening her into silence, arguing that "the screams she swallowed must still be tearing her up inside" (2.5.88). Thus, Sonali's anxiety and fear have some psychosomatic manifestations in her low voice, the way she squirms, retches, and gags as she relives the rape scene with its physical and emotional sensations.

Sonali's initial psychological and psychosomatic negative coping with trauma are also witnessed in her loss of temper and lack of self-control early in the play as a subconscious expression of her emotional turmoil. In the first scene, while Sonali is sitting with Malu at a café, she shows unjustified and unexpected signs of anger. When Malu asks her about her frequently experienced headaches, Sonali talks nervously and changes topic impatiently as a sign of the restlessness she experiences with the slightest stimulus triggering her traumatic memories:

MALU: You still get those awful headaches, Sonali?

SONALI: Sometimes. (*Talking nervously.*) Like my new hairdo? . . . (1.1.58)

As Sonali searches for her lighter, she yells, "[d]amn, I had a lighter somewhere in this bag" (1.1.59-60). She also gets in rage as Malu attacks her for her intention to sit for the prenatal test and to abort her daughter. She shouts at Malu:

SONALI (*hysterical now*). Stop it!. . . I remember anger from the past (*with one sweep of her hand she sends the coffee things crashing to the floor*).

.....

(*another sweep of the crockery*). (1.1.63-64)

These words of Sonali's are an acknowledgement of her feeling of anger towards the traumatic physical and emotional abuse she has been subject to as a child, which is reflected on her unjustified excessive anger and impatience. She overreacts, becomes hysterical, and sweeps the tableware to the floor twice. Her

excessive anger is, thus, a manifestation of her emotional disturbance and incapacity of overcoming her past traumatic experiences.

The main environmental factor stimulating Sonali's positive coping with trauma is her having received psychosocial, or social and emotional support at the hands of trustworthy family members as Anil and Gopal, as well as female friends like Malu and Raziya. Sonali manages to reach positive coping primarily through the technique of abreaction in the presence of these close partners. James Chu defines abreaction as "the reconstruction of a comprehensive verbal narrative of such unresolved traumatic events, where 'the therapist plays the role of witness and ally, in whose presence the survivor can speak the unspeakable'" (123). In other words, abreaction is the repeated deliberate return to the traumatic memories under supervision and support of close partners. It involves the traumatized individual's "remembering, tolerating, processing, and integrating overwhelming past events" (Chu 122). Through the direct help of Gopal and the indirect help of Anil and Malu, Sonali manages to confront and relive her traumatic experience. She manages to remember the hidden truth that her mind has subconsciously blocked about her having planned the uncle's accident to end his life. Unlike the earlier fragmentation, Sonali this time manages to obtain a comprehensive multi-faceted perception of her traumatic experience as a sign of its tolerance.

Gopal plays a crucial role in facilitating Sonali's abreaction and positive coping through his psychosocial support in enabling her to remember the harsh traumatic memories she cannot remember or face on her own. This is exemplified in the way he helps her remember the scene of her planned murder of their uncle through reenacting it with her. The scene goes as follows:

SONALI: Wait! It's all coming together, Gopal, . . . (*Regressing, in her childish voice.*) . . . Try giving it [the cart] a push (*clapping her hands*), it moved, it works! . . . (*away from the mirror, in her adult voice*) and that was when something clicked in my head . . . and I clearly saw that it was time for Uncle to have a second 'accident'.

.....

GOPAL I can see . . . you smuggle the toy cart . . . (*he goes and stands close behind her*).

SONALI. . . . I feel your eyes on me and I'm terrified . . .

GOPAL (*they now move in unison, one behind the other, miming the incident.*
 .). I climb up after you, . . . and screen you as you place it on the topmost
 step.

SONALI: . . . we look at each other wordlessly (*they turn to each other*).

.....

(*sitting up with a start*). The noise wakes me up. I cower in bed, sweating
 with fear . . . (Mehta 2.5.88-89)

First as Gopal and Sonali repeat the same dialogue that they have had as children on the day of the accident, Sonali manages to recall the missing words and forgotten dialogue. She remembers asking him to give his toy cart a push and describing how it moves. Second, Sonali is able to remember more details about the accident as Gopal takes part with her in miming their actions on that day. He mimes how he has stood close behind watching her on the stairs and Sonali recollects how she has reacted and they start reenacting the scene. She remembers how she has intentionally placed the cart to block her uncle's way and gone to stay away in bed. Moreover, Sonali manages to recall her thoughts at this moment. She notes that seeing the cart moving gave her the idea of getting rid of her uncle through letting him trip over it. She also remembers her feelings, being terrified that Gopal can see her arranging the murder scene, and then trembling and sweating in fear in bed to hear the noise of her uncle's fall. Thus, aided by psychosocial support in undergoing abreaction, Sonali manages to have a comprehensive perception and expression of her traumatic experience. She is able to overcome the fragmented traumatic revisits, remember missing details, and give a full account of her harsh memories as a sign of her having overcome her fears and her ability to face the abhorred past reality subconsciously buried in her mind.

Anil and Malu's social and emotional support has also been adamant in facilitating Sonali's positive coping with trauma. First, Anil and Malu's psychosocial support is traced in the real worry they show about Sonali's suffering and concern about her well-being. At the beginning, they are aware of her varied disturbance signs, but they are in the dark about the cause of her suffering and insist on finding it out in order to help her recover. Malu asserts:

MALU. I'm really worried about Sonali. Something's eating her . . . Her headaches, her mirror-gazing . . . What does one make of that? (2.1.73)

Similarly, Anil reports to Gopal that he can see Sonali's torture and insists with Malu that Gopal speaks of its cause if he knows it:

ANIL. She's going through a private hell no one knows much about—except, perhaps, you, Gopal. I think it's time you talked to me.

.....

ANIL. Whatever it is that gives her these feelings of guilt and anger . . . abusing herself, destructive behaviour . . . confusion over whom to trust. I think I have a right to know.

MALU. I think so, too. (2.5.87)

At the beginning of the abreaction or confrontation scene, Anil, Malu, and Gopal can see Sonali lying in bed, and "*all three looking very anxious*" (2.5.87). Anil and Malu are aware of Sonali's signs of negative coping with a trauma unknown to them. They insist on finding out the reason behind her suffering and rescue her of her private hell. That is why they are keen on helping her through abreaction with their emotional support to enable her to cope with trauma.

During the abreaction scene, Anil and Malu's psychosocial support is evident in their showing attentive and tolerant ears to Sonali, through which she manages to speak at ease of her horrible traumatic experience, remember its missing details, and look it in the eye. As Sonali starts speaking of details about the uncle's murder, Gopal initially tries to stop her. However, Anil insists that she goes on talking so that she can face her fears and put an end to them:

GOPAL: Okay, Sonali, you don't have to say any more.

ANIL: Let her say it, Gopal! (2.5.88)

Furthermore, in the presence of Anil's tolerant hearing, and as she "*grabs his arm,*" (2.5.86) Sonali manages to remember other details about how her uncle's accident has taken place and how he has tripped over Gopal's toy cart. Thus, through being tolerant listeners, Anil and Malu facilitate Sonali's abreaction and coping.

Another example of Anil's contribution in Sonali's positive coping with trauma is his tolerance of her past traumatic experiences, especially her rape and murder of her uncle. By the end of the abreaction scene, and as Sonali is about to faint, Anil is still keen on her physical and emotional safety and reassuring her of his love, tolerance, and support:

ANIL (*holding her*): It's all right, I've got her. It's all right, Sonu, it's all right, my darling. . . . (2.5.89)

Months after the revelation of the horrible truth, Sonali admits that although she expects to find disgust in Anil's gaze, she is still comforted to find out that all his eyes "tell [her] is [she's] come home at last" (2.6.91). Instead of viewing her as guilty or shameful and abandoning her for her mistakes or shameful past, Sonali is able to cope positively with her trauma, emotionally settle down, and reach spiritual home through Anil's patience in withstanding her emotional and behavioural disturbance, acceptance of her mistakes, and tolerance of her past. Nancy Naples holds that a woman survivor of childhood trauma and sexual abuse is able to go through the "healing process if given a nonjudgmental, safe place to explore her feelings" (1166). Therefore, Anil, Gopal, and Malu have contributed tremendously to her attaining positive coping with trauma through providing her with a safe and tolerant medium of self-expression.

Thus, it is only towards the end of the play that Sonali manages to adapt positively with her trauma and show psychological and psychosomatic signs of positive coping. Four months after her confrontation of the traumatic memory under the support of Anil, Gopal, and Malu, Sonali is seen talking quietly without showing signs of stress, fear, worry, or loss of temper. She calmly socializes with Malu and shows a sense of humour, referring to herself with the first person plural pronoun "us," asking her, "Well. Give us all the news" (2.6.90). She also jokes about how the stranger harassing Malu has left the place when he saw a hugely pregnant woman as herself, remarking, "my bulk seems to have frightened him away" (2.6.90). These instances illustrate Sonali's self-control, calmness and emotional stability, which also evidently stem from her being subject to fewer or no intrusions of traumatic memory after she has successfully managed to face her traumatic experience through abreaction, to be explained below. Furthermore, Sonali now does not complain of headaches or bodily pain. All these are signs highlighting Sonali's psychological and psychosomatic positive coping with trauma.

The other signs revealing Sonali's ability to overcome trauma are cognitive signs. Sonali shows initial cognitive signs of negative coping with trauma, followed by final development into positive coping. Sonali assumes negative self-image, especially as instilled by the patriarchal gaze. Shannon Baugher et al. maintain that "negative and stereotyped attitudes about women created a venue for blaming and stigmatizing the rape victim" (2038). Being a survivor of rape, Sonali is aware of society's unjust stereotypical perception of her as guilty of the rape and deserving

of such suffering. Unfortunately, Sonali internalizes such false perception. First, Sonali views herself as shameful and guilty of her uncle's rape. She admits to Malu:

SONALI: I still have my moments of panic. Still look, sometimes, for the disgust in Anil's eyes . . . (Mehta 2.6.91)

Being a woman who is traditionally taught to believe herself as essentially guilty of any mischief, Sonali attributes shame and disgust to herself. Besides, Sonali's internalized feeling of guilt also stems from her mother's continuous blaming and her uncle's accusations of her being the cause of his fall instead of Gopal. This goes in line with Janice Doane and Devon Hodges's argument that women victims of childhood sexual abuse show "internalization of the perpetrator's voice" (qtd. in Naples 1168). This fact is further emphasized by Raziya and Malu, who maintain that Sonali's mistake is "assessing [herself] / through male eyes" (Mehta 2.1.73). Therefore, Sonali internalizes this feeling of guilt for a crime falsely attributed to her. As a result, she realizes that she has to atone for her guilt by submitting to the uncle's rape as a child, and by retaining a sense of guilt and shame as a grownup.

Moreover, Sonali at first regards herself guilty for her pregnancy, particularly for the likely probability of her giving birth to a girl. Due to the fact that the Indian patriarchal society is traditionally biased against women, families do not accept having female children. Nehaluddin Ahmad remarks, "[i]n India, the preference is always for a male child. It is the female child who is unwanted" (22). This fact is revealed through Sonali's words, "Do I have to produce a queue of superfluous daughters—when all that's required is a son?" (Mehta 1.1.62). Consequently, a mother giving birth to a girl is blamed by society for making the mistake of contributing undesired female children. Sonali has also internalized other biased patriarchal beliefs concerning giving birth to daughters from her mother's teachings as evident in her confession:

SONALI. . . . When I listen carefully to my thoughts, it's my mother's voice I hear! And I remember all the things she taught me. . . . my mother always said that a woman's failure to bear a son is just retribution for misdeeds in her past life. (1.1.63, 64)

Sonali's mother is responsible for Sonali's cognitive disturbance and false sense of shame and guilt. The mother's words imply that patriarchal society views the mother of a girl as a shameful sinner who is punished by her inability to deliver male children. Holly Singh remarks that women in India have often had a social problem with their status within the family depending on their fertility and

whether they give birth to the desired children or they do not (25). Hence, Sonali's failure to give birth to a son is viewed by society as a double source of shame, guilt, and "social stigma" (Gupta 197) since it entails a shortcoming on her part or that she is a woman of assumed inappropriate moral conduct. Consequently, Sonali's mother's biased ideology has imposed a negative self-image of inferiority and guilt on her daughter for her potential pregnancy with a girl.

Sonali at last overcomes her negative thoughts about herself and giving birth to a girl. She rejects her abortion thoughts and even takes pride in her pregnancy. As Malu asks her about her pregnancy and health, Sonali assures her, "I'm in my seventh month—and flourishing, as you see" (Mehta 2.6.90, 91). The fact that Sonali is pleased with herself and her foetus seeming equally healthy shows her satisfaction with her pregnancy and her overcoming of feelings of guilt and shame. It is also another indication of her emotional and physical well-being indicative of her positive coping with trauma. In addition, unlike her initial negative self-image about herself being pregnant and looking as ugly as "a cow," (1.1.59) Sonali later brags about her bulk and being "*hugely pregnant*," which is another hint at her taking pride in her pregnancy (2.6.90). All these incidents highlight how Sonali's mind has overcome biased ideas imposed by society and her mother in relation to giving birth to a girl. They also reveal how Sonali has acquired positive self-perception and self-confidence as cognitive signs of positive coping with trauma.

Sonali's negative communicative and interpersonal signs similarly change into positive ones by the end of the play to reflect her development and positive coping with trauma. At first, Sonali's persistent communicative and interpersonal failure at coping with past trauma is evident through her social withdrawal, reluctance to engage in interpersonal relationships, and tendency to maintain silence. Crosta et al. maintain that victims of childhood trauma show low self-confidence, less interpersonal exchanges, social avoidance, and social malfunctioning (28). Sonali shows inclination to fleeing into isolation and locking herself up literally and metaphorically. Besides physically distancing herself in her bedroom, Sonali remains silent and does not communicate or socialize with others. This is first seen in her shouting at her mother-in-law to leave her alone in her bedroom:

SONALI. (*screaming*) get away from my door . . . (*slams the door shut; then sits on her bed, head bowed in her hands.*) (Mehta 1.3.66)

Similarly, as Anil forgets to take Gopal's photographs from Sonali's bedroom and returns to take them, he finds she has locked herself up. He asks her:

ANIL. Why did you lock the door, Sonu? Are you okay? . . .

SONALI (*drawing back as if stung, hysterically*). I'm okay, . . . okay! Why don't you go? (2.5.85)

More seriously, as Sonali is attacked by her traumatic memories, she lies silent, unresponsive, and lifeless in her bed facing the wall so that others cannot see her, evidently as an attempt to avoid communication as well. At the beginning of the confrontation scene with Gopal, Anil comments on her odd posture and stillness:

(Sonali is lying with her eyes closed in bed ...)

GOPAL: Is she asleep?

ANIL: Not really. At times she lies. . . unresponsive . . . for hours . . . (2.5.87)

Sonali's inclination towards silence and social disengagement is manifest in her physical distancing, drawing away from her husband, insistence on locking her door, lying in bed, as well as keeping her eyes shut and her head bowed. These reveal her communicative and interpersonal disorder and inability to cope with her past rape and murder and the recurrent revisits of such traumatic experiences.

Another example of Sonali's silence and inability to communicate with others or express herself is her indirect self-expression through art. Due to her failure to fully remember her harsh memories or speak of them out of fear, guilt, and shame, Sonali resorts to giving indirect vent to her thoughts, feelings, and the ugly incomplete truth about the past through art. Malu describes Sonali's paintings:

MALU. I wonder if Sonali liked her Uncle Narotam? . . . he keeps popping up in the weird water-colours she turns out. Painted always in menacing reds.

.....

Like she's painting her dreams . . . (2.1.74)

Sonali produces incomprehensible paintings that seem as if they are representations of her dreams while they hold remnants of her traumatic experiences. In fact, the menacing red colour is a metaphor for the blood associated with rape and murder, as well as a signal of her inner turmoil and ruined self. Sonali describes her uncle or the figure in her paintings as "the red monster" without disclosing his identity. Her paintings are, thus, a stifled expression of what she refers to as the "anger screaming silently inside [her], never expressed" (1.1.64). These paintings mark Sonali's communicative and interpersonal disorder and highlight her negative coping with trauma.

Yet, towards the end, Sonali is positively able to cope with trauma and her revisits of traumatic experiences. This is manifest through her ability to overcome

her silence and social withdrawal. First, aided by Anil, Gopal, and Malu's support, Sonali manages to speak out about all the details related to her uncle's murder in scene five, which reflects how she has reacted positively with such a traumatic experience and overcome its associated feelings of shame, fear, and guilt. It is also an illustration of her having overcome her fear of self-exposure and reluctance to communicate with others linked with her failed adaptation with trauma. Second, the last scene of the play shows a remarkable change in Sonali's communicative and interactive patterns. Although she is pregnant in her seventh month, she is still outgoing and sociable enough to hang out with Malu at a café. Sonali shows ease and enthusiasm about socializing as she speaks freely about herself, the change in her life and feelings, and her husband. She also discusses her friends' problems and proposes some solutions to them. She takes the lead in holding the conversation with Malu, posing questions, making comments, and expressing her opinion not merely replying to Malu's questions, reacting impatiently to her comments, or avoiding conversation with her as in scene one. These reflect Sonali's development into showing better self-expression, communication, and reconnection with others as opposed to her previous silence and social isolation.

One more communicative and interpersonal sign of Sonali's early phase of negative coping with trauma is her lack of trust. The most noticeable example is the way Sonali cannot trust her mother-in-law and always doubts her real intention as deception and abuse. For instance, while the mother-in-law tells her son that she is worried about Sonali for having noticed her talking to herself in the mirror, Sonali accuses her of hating her, spying on her, and collecting details against her in attempt to harm her. Sonali insists that her mother-in-law is:

SONALI. ... a witch. Sly. Secretive. She spies on me, I know. Stores up evidence against me . . . (*Intensely.*) My mother-in-law hates me, Malu.

MALU. You still have a fertile imagination, I see. (1.1.58)

Sonali implies that her mother-in-law intentionally watches her in secret to tell Anil that she is pregnant, while Sonali does not want him to know so that she can easily abort the girl foetus without his knowledge. Nevertheless, all characters agree that these are mere delusions. The mother-in-law emphasizes, "I never peep but she forgot to lock her bedroom door" (1.2.66). Anil assures Sonali that her claims against his mother are not true telling her, "You know that's rubbish" (2.5.85). This is also seen in Malu's reply in the excerpt above that Sonali is taking her imagination too far. Sonali is similarly unable to trust Malu and Raziya. This is

evident in Sonali's words to Anil, "I don't trust Raziya any more" (2.5.85). She also tells Malu, "Go away, Malu. I see it was . . . a mistake to trust you" (1.1.63). Since both Malu and Raziya are against her undergoing the prenatal test and aborting her foetus, Sonali starts doubting their sincerity and that they really care for her good.

All these examples illustrate Sonali's interpersonal disturbance resulting from failed adaptation with trauma. Due to previously being involved with unsupportive and physically and/or emotionally abusive relations, Sonali becomes unable to find a trustworthy partner. Banyard et al. maintain that victims of childhood trauma and sexual abuse "develop impaired schemas about the safety of the world around them and do not acquire needed skills such as an ability to regulate their own emotions or an ability to trust others, which in turn can have negative consequences for adult mental health and relationships" ("The long-term" 698). Being a victim of multiple sexual and emotional abuse at the hands of her family members, Sonali loses trust in all people surrounding her, even her close ones, which endangers her social relationships and adds to her psychological suffering. In fact, Sonali's false accusations about her mother-in-law and her friends are a mere reaction against the real offenses perpetrated by her uncle and mother against her earlier. This is evident through Sonali's words to the mother-in-law:

SONALI. You have no other work, old woman, but to peep at me—like him! . . . get away or I'll tell Anil you're hounding me (Mehta 1.3.66).

Thus, the uncle's harassment have shattered Sonali's trust in others and rendered her liable to experience interpersonal disorder and fractured social relations.

Nonetheless, towards the end, Sonali is able to regain a sense of trust and shows better interaction with others. She writes a letter to her mother-in-law who has gone to stay with a relative "asking her to return at once, that [she] need[s] her here with the baby on the way" (2.6.92). This shows that Sonali no longer doubts her mother-in-law's sincerity, instead she not only entrusts the mother-in-law with herself, but also with her baby. This is another indication of Sonali's having achieved better social interaction in positive coping with her trauma since she is the one who holds out to the mother-in-law and seeks to reconnect with her. This stands in sharp contrast with the way Sonali has avoided communicating or interacting with her at first. Furthermore, Sonali recovers her faith in her friends Malu and Raziya, as well as all women, as seen in her final discussion with Malu:

MALU. Women must help women, surely?

.....

SONALI. I'm proud to know you . . . and Razzle Dazzle.

.....

MALU. . . . From somewhere, somehow, we must muster the strength to love.

SONALI. Nothing can change overnight, I guess, but we can be goddesses if we want it enough. . . .

MALU. Right!

SONALI. So let's drink to us, Mallika! (2.6.91-92)

This excerpt shows that Sonali has restored her faith in her friends Malu and Raziya as well as other women, and that she has overcome losing trust in others as a negative sign of coping with trauma. She agrees with Malu that all women should love and stand up for each other. She is now able to believe in other women and to see how they all share the same suffering and need for help. Therefore, Sonali chooses to reach out to other women and to stand in solidarity with them. She argues that although change is difficult due to patriarchal restrictions, women like herself, Malu, and, Raziya can adopt such a cause. They should connect with all fellow women in the world, and provide them with the needed faith and support. She will be the change she wants to witness and bring about to the world by being a herald of love, trust, and female solidarity to the whole world. These are examples of strong interpersonal and communicative skills that Sonali has recently acquired and that shed light on her positive coping with trauma.

In conclusion, Sonali is a female character in Indian theatre who represents how women in modern India are still subject to traumatizing patriarchal physical and emotional abuse both within domestic and societal contexts. Sonali shows psychological, psychosomatic, cognitive, communicative, and interactive signs of negative coping with trauma as a result of her mother's and uncle's abuse. Yet, she eventually manages to relatively adapt with her trauma and to show respective signs of positive coping guided by psychosocial support at the hands of Anil, Gopal, and Malu. Accordingly, Sonali reveals better bodily and emotional ability to overcome the impact of the traumatic experience she has been through. She also manifests improved perception of herself and her surroundings, satisfaction with delivering a baby girl, self-confidence, in addition to a higher capacity for self-expression, intercommunication, and interconnectedness with others. Thus, Sonali represents modern Indian women who manage to cope positively with the

trauma of domestic and structural patriarchal violence or abuse, especially after earlier failure at adaptation and through psychosocial support at the hands of trustworthy partners, friends, and family members.

While the paper illustrates different forms of traumatizing violence directed towards women within the modern Indian society, it proposes psychosocial support in general and female solidarity in particular as women's effective weapons in facing such abuses. Therefore, the paper suggests that the phenomenon of patriarchal violence can come to an end as women stand together and empower each other in the face of abusive partners and patriarchal society.

□

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