

## Female Negative Coping with Trauma in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*

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### Abstract

This paper investigates how far Indian women's modern theatre portrays women's position in modern India, particularly how they go through trauma due to being subject to patriarchal violence or abuse and often fail to cope or show recovery. The paper employs a psychoanalytic approach in analyzing the female character, Leela, in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* (1984) in order to examine how far Leela, and in turn women in the modern Indian society, are subject to physical and/or emotional patriarchal abuse, both within domestic and social contexts, which render them liable to experience psychological trauma. Leela faces the trauma of her husband's emotional neglect and abuse, as well as being forced to witness physical abuse of women, each being gang-raped daily in her hearing. While some women manage to cope positively with their trauma, the research attempts to investigate how far Leela fails and shows negative coping signs. These signs are represented in showing psychosomatic symptoms, or physical pain and health problems that come in parallel with emotional disturbance and feelings of anxiety, fear, and hypersensitivity. Furthermore, Leela shows cognitive disorder seen through her adoption of negative self-image and a false feeling of guilt. Her unsuccessful adaptation is similarly traced through her demonstration of behavioural, interpersonal, and communicative signs of negative coping with trauma like passivity, social and physical withdrawal, besides silence.

**Key words:** Women's Theatre - Modern Indian Theatre - Indian Women - Patriarchal Violence - Female Trauma - Negative Coping - Psychosomatic Signs - Cognitive Signs - Behavioural Signs - Interpersonal and Communicative Signs

المواجهة النسائية السلبية للصدمة في مسرحية 'إنطفاء الأضواء' لمانجولا بادمانابهان

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### □المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة وضع المرأة الهندية في المجتمع الهندي الحديث وتعرضها للصدمة النفسية من جراء العنف والإيذاء في مجتمع ذكوري ومدى فشلها في التأقلم مع الصدمة وتخطيها لها. يتبنى البحث نهج التحليل النفسي لدراسة شخصية 'ليلا' في مسرحية 'إنطفاء الأضواء' (1984) لمانجولا بادمانابهان 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 ليلا لصدمة الإهمال والإذاء العاطفي من قبل زوجها، بالإضافة لإضطرابها أن تشهد الإيذاء البدني لنساء يتم اغتصابهن بشكل جماعي يومي على مسمع منها. بينما تتمكن بعض النساء من التأقلم والمواجهة الإيجابية للصدمة، يستكشف البحث مدى فشل ليلا وإظهارها لعلامات المواجهة السلبية وعدم التأقلم. تتمثل هذه العلامات في إظهار أعراض سيكوسوماتية، تتمثل في أعراض بدنية ومشاكل صحية مصاحبة للاضطراب النفسي ومشاعر الخوف والقلق والحساسية المفرطة. وكذلك يظهر

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على ليلا أعراض إدراكية لعدم التأقلم مع الصدمة تكمن في تبنيها لنظرة نفسية سلبية وشعور غير حقيقي بالذنب. كما تبدو مواجهة ليلا السلبية للصدمة جلية في ظهور علامات فشل التأقلم السلوكي، والاجتماعي، والحواري مع الصدمة في التواصل مع الآخرين، مثل السلبية، والانسحاب الاجتماعي والجسدي أو المكاني، والصمت. الكلمات المفتاحية: المسرح النسائي - المسرح الهندي الحديث - المرأة الهندية - العنف الذكوري - الصدمة النسائية - المواجهة السلبية - أعراض سيكوسوماتية - أعراض إدراكية - أعراض سلوكية - أعراض اجتماعية وحوارية

## Introduction

Women are very often susceptible to go through psychological trauma as a result of experiencing tough traumatic situations and ill-treatment. Trauma is defined as “an acute and intensely painful experience, as well as the mental and emotional after-effects of that experience” (Freed 409). It is a highly troubled psychological state taking place while the traumatic experience or ordeal is still taking place or after it has subsided but leaving a noticeable negative impact. One of the principal causes of female trauma is being subject to different forms of violence or abuse at the hands of male individuals or patriarchal society. The article of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as any act “that results in or is likely to result in physical or psychological harm or suffering to women” (qtd. in Sinha et al. 135). Therefore, aggression towards women not only affects their physical health, but also their mental and emotional health rendering them liable to manifest different symptoms of trauma as “depression, fear, anxiety, sexual dysfunction, neurosis, and obsessive behavior” (Sinha et al. 136).

One of the principal causes of female trauma is being subject to hostility within family or domestic environment. Domestic abuse is also known as:

‘family violence’, ‘spousal abuse’, ... or ‘battering’... [and it] relates to an array of different behaviors including physical (e.g., slapping, kicking), psychological (e.g., intimidation, humiliation), sexual (e.g., forced intercourse, sexual coercion), and economic violence (e.g., withholding money), as well as a range of other ‘controlling’ behaviors such as isolating the victim from family and friends or monitoring his or her movements. (Pill et al. 178-79)

Women undergo bodily torture, sexual exploitation, emotional abuse, and economic deprivation, whether at the hands of husbands

or male family members. Moreover, men resort to violence and oppression so as to maintain patriarchal social order within their homes, as well as practise subjugation and control over their women. Accordingly, patriarchal domestic violence and domination lead to women's psychological trauma and unresolved emotional pain. "Research has shown clear links between women's experience of domestic abuse and a range of mental health problems, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harming behaviours and suicidality" (Abrahams 23). Thus, women's psychological trauma is caused by their unprivileged position within their families governed by patriarchal rules that give supremacy, control, freedom, and all rights to men at the expense of women, who only receive violence and ill-treatment.

Although some women manage to overcome their trauma, other women fail to adapt and show signs of negative coping. These signs can be defined as "a woman's dysfunctional responses," or "maladaptive coping" to abuse or traumatic experiences, which exceed her adaptive "resources," and render her vulnerable (Carlson 292, 293). In other words, a woman's negative coping or vulnerability, whether taking place in the early or late phases of experiencing a traumatic experience, is associated with inability to coexist with the traumatic experience leading to negative outcomes. Accordingly, traumatized female characters start showing varied physical, psychological, cognitive, behavioural, interpersonal, and communicative signs of maladaptation or negative coping with the traumatic experiences they have had.

This paper discusses the female character Leela in *Lights Out* (1984) by Manjula Padmanabhan (born 1953). Padmanabhan is an Indian writer, dramatist, column writer in the *Pioneer*, and a cartoonist. She has several publications including a collection of short stories published in India, the UK, and the Netherlands. *Harvest*, her fifth play, won the Onassis International Cultural Competition Prize for Theatrical plays in 1997 in Greece. It was also performed in Greece (in Greek) in 1999 and as readings in Australia, Canada, and USA. Indu Pandey remarks, "[o]nly a woman playwright like Manjula

Padmanabhan could write a play like *Lights Out* about women's objectification and victimization" (51). Therefore, Padmanabhan is one of the modern and contemporary women playwrights who use theatre as a powerful tool to highlight oppression and violence directed at women by males and the patriarchal Indian society, as well as how women react to such physical and/or psychological violence.

*Lights Out* depicts a middle class woman, Leela, who suffers from unbearable noise taking place daily next to her house. Her trauma is made worse as her husband, Bhasker, ignores her suffering and never listens to her continuous pleading for him to call the police to know the cause of the noise and put an end to it. The noise turns out to be of poor women, each one being gang-raped daily in an adjacent building under construction. These crimes are committed in her hearing and before the middle class society, especially its male members who refuse to interfere. Bhasker and his two male friends, Mohan and Surinder, spend the whole play discussing reasons why they should not interfere and contemplating different methods how to stop the rapists, yet never take any action. Leela listens to their endless arguments, awaits their action, breaks down at the peak of the screams, and eventually despairs as the rapists have left the crime scene undeterred. Having been led down by her husband and the other men, she sadly realizes that she will have to bear with the same disturbing experience the next day.

Padmanabhan's Leela exemplifies Indian women who go through traumatic experiences and show negative coping, thereby failing to surpass their trauma experience. She represents women who undergo different forms of domestic violence, especially at the hands of a male partner, that they often fail to withstand. Accordingly, this paper adopts a psychoanalytic study of Leela in *Lights Out* so as to examine how far she shows varied signs of failed adaptation with trauma. The analysis, thus, aims to shed light on the extent of patriarchal violence and injustice perpetrated against women within the domestic setting, which, in turn, result in their psychological trauma that cannot often be overcome.

Leela is exposed to domestic emotional violence or abuse at the hands of her husband, Bhasker. Caitlin Rancher et al. hold, "Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a widespread problem, . . . . The mental health consequences of experiencing IPV are well documented . . . , with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (2). Bhasker represents husbands with a typical patriarchal self-centered mindset that looks down upon women, belittles their mentality, and ignores their feelings and desires. He neglects Leela, ignores her anxiety, and does not provide her with reassurance or emotional support to face her trauma. He exemplifies one of the sources of women's unresolved trauma indicated by Kimberly Flemke, namely, "feeling unprotected by caretakers" (126). At the beginning of the play, Leela seems to have futilely asked him to report the disturbing noise heard daily to the police. Upon his arrival at home in scene one, Leela realizes that he still has not acted upon her request. She disappointedly repeats to him how much unbearable fear and pain the noise causes her and repeats her only desperate request:

LEELA. Call them—you said you would!

.....  
LEELA. You don't care what I feel, what I go through every day!

.....  
LEELA (*wheedlingly*). Can't you call the police? Just for me?

BHASKER (*drawing away*). No. (Padmanabhan 4-5; scene 1)

Bhasker's emotional abuse is evident in his insistence on letting her down, breaking his promises, answering her pleadings with a straightforward "No", and overlooking her fears and emotional pain. K. Frances Lieder notes that Bhasker and his friend Mohan "continue to discount Leela's discomfort, scrambling for any justification that does not require them to interfere in whatever is going on" to stop the crime and ease her pain (519). Hilary Abrahams argues, "the diagnosis of PTSD ... directly links domestic violence with its effects on mental health and emotional well-being" (24). The way Bhasker handles his wife's problem and feelings shows how he is too selfish

and heartless to provide her with the emotional support necessary for her to overcome her trauma. More horridly, he adds to her trauma through his repeated rejection of her fears and underestimation of her suffering.

Bhasker's coldness of emotions and lack of emotional support to Leela are also apparent in his words, sounds, and body language. This is quite obvious in the same scene where Leela asks desperately whether he has reported the screams to the police. The dialogue between them goes as follows:

LEELA. (*moving towards him*). Oh ... ! Bhasker--

BHASKER. (*not looking up from his paper*). Hi.

LEELA. (*when she is near him*). Tell me!

BHASKER (*not looking up from his paper*). Mm?

LEELA (*sits beside him*). Did you ... do it?

.....  
LEELA. Again?

BHASKER. Again what?

LEELA. How could you forget? (*lifts her head to stare at him*).

BHASKER (*his gaze has not left the paper*). Huh?

.....  
(*A pause during which Bhasker smooths out the pages of the paper.*) (3-4; scene 1)

Bhasker does not start the conversation and answers Leela in cold unconcerned sounds as "Mm" and "Huh," or short abrupt words or phrases as "Hi" and "Again what". This reflects his self-centeredness, cruelty, and carelessness. Moreover, the way Bhasker deprives her of emotional backing is quite explicit in his body language. As Leela directly addresses him, he draws away from her and focuses his attention on the paper he reads. Instead of showing any attempt to comfort her, he smooths out the pages of the paper, a gesture that ironically betrays his concern with material things instead of his wife's psychological well-being. Therefore, the way Bhasker escapes his responsibility of comforting his wife, easing her pain, and solving her problems reflects the emotional violence he exercises against her that causes her psychological trauma.

Bhasker's emotional abuse of Leela is likewise evident in his condescending treatment. He deals with her as if she were a naïve child or doll and makes fun of her fears and agony. When she tells him how the sounds she hears make her horrified, he tells her, "*(as if to a child)*: But *sounds* can't hurt you" (8; scene 1). He satirizes her, "go tell the police that you're frightened about noises in the next building! They'll laugh in your face!" (5; scene 1). Lieder comments that Leela "is talked down to and dismissed" (526). Bhasker belittles her as immature, underestimates her emotions, and overlooks them. He gives her silly suggestions to help her be distracted about the noise. He tells her, "[s]o shut your ears, see? Like this— (*places his hands over her ears*)" (8; scene 1). This illustrates Bhasker's undignified treatment of her and how he disregards her fears as nonsensical fears of a child. It also manifests his hypocrisy and aloofness as he pretends to show care yet without showing any real intention to help. Another proof of Bhasker's patronization or belittling is how he insists on hiding the reality of the crime not wanting her to know it is rape. He treats her as intellectually and emotionally inferior, and controls her through keeping her in the dark in a sheltered world of his creation. All these examples illustrate how Bhasker emotionally abuses Leela through looking down upon her as a senseless little creature, discounting her feelings, and adding to her trauma instead of helping her to heal.

Bhasker's emotional violence against Leela is similarly apparent in his loss of temper and intolerance towards her fears and requests. He accuses her of taking her fears to an illogical and unjustifiable extreme, telling her, "oh, come on! You're making too much of it!" (5; scene 1) and "Don't over-react, Leela" (38; scene 3). Furthermore, he shows anger at her repeated complaints and beseeching by "*mak[ing] a face,*" and yelling at her, "[o]h, for god's sake! . . . You're still worrying about that thing?" (4; scene 1). As she insists, he shows "*exasperation, putting down his paper*" in a gesture of impatience (6; scene 1). Lieder argues that Leela faces "the trauma of the everyday emotional abuse by her husband. Leela is constantly told that she is overreacting, that she is too delicate, [and] that she

cannot possibly handle reality" (526). Thus, Bhasker's impatience and reluctance to show emotional support towards Leela exemplify the domestic marital emotional abuse he exercises over her. As a result, Leela becomes prone to experience severe psychological trauma or post-traumatic stress disorder that she fails to cope with.

Leela's unsuccessful adaptation can be traced through multiple signs, first set of which is psychological and accompanying psychosomatic or physical signs of negative coping with the cruelty of her husband. A study on "the impact of violence and abuse on [women's] physical health" shows that:

more severe childhood abuse, lifetime interpersonal abuse, and lifetime exposure to other stressful events were related to poorer perceived health, more physical illnesses, more disabling conditions, more severe somatic symptoms, more years of cigarette smoking, and more drug use. (Weissbecker and Clark 919)

These somatic symptoms of physical disorder originating from psychic or emotional disorder are exemplified by "pains in heart or chest,' 'nausea or upset stomach,'" "dizziness," (Weissbecker 914, 919) besides "chronic pain, digestive, cardio-pulmonary, sexual, or conversion symptoms" (Pill et al. 180). Leela experiences heightened physical sensations in reaction to her psychological trauma. While hearing the screams of the rape victim outside her window, she cannot tolerate such a sound that she "*holds her head with both hands, covering her ears*" (35; scene 3). Being highly sensitive and empathetic towards the raped women's suffering, Leela's gesture reflects how she goes through parallel trauma with similar psychological and somatic symptoms. Lieder emphasizes, "[u]nlike Bhasker, [Leela] feels the daily screaming episodes intensely" through showing bodily pain that he describes as "affective response," or "the physical manifestation of the pain of another" (525). Leela undergoes the same pain even at times when the rape is not taking place. She develops a sort of hallucination or obsession with the screaming voice that even before the rape starts she speaks about how badly she feels about it. She "*touch[es] her ears*

*pathetically*” as if trying to drive away the imaginary voice that she still hears long after it has ceased (6; scene 1). Leela also notes that her continued fake sensation of the screams increase over the time and gradually control her entire day. She comments:

LEELA. . . . At first it was only at the time it was going on.  
Then, as soon as it got dark. Then around tea-time, . . . .  
Then in the middle of the day, whenever the door-bell rang. Then in the morning, . . . . And now—from the moment I wake up . . . (5; scene 1)

Accordingly, the lingering physical responsiveness to the sound triggering Leela’s trauma is a sign of her failed adaptation or negative coping.

Besides, Leela admits that the raped women’s screams, whether real or imagined, cause her severe bodily pain:

LEELA. ... like a tight, hard ball, just ... here (*she holds her midriff*).

BHASKER (*looking concerned*). Pain? You’re in pain?

LEELA. ... it’s—as if my insides were knotted up.

.....  
LEELA. I carry it around all day. Sometimes it’s like a shawl, it wraps itself around my shoulders and I start to shiver.  
(5; scene 1)

Leela’s magnified bodily reaction to the torturing sounds is seen in the way she reports going through all-encompassing bodily pain that she compares to a shawl wrapping her body. It is likewise noticed in the way she compares the pain’s severity or intensity to a tight hard ball blocking her body and causing her to shiver. Moreover, Leela complains that though she has not seen the rape scene, the screaming voices of the victims cause her to go through nausea and loss of appetite. She says, “I feel awful, I feel sick. I can barely eat” (9; scene 1). Leela also shows problems with sleep, bodily balance, and movement that she complains, “I can’t sleep at nights” (44; scene 3) and stands “*off balance*” (17; scene 2) both while and before the screams start taking place. Thus, all these physical disturbance

symptoms shed light on Leela's anxiety and emotional disorder stemming from her negative coping with trauma.

Cathy Caruth believes that traumatized characters usually have their trauma with its negative feelings aroused through witnessing the traumatic experiences of others. She explains, "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another's wound" (Caruth 8). This also emphasizes that traumatized characters have a high sense of empathy and understanding of each other's agony since each of them has had his/her own experience with trauma despite individual differences in each experience. "Empathy is a cornerstone of social work relationships," and it is "particularly striking" when a woman finds that the anger she experiences when "organizing for the rights of others [particularly women] was connected to her own personal trauma and victimization" (East and Roll 282, 284). Accordingly, Leela is able to interact with the raped women's screams, to understand their suffering and relate to them since Leela has had her own share of trauma. Lieder notes:

In Caruth's analysis, the cry of pain echoes in the head of the witness to that pain because the witness herself has experienced her own pain. The two pains may not have anything specific in common with each other, but somehow the one pain is able to speak to the other . . . The empathy is literal; I feel your pain because I know my own . . . (526)

Leela's physical perception of pain is, thus, a more elevated level of understanding and empathy towards the trauma of a fellow traumatized woman as herself, though she has never been through the same traumatic circumstance of rape. "Leela's ability to sympathize with the scream of the woman outside her window is directly related to her own experience of trauma, in this case the trauma of the everyday emotional abuse by her husband" (Lieder 526). In other words, Leela can relate to the woman's trauma caused by the male assailants since she has experienced correspondent male control and abuse at the hands of her husband.

Leela's negative coping with her traumatic experience is likewise seen in the emotional disruption signs and excessive negative emotions she shows. She goes through extreme fear of the crime taking place next to her house, which is evident in her words. For instance, she uses the word "frightening" three times as in "it all sounds so frightening," (19; scene 2) and the word "frightened" ten times as in "I feel frightened. All through the day . . . I'm frightened!" (5; scene 1). Thus, Leela's language and choice of words shed light on her mindset controlled by fear indicative of failed coping with her trauma. Furthermore, Leela's emotional disorder is made further explicit through her hypersensitivity resulting from her excessive fear. On the one hand, Leela grows too obsessed with the raped women's screams that she complains, "their sounds come inside, inside my nice clean house, and I can't push them out!" (8; scene 1). Her sensitivity and intolerance become obvious as she says, "tearfully," "I wish I could! ... forget" these sounds (4; scene 1). She admits that she has become unable to bear any sound even music. As Bhasker suggests that she "put[s] on some music" to hide the disturbing noise, Leela refuses declaring, "the sound will make me tense, I can't bear any sounds any more!" (10; scene 1). Therefore, Leela's inability to cope with the traumatic experience is seen through her oversensitivity and inability to handle all sounds.

Besides, Leela meets the disturbing screams with extreme anxiety and worry. Her anxiety is apparent in the way the first thing she does on meeting her husband is asking him whether he has acted upon her request. Even her manner of asking portrays how stressed she is as she does not refer to calling the police and instead asks him, "[d]id you . . . do it?" (3; scene 1). This hints at her anxious reluctance to directly refer to the cause of her trauma, as well as her fear of disappointment by her husband. Leela admits to her husband that she "worr[ies] about that thing [the screams]. . . all the time!" (4; scene 1) and asserts, "[a]ll through the day, I feel tense" (5; scene 1). Abrahams maintains:

Once the first ... incident [of violence], however minor, has taken place, there will inevitably be the anticipation and fear

of further violence, resulting in growing feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. ... The unpredictable nature and timing of the abuse removed from them any sense of physical or mental safety. (18, 19)

Knowing that the screams are heard on a daily basis, Leela becomes incessantly alert and tense in expectation of the next surge. She develops such hyper-alertness that while she is clutching a drink, the doorbell rings, causing her *"to jump, spilling her drink"* (12-13; scene 2). Moreover, as *"the doorbell rings harshly,"* Leela panics and screams, *"Ahhh! (Coming out of her trance with a violent start) Wh-who is it! wh-what-what's happening! Frieda! Oh!"* (11; scene 1). Her hyper-alertness is seen in the way she reacts to any abrupt sound with shaking, screaming, a violent start, and alarm. She reasserts that this is what happens to her every time she hears any sound. She emphasizes, *"(half-sobbing). You see? You see? That's what happens, that's why I can't meditate! There's always something coming and disturbing me!"* (12; scene 2). Therefore, through being repeatedly exposed to the traumatizing screams of the raped women, Leela has grown overly alert and expectant of the recurrence of such traumatic experience that she loses her inner peace.

Leela's emotional disturbance and inability to cope with trauma reach their peak as she experiences a nervous breakdown. Being unable to tolerate the screams and due to her struggle with continuous fears, worries, hypersensitivity, and hyper-alertness, Leela collapses. Throughout the play, Leela keeps waiting in hopes that her husband and the other men would take action against the screams. As they keep arguing in vain and as the screams continue to disturb her inner peace, Leela interrupts their conversation with her sudden breakdown:

*Leela starts to scream, bringing the discussion to a halt.*

LEELA. AAAAAH!

NAINA: Quick! She's hysterical! *(tries to hold Leela's head still)*

.....

BHASKER. I told you, she's hypersensitive!

LEELA. AAAAAAHHHHHHHHH! *(sobbing now).*

*Frieda brings the water.*

NAINA. Here—drink this—

LEELA. ... I don't want any water! I want the police! I want the police! (43-44; scene 3)

This excerpt shows Leela's ultimate negative coping with all the traumatic experiences she has been through, ranging from the screams that disturb her peace of mind, to her husband's neglect, emotional abuse, accusation of hypersensitivity, and lack of emotional support. Her emotional upheaval is seen in her continuous screaming, sobbing, and refusal to drink. Being saturated with her disappointment, anxiety, and fear, Leela finally gives vent to all her repressed emotions and forcefully expresses her pain, suffering, and sole request. She asserts:

LEELA. ... The sounds torture me. Tell the police I can't sleep at nights . . . tell the police the goondas [thugs] must go away ... (*She is losing control again.*) . . . out of my hearing . . . out of my life . . .

.....  
LEELA. Are you going to call the police? (*The hysterical note has returned.*) (44; scene 3)

Leela's words reveal the traumatic experience that has turned her life upside down, that is why she asserts that her only desire is for the screams to be out of her hearing. Her words also reveal signs of her inability to withstand the traumatic experience as she describes how the sounds torture her. Even her manner of speaking and voice also reflect her negative coping as stage directions indicate that she loses control and speaks in a hysterical note. She seems to go crazy unless they save her of her agony by responding to her desperate pleadings.

The second set of signs revealing women's negative coping with their traumatic experiences is cognitive signs. Pill et al. maintain: Negative alterations in cognitions and mood associated with the traumatic event refer to symptoms such as . . . persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs about the self, others, or the world, and/or feelings of detachment or estrangement. This

cluster of symptoms was added to account for the cognitive changes that many survivors disclose. (179)

These traumatized women show misconceptions about their traumatic experience or inability to have an objective view of it as they view the world, their own experience, and themselves from the lens of their harsh environment. Therefore, their perception of the trauma experience becomes influenced by the surrounding people's judgmental opinion and harsh criticism. Furthermore, women suffering from prolonged trauma victimization reveal "[a]lterations in self-perception" represented in "[a] chronic sense of guilt and responsibility, feelings of shame," (Pill et al. 180) and/or "loss of confidence, self-esteem and self-worth" (Abrahams 27). These traumatized women unjustifiably hold themselves accountable for the abuse or trauma they have experienced. In addition, they show negative self-image or low self-esteem as another cognitive sign of lack of resilience towards trauma.

*Lights Out* portrays Leela's negative coping with trauma through highlighting the cognitive disturbance symptoms she shows. First, Leela feels guilty and holds herself responsible for the continuation of the rape crimes daily. Her guilt is seen through her repetition of her friend's opinion, "Sushila said—if you can stop a crime, you must—or else you're helping it to happen" (16; scene 2). Second, being a victim of her husband's emotional violence, Leela shows cognitive disorder represented in adopting a negative self-image. She internalizes a sense of inefficiency and emotional as well as mental frailty, especially inspired by her husband's ridicule and treatment of her as a naïve child. As a result, she admits that she is too powerless and vulnerable a victim to watch the rape scene. As Mohan asks her if she has seen the rape from the window, she replies, "Me? No! Never! How could I? It would make me ill for weeks!" (23; scene 2). She emphasizes that she cannot help but get disturbed and tortured by the screams:

BHASKER (*taking a deep breath*). Leela, the thing to do is not let them disturb you like this, pretend they're not there .

..

LEELA. But *how?* I can't *help* hearing them! They're so—so *loud!* And *rude!* How can I make myself deaf just for them!

.....  
LEELA (*fearfully*). Am I going mad? (8, 12; scene 1)

Leela internalizes a sense of powerlessness and helplessness that she regards herself too weak to withstand this traumatic experience or to show positive coping with it. Leela also shows an extreme low self-image by thinking that she has gone “mad” for her heightened perception of the screams, whether real or imaginary ones. She even internalizes a sense of powerlessness and inadequacy that she is too weak to face the rapists, or stop their crime. For instance, as their friend Surinder suggests that they kill the rapists using knives, she exclaims doubtingly, “What—all of us!!” (48; scene 3). Moreover, held back by her fears, she declares:

LEELA (*gesturing towards the window*). But I'd be too frightened to go to their help!

.....  
LEELA (*quite firm about where she stands*). I want the police to come and clear them away. I don't want to go there *myself!* (16, 17; scene 2)

Leela admits that she is too scared and powerless to take any action to rescue the raped woman. She even surrenders to the false idea that she is too weak to withstand the disturbing noise or face her husband's emotional abuse.

The last set of signs reflecting women's failed resilience in the face of their traumatic experiences comprises behavioural, interpersonal, and communicative signs. First, women's behavioural disturbance resulting from trauma is evident in a number of signs, one of which is showing different patterns of obsessive behavior. Second, traumatized female characters reveal interpersonal signs of negative coping represented in their failure to establish or maintain healthy interpersonal relationships, tendency towards isolation, social withdrawal, and reluctance to engage with others. Violence and abuse directed towards women lead them to show interpersonal

signs of trauma exemplified by experiencing “problems in relating to others,” (Tseris 155) or “changes in relationship to others” (Pill et al. 181). Thus, traumatic violence and abuse “isolate [women], and destroy [their] emotional ties to others” (Pill et al. 181). Furthermore, due to women’s isolation and being subject to repeated acts of violence and abuse, they lose trust in others and start resorting to silence. Kathleen Jager and Marsha Carolan give an example of a woman who suffers from PTSD as a result of being subject to domestic violence. She emphasizes that she could not confide in any one out of fear of further abuse and lack of trust in all those surrounding her. She notes, “I was too scared to say anything. . . . I did not even know if I could trust anybody” (Jager and Carolan 303, 304). Accordingly, traumatized women prefer silent suffering in fear of further abuse rather than communicating with others and engaging verbally and interpersonally with them. “[S]ilence” is “acknowledged to often be the result of oppressive structures that suppress women” (East and Roll 282). Therefore, women’s communicative disturbance is manifest in their tendency towards silence, lack of self-expression, and refrain from engaging verbally with others.

Leela’s maladaptation with trauma is manifest through several behavioural disturbance signs, most distinctive of which is her showing different examples of obsessive behavior towards the traumatic stressor. Leela shows obsession with attempting to hide or cover the rape taking place and the screaming voice of the raped woman. As soon as the screams start to be heard, she panics and takes all sorts of measures to cover any sign of the crime:

LEELA (*listening*). . . . (*Rising to her feet, calling to Frieda*)  
Frieda? Bring some candles! Put out the lights! Draw the  
curtains! (*Turning back to the other two.*) Come! Dinner’s  
on the table. Let’s eat. (28; scene 2)

Leela uses candles, lights, and curtains as physical protective shields against the trauma source. Besides, she shows obsession with employing the escaping techniques or behavioural patterns of calling to Frieda to redirect the responsibility of taking counter actions unto

her. She also resorts to inviting the others to dinner to physically withdraw from the crime scene and to emotionally distance herself by engaging in a different activity to divert her attention. Similar obsession with covering the rape and getting herself distracted can be traced in her repetition of some behavioural patterns as doing yoga and focusing on meditation and breathing. She notes:

LEELA. . . . I did just what my guruji [master or tutor] told me. I sat on a cushion, there by the window and I made my mind blank. . . . And I thought of the cosmos, and of my breath, coming in (*she breathes in sharply*) . . . and out (*she breathes out*) . . . (11; scene 1)

Thus, Leela is keen on getting herself engaged in physical and mental activities that would help her be distracted and escape having any sensual experience of the traumatic noise to avoid additional feelings of fear, irresponsibility, or guilt for not taking any counter reaction that further heighten her trauma.

This obsession with covering the rape and screams is likewise apparent in Leela's communicative pattern of coping with such a traumatic experience in the way she desperately tries to force any conversation on any topic to divert Naina's attention and hers against the sounds and the horrible crime taking place. For instance, as the screams start to be heard, Leela keeps shifting topics while talking to Naina in an abrupt manner:

LEELA (*trying desperately to mask the sound*). So—so how are things, Naina?

.....  
LEELA (*quickly*). Yes, they [the children]'re off to bed early these days. . . .

LEELA (*desperately*). Seen—seen any movies lately, Naina?

NAINA (*grins*). Nothing! Not even on TV!

LEELA. And—Surinder? How's his—the business? (32; scene 3)

Leela switches from asking about Naina, to talking about her own kids, then to movies and Bhasker's business. This obsession with covering is Leela's means of escaping the harsh reality, her inability to handle it, as well as her fear and sense of guilt for the

responsibility of facing the crime that she fails to fulfill. This can be regarded as another sign of Leela's failure in coping with her trauma. She tries to cover the trauma sources to pretend as if they do not exist as she does not have the ability to tolerate them.

Another interpersonal pattern that reflects Leela's negative coping with her traumatic experience is her tendency towards social withdrawal and fleeing into isolation. As screams intensify, Leela's trauma worsens and she resorts to locking herself and her kids up in far rooms and within the bounds of her house to avoid hearing them. She admits, "[e]ven in the children's room, on the other side of the house, I could hear it!" (6; scene 1) and "I never let the children out any more" (5). She chooses social and physical withdrawal for herself and imposes it on her children as a sign of her inability to tolerate the traumatic situation and her negative coping with it. Accordingly, during her conversation with Naina, when the screams are heard, "*(Leela gets up and leads her away to the bedroom)*" (36; scene 3), seeking temporary shelter or refuge.

In addition, Leela's interactive and communicative signs of negative coping with trauma are exemplified by her social withdrawal, silence, and tendency to avoid communication or being involved in social relationships. When Bhasker informs her that he has invited Mohan to their house for the evening, she reacts in sudden panic accompanied with a pause:

LEELA. What?! You—you've called someone?

BHASKER. Yes. Mohan—

.....

LEELA. Who? Oh . . . your Delhi friend! (*pause, then sudden panic*). (10; scene 1)

In fact, Leela's pauses in the play are significant as they signify her inability to handle an on-going or potential traumatic situation. Furthermore, when Mohan arrives, Leela greets him in a tense unwelcoming manner and with silence:

BHASKER. No problem! Come—you've met my wife? Leela?  
*Mohan nods a greeting as Leela acknowledges him too,  
 forcing her smile.*

.....  
*. . . Leela sits back tensely, looks at her watch. Mohan sees  
 her. There is a silence after which they each open their  
 mouths to say something, . . . Bhasker looks across to  
 Mohan, Leela glances again at her watch.  
 (13, 14; scene 2)*

Leela's inability to smile or sit comfortably and the way she keeps looking at her watch disclose her lack of desire in socializing or communication. In fact, Leela's problem is not with Mohan but with the screams or the traumatic situation which is too stressful for her to bear and that hinders her from leading a normal life, communicating with others and engaging in healthy social interaction.

Another example that highlights Leela's interpersonal and communicative negative coping with trauma is seen in her resorting to silence and avoidance of communication in her conversation with Bhasker in scene one. This is seen in the fact that her speech is mostly made of words or phrases, rather than long sentences. As Leela faces the traumatic experience of Bhasker's insistence on not calling the police and his emotional neglect for focusing on the paper, she speaks to him in short incomplete hesitant phrases that highlight her shock and inner pain:

LEELA (*sits beside him*). Did you ... do it?

.....  
 LEELA (*stares at him, then, buries her face in her hands*). No!  
 You didn't!

BHASKER. What?

LEELA. Again?

BHASKER. Again what?

LEELA. How could you forget? (*lifts her head to stare at him*).  
 (3-4; scene 1)

Leela reacts to Bhasker's emotional violence in the same dialogue by silence. The stage directions indicate that she reacts with a pause while he does not show interest in talking to her. Moreover, as she describes how painful the screams are to her, she pauses. She cries, "I don't even have to watch - the sounds are bad enough! (*Pause*)" (6; scene 1). Therefore, Leela's inability to handle her overwhelming traumatic experiences hinder her from socializing and communicating effectively with others

To conclude, women have often been victims of physical and emotional violence and abuse at the hands of male partners, family members, and the patriarchal society. Being unable to withstand this multifaceted abuse in their domestic and social life, women experience serious trauma or PTSD and show signs of negative coping or failure to adapt with such trauma. Leela in Padmanabhan's *Lights Out* manifests how some Indian women go through unresolved trauma due to being victims of patriarchal abuse, especially domestic emotional violence at the hands of their spouses, in addition to witnessing and empathizing with raped women going through physical violence. Leela goes through serious trauma, with which she shows signs of failed adaptation. She reveals psychosomatic or emotional and concomitant bodily signs of negative coping, exemplified by a combination of negative emotions of anxiety, fear, hyper-alertness, and hypersensitivity, accompanied by physical symptoms like bodily pain, nausea, loss of appetite, and insomnia. Leela similarly shows cognitive disturbance signs as she regards herself guilty and internalizes a negative self-image of helplessness and powerlessness. Furthermore, Leela's unsuccessful coping with trauma is traced through a set of behavioural, interpersonal, and communicative symptoms such as obsessive behaviour, physical and social withdrawal, as well as silence. To conclude, having shown all these multiple traumatic disturbance signs, Leela's negative coping with trauma is made manifest.

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