Changing the Perceptions: Tracing Feminist and Postfeminist Apprehensions of Rape Culture in Sohaila Abdulali's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape*

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Abstract

Rape is the linchpin of patriarchy. The prevailing perception of rape and rape victims is an important matter of discussion as many people still believe in rape myths. Writer, activist, and rape survivor Sohaila Abdulali's personal narrative *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape* questions gender roles and the patriarchal system. She describes how erroneous beliefs about rape, rapists, and rape victims affect society and leads to victim blaming, slut shaming, and questioning the behaviour of women. Rape myths, which are by-products of patriarchy, rationalise sexual violence and promote animosity toward the victims. In the book, Abdulali urges society to shift its focus from women as victims to men as rapists. By depicting the real incidents, the author shows how men use power to justify rape and sexual assault. Born in India, she takes the issue of rape to the global level by addressing rape cases from all around the world to show how rape affects people from various communities and cultures. This paper seeks to explore the ways in which Sohaila Abdulali deals with the issue of rape with reference to gender, race, and class. The paper also looks at how much society has changed over time in terms of its perceptions of rape and rape victims while there are many people who still adhere to the old gender stereotypes. The study draws on feminist and postfeminist theoretical elements to address the issue of rape.

Keywords: Rape, victim blaming, feminism, post-feminism, women

1. Introduction

Historically, feminist movements have been dedicated solely to the fight against gender inequalities. Undoubtedly, the gains made by these movements could dramatically alter the condition and sufferings of women in a very significant manner. In order to achieve its objectives, feminists assert that our society is patriarchal and that men and their perspectives predominate over those of women. As Chris Weedon (1987) defines,

> The term 'patriarchal' refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men. These power relations take many forms, from the sexual division of labour and the social organization of procreation to the internalized norms of femininity by which we live. Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference. In patriarchal discourse the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm which is male (p. 2).

Women were absolutely denied any legal rights prior to the rise of feminism, especially the right to vote. The first wave of feminism evolved during the late 19th and early 20th centuries as a result of an understanding of the need for women's political and educational rights. It was successful in securing women's voting rights. Additionally, efforts were made to achieve equality in marriage, profession, and education. The subsequent waves of feminism were an effort to fill up the gaps left by their mothers. The second wave of feminism with the catchphrase 'the personal is political' began in the early 1960s. It sought to extend what the first wave of feminism had previously accomplished regarding suffrage, to other significant concerns pertaining to family, marriage, sexuality, sexual violence, rape, domestic violence, and inequality in the workplace. However, second-wave feminism was accused of lacking diversity because it centered on white, middle-class women, alienating women of colour and women from less privileged socioeconomic groups.

A third wave of feminism evolved during the early 1990s, focusing on the second wave's lack of diversity. The concept of 'intersectionality' was one of the key goals of third-wave feminists which refers to the multiplicity of oppression that women experience based on their race, class, and gender. In short, third-wave feminism gained popularity with its emphasis on gender equality by eliminating the prevalent gender stereotypes and extending the movement to racially and culturally diversified women. The fourth wave of feminism, which started about 2012, was concerned with giving women more power through the use of technology and the internet.

Expanding the third wave's philosophy of 'intersectionality', the fourth wave explored avenues for all women, regardless of their colour and class, to share their stories of sexual violence, rape, and other sorts of harassment online.

A term that has created much tension among feminists is 'postfeminism'. "The wide-ranging circulation of the term and its uncertain definition prompted scholars to study the implications of its usage" (Grafton et al., 2013). The term 'postfeminism' was praised by some and decried by others. Despite some claims to the contrary, postfeminism is a phrase that has gained popularity recently and signifies a progression or continuation of feminism. The term is now explained to be a "useful conceptual frame of reference encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including post modernism, post structuralism, and post colonialism" (Brooks, 2003, p. 1). The link of feminism with popular culture is another way to define postfeminism. It challenges parts of the second and third wave feminism's ideals, including binary thinking, the conception of femininity, and the emphasis on women as the 'victims' of sexual assault. Simply put, postfeminism "signals a shift in the understandings of feminism and is evoked by a generation of younger feminists who wanted feminism to be relevant to the era they are living in" (Thakur, 2013, p. 13).

The personal narrative *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape* by Sohaila Abdulali challenges our perception of rape and rape victims. Published in 2018, Abdulali drew inspiration for the book from her personal experiences as a rape survivor, her work with numerous other survivors from all around the world, and the finding of her research on rape.

2. Method

This paper seeks to analyse the book *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape* by Sohaila Abdulali while embracing feminism's principles, particularly those of the second through fourth waves and postfeminism, on issues related to rape, sexual violence, femininity, and masculinity. The paper will also discuss how attitudes toward rape, women, and sexuality have evolved over time. Personal narratives are the most fitting genre to discuss topics like rape and sexual violence because they depict the true experiences of women. They may help readers understand reality. Insights from the theoretical tools employed by Ann Brooks, Sarah Gamble, Susan Brownmiller, Katie S. Roiphe, Rene Denfeld, and other similar theoreticians would be relied on for the analysis.

3. Analysis

The movements for women's liberation have tackled the issues of rape and sexual violence against women since the second wave of feminism. Although there have been many anti-rape campaigns around the world, attacks and violence against women persist.

3.1 Anti-rape Activism During the Early 1960s

The release of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 heralded the beginning of the second wave of feminism in the United States. While the First Wave of feminism concentrated on achieving equal rights, the second wave focused on the liberation of women. And, "whilst old feminism was individualist and reformist, women's liberation was collective and revolutionary" (Thornham, 2006, p. 25). Holding the slogan that "the personal is political" (Hanisch, 1969), the second-wave feminists formed consciousness-raising groups, a movement aimed at transforming the personal experiences of women into political ones as men maintain their power through personal institutions like marriage, sex, childbearing, and nurturing. During this time, anti-rape activism was born as numerous women were raped both inside and outside of their homes. The prevalence of marital rape increased during this time, and numerous anti-rape organizations began to thrive.

It was the purpose of the consciousness-raising groups to bring women together to share and discuss any experience of oppression by men, thereby raising the political consciousness of the community. In *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape*, Sohaila Abdulali urges rape victims to share their experiences openly rather than be silenced by society. In the introductory chapter of the book, Abdulali (2018) states "discussions about rape are so often irrational, and sometimes outright bizzare" (p. 1). She shares her experiences of being raped by four men while out with her male friend; Abdulali was herself a rape victim. When she and her friend made some promises, the men who had threatened to kill them eventually backtracked on their threat. She was choosing rape over death. Several days after her own rape, she recounts another incident that occurred to a married couple. The couple was stopped by some men while traveling home at night. The men took the woman away and her husband did nothing to stop the rape. He left the scene alone without informing anyone about what had happened. The following day, his wife returned home and killed herself.

Abdulali illustrates how a woman should act after being raped and how she shouldn't act by contrasting her personal experience with that of the married couple. Abdulali was not ashamed of sharing her experiences as a rape victim with anyone. She says, "I must be missing the Shame Gene that other Indian women are born with, because, for all the guilt, horror, trauma, and confusion that followed my rape, it never occurred to me that I had anything to be ashamed of. Luckily for me, it didn't occur to my parents either" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 6). She opposes the married couple, claiming that people are ashamed to talk about their experiences with their own family members. She, on the other hand, doesn't hesitate to tell her parents about her encounter. Even though there was no internet back then, she writes her story for publishing alongside her photograph in a magazine in Delhi. Despite a slight uproar in India following the publication, nobody else came forward to relate their stories as Abdulali did for "developing a shared consciousness of oppression among women" (Gamble, 2006, p. 174).

Rida, who was repeatedly raped by a bulky man when she was three or four, was one of the victims who kept their ordeal a secret. She kept it a secret out of concern that she would be held accountable by her traditional family. The fact that the same man also sexually assaulted her sister was not revealed to her until many years later. They both spent many years keeping this a secret. "What happens when

you keep such a big secret? What happens to you, and what does your silence mean for the people around you and your community?" asks Abdulali (2018, p. 16). Cheryl is another victim of a classmate's rape at school. She kept it a secret, and when she told Abdulali about it, the girl expressed how lonely it made her feel to be dealing with the burden. Heather kept the fact that she had been gang raped a secret out of humiliation and shame. According to Abdulali, shame is one of the main factors preventing women from discussing this openly.

"Consciousness-raising sessions addressed a wide range of topics. However, by far the most common thread discussed was men's unbridled access to women's bodies." (Echols, 1989, as cited in Lonely-Howes, Rachel,2019). Rachel Lonely Howes (2019) argues,

> Rape emerged as the issue of second wave feminism because rape, sexual violence and sexual harassment became the focal point of feminist activism in the 1970s because of how pervasive these experiences were and how fundamental they were to the struggle over the ownership and control of women's bodies (p. 23).

Abdulali then discusses how we perceive rape by a family member and rape by a stranger. In her account of Busisiwe Mrasi's rape, Abdulali (2018) makes the observation that "taboos are as varied as societies" (p. 17). Busisiwe was nine years old when she was raped and contracted HIV while living in the townships of Port Elizabeth, South Africa. She is upfront about having been raped and having HIV. She acknowledges that residents of the townships do publicly discuss their experiences, but the sad reality is that they only do so when the offender is a stranger. If the offender is a member of their own family, they say nothing. She uses Sanjana, who was molested by a family acquaintance, and a South Asian woman, who was victimised by a relative, as instances. They both were embarrassed to disclose this to anyone. The South Asian woman tried to tell her father, but he didn't believe her. Despite the fact that consciousness-raising campaigns have been underway since the 1960s, Abdulali's interviews with these rape survivors reveal that they are still keeping their experiences hidden. For Abdulali (2018),

> It is difficult to comprehend today's world, where women (mainly women with some privilege and safety) come out about rape and their perpetrators, compared to the environment in which she grew up, where she was unable to visualise the face of another rape victim. It is still a significant issue. There will be a long way to go before speaking out as a rape survivor is no longer stigmatised. Sometimes, the punishment entails being reduced or pigeonholed (p. 20).

Abdulali, who was known to be the first rape survivor in India to publicly discuss her ordeal, exhorts other rape victims to do the same. She tells the victims,

> It is also rather curative – the more often we tell it, the more manageable it gets, because no matter how many details we share, we leave out the unbearable ones that nobody wants to hear. Finally we are left with a sanitized version, with the requisite sprinkling of horror, but nothing to make you too uncomfortable. And we are always making sure not to give you more than you can handle. We are protecting you. (Abdulali, 2018, p. 20).

Consciousness-raising sessions that promoted public speak-outs encouraged women to reveal their stories of sexual violence. "The idea of 'breaking the silence' has been a ubiquitous strategy of the anti-rape movement and 'speak-outs' have been, and continue to be, considered the best strategy to educate society about the personal costs of violence" (Alcoff, 2018, as cited in Lonely-Howes, Rachel, 2019).

3.2 Lack of Diversity and the Need for Intersectionality

The second wave of feminism received harsh criticism for not being inclusive. It received backlash for disregarding the voices of black, poor, and certain middle-class women as well as the LGBT people in favour of white and middle-class women. Due to this exclusion, various alternative forms of feminism, like Black feminism, Chicana feminism, and Africana feminism have emerged. This suggests that the oppressions women experience are influenced by their colour, class, and sexual orientation. In response to the focus of second-wave feminism on white, middle-class women, Kimberle Crenshaw invented the term 'intersectionality' in 1989. As a result, intersectionality emerged as one of the major indicators of third-wave feminism, which "refers to the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Davis, 2008, p. 68).

Sohaila Abdulali advocates for consciousness-raising and she doesn't single out any particular gender, race, or social group while discussing the problems associated with sexual assault and rape. She speaks about rape victims in Africa, particularly in The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), typically referred to as 'The Rape Capital of the World'. In the DRC, rape occurs often during armed conflict, and the city of Bukavu has a hospital specifically designed to care for raped women. Abdulali described an incident that happened in the Eastern Congo's small village of Kavumu, where MP Frederic Batumike Rugimbanya and another eleven men raped and killed around fifty girls under the age of eighteen. From 2015 until the DRC government took the appropriate action against the culprits, this case was consistently documented by Lauren Wolfe, director of Women Under Siege in the US. All twelve men were given successive life sentences by the authorities in 2017. Abdulali (2018) says, "Words did that. Words led to the first time that an army official in the DRC was convicted of rape. Lauren Wolfe refused to shut up, and helped give voice to all the victims and families who talked to her" (p. 25).

Speaking out about rape and speaking against their perpetrators varies according to which class and race they belong to. Abdulali (2018) points out, "it takes courage for anyone at all to speak up about sexual abuse in any form. For many, many women, speaking up is lethal. For every woman, it takes guts" (p. 25). Actress and writer Kalki Koechlin has admitted in public that she was raped. She says, "it is universal – it happened to every woman, including me" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 25). Despite the fact that she is not ashamed of being a victim

of rape, she does not want to be defined by it. She doesn't think it's a big deal to come out against rape. The entire world, including the media and her family members – known and unknown – wanted to hear more about her experience when she revealed that she, too, had been a victim of rape. "An established, rich, white Hollywood Star deserved kudos for speaking out. A maid in a Mumbai apartment who is counting on her salary to support her children has to think a lot harder about outing her employer if he comes into her room at night" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 25-26).

Abdulali was successful in increasing awareness by incorporating the experiences of women of colour, women from poor backgrounds, transgenders, and men who had been raped "as being particularly salient when it comes to exclusionary or inclusionary discourse" (Evans, 2015, p. 9). Thus she embodies the third wave of feminism which has been "closely associated with intersectionality, and inclusion of specific groups who had previously felt excluded from feminist activism" (Evans, 2015, p. 9).

The recent news about Jyoti Singh, who was studying physiotherapy in New Delhi, was gang raped as she and her male friend were traveling on a bus, caused the most outrage in India. This happened in 2012. Discussing the Mathura Case of 1972, where a tribal girl was raped by two men Abdulali argues that women from lower caste don't get the public impact as the case of Jyoti Singh received. The Mathura Case is significant because it marked the beginning of anti-rape movement in India. The rapists were judged not guilty, therefore the girl and her family did not receive the justice they were entitled to. In this case, the rape victim is a tribal girl, and the perpetrators are police officers. The judge described the tribal girl as "habituated to sexual intercourse" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 29). demonstrating how class plays a part in this case. In another rape case, an eight years old girl was raped, in which "sexism, caste, politics, power, all coming together to eliminate one small eight-year-old" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 33). The little girl was found raped and murdered in the Jammu and Kashmir woods. In this case, communalism was one of the terrible causes of rape. "The rapists were Hindu nationalists whose mission was to frighten away her tribal Muslim community" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 33).

These are the problems faced by girls and women and as Abdulali (2018) points out, "if you are a transperson, your chances of being sexually assaulted are fifty-fifty, but your chances of finding understanding and support, or justice, are far lower" (p. 4). Abdulali describes a camp called Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) that was held in South Sudan with the intention of aiding rape victims and spreading rape awareness. Worker Mitali Ayyangar acknowledges that the camp was exclusively for women and not for male victims. "This is an unfortunate global truth – the lack of sexual assault services for men and boys. No matter how insufficient they are for women everywhere, services are worse for men" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 68). Abdulali recounts the story of Manassah Bradley, a rape survivor, in need of help. He was in danger of killing himself if no one intervened. In his Boston school, a teacher he didn't know sexually assaulted him. He was unable to tell anyone what had happened to him, not even his mother, because he had no idea what rape was. He was troubled by the experience for years. When he called a rape crisis center they told him that "men could not be raped; they could only be rapists" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 130)

Abdulali is seeking to highlight one of the intersectionality's primary concerns by narrating the experiences of many rape survivors for "understanding the effects of race, class, and gender on women's identities, experiences and struggles for empowerment" (Davis, 2008, p. 71). It is also concerned with how rape affects unprivileged and coloured women. A woman of colour who has been the victim of rape experiences oppression and marginalization in multiple ways – for being a woman and for being black. They receive no support or attention from the general population. They become more defenceless and outcasts. While some speak out in public about their experiences as rape survivors, others choose to keep quiet. They are afraid of the society they are a part of. In the rape case that happened in the DRC, the words of Lauren Wolfe led the government to take action against the rapists. Abdulali is giving the entire women community the confidence to speak up against all forms of discrimination, regardless of their race, class and gender.

3.3 Consciousness Raising Through Online Activism

In the book, Abdulali frequently discusses the #MeToo movement, which was enabled by fourth wave feminism. "This new wave is especially associated with social media, online activism, intersectionality, protesting against sexual harassment and rape culture" (Andersen, 2018, p. 2). By addressing the problems of historically oppressed individuals like transgenders and black people, it broadens the idea of intersectionality. The fourth wave encouraged people to utilise social media as a platform to speak out against sexual violence, rape, gender discrimination in the workplace and other issues. Because it was the age of internet and mass media, the news of Jyoti Singh received considerable attention. Many women responded to the news and used social media to oppose the perpetrators.

Prof. A. Armstrong (as cited in Abdulali, 2018) of the University of Michigan praises *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape* as it

> Places the American #MeToo movement in a global context. Drawing on her experiences as a rape survivor and as scholar and advocate, Sohaila Abdulali takes us from the US, to India, South Africa, Mexico, Kuwait and other countries providing examples that illustrate both the intense particularity and infuriating similarities of sexual violence around the globe. Courageous, angry, compassionate, informative, hopeful, and wise, this book approaches this hard topic from a variety of angles. She addresses shame and the silencing of survivors, retaliation, victim blaming, the complexities of consent, recovery and other issues.

About three decades ago, Abdulali wrote about the story of her rape in *Manushi*, a women's magazine, but the news didn't garner much attention. But after thirty years, she discovered that a picture of her as a teenager had gone viral on social media, and numerous TV stations and other media outlets had requested interviews with her because she was the "Only Living Rape Victim of India" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 9). Thirty years after the incident, it wasn't until then her story gained worldwide attention.

According to Abdulali, one rape victim consented to share her story only if it helped the #MeToo movement. For her, the movement provided the confidence to speak up. The movement was founded as a form of protest against rape and sexual violence. The movement's main goals were to "spread awareness of sexual violence and to empower through empathy" (Andersen, 2018, p. 31). The movement encouraged women to share their experiences as survivors of sexual abuse and rape. Women were reminded by it that they are not alone. Abdulali (2018) states; "#MeToo won't end sexual harassment in either Hollywood or the corner shoe store, but I hope victims won't feel quite as alone" (p. 36). Although attempts had already been made to increase awareness, the #MeToo movement gave people a better understanding of the intensity of the issues that women faced.

The #MeToo movement can be viewed as a contemporary method for raising consciousness. Abdulali admits that she is unsure if this campaign will be able to stop rape, but she believes that it is necessary for those who are dealing with similar situations to talk about sexual assault, whether it is committed by a stranger or by a relative of the victim. Sharing one woman's difficulties with another helped her understand that she was not the only one dealing with gender-based persecution. Abdulali was making two points very apparent about the #MeToo movement; "the personal is political and sisterhood is powerful" (Lauren Rosewarne, 2019, p. 175). which are the two main tenets of the consciousness raising agenda. According to Abdulali, the movement did not start with superstar Milano's tweet in 2017. It was started in 1997 by Tarana Burke, a thirteen-year-old black girl who came out to say that she had been sexually molested.

Another aspect of fourth wave feminism and the #MeToo movement is men's accountability. To stop sexual violence, it looks to males as allies. Abdulali goes into great length on this subject. When asked how we may raise our children, she responds, "if we want to teach our children to be decent human beings who respect others and themselves, we have to tackle the notions of masculinity and femininity and patriarchy" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 133). Patriarchy elevates a particular form of masculinity above women and all other perceived feminine genders. But as Stephen M.A Saucie et.al (2019) point out, "to be sure, most men are not comfortable with the dominant (and hegemonic) narrative of masculinity in our society" (p. 159). Abdulali demonstrates this by juxtaposing the abuse Heather received from her family, with the support Abdulali received from her family, especially from the male members. Heather was born into and was raised in a violent household. She was also involved with a boy who was abusive. He and his friends gang raped her when she rejected him. After the incident, she changed careers, started living alone, and spent a significant amount of money on therapy. And she did all this without any help from her family. Abdulali (2018) says that,

> Rape is terrible no matter what, but the more stories I hear, the more I see the huge power of family, support, childhood messages. I have plenty of baggage myself, but I am convinced that the reason it was possible for me to become a person who is happy to be in the world is because I had the safety net so many victims lack (p. 164).

When Heather refused to follow her father's orders, he threw her out; Abdulali's father, however, threw out the policemen, not his daughter, since they refused to listen to her or take her words seriously. Abdulali also recalls the 1980s, when her friend, brother, and boyfriend founded an organisation called Men Against Sexual Assault. She attempts to highlight the idea that men can be active participants and they can take responsibility in resisting violence and oppression against women, by exhibiting the activities of males in her family and among her acquaintances.

Additionally, Abdulali speaks about men who have witnessed rape. She offers her personal experience as an example. Her male companion was helpless while she was being raped. She says, "the whole scenario is a toxic blend of machismo and cruelty, a neat way of pressing every button related to what it means to be male and female. In every culture, we cling to prescribed expectations of masculinity and femininity, usually to everyone's detriment" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 70). Furthermore, she claims that the studies on rape, power and control show, "if you manage to rape a woman and bring a man to his knees at the same time, it must be a double victory. And, if you're the man who has to witness the crime, it must be a double devastation – you see someone, maybe someone whom you love, hurt, and you can't do anything about it" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 70). This is the constructed gender role of masculinity. The encouragement Abdulali received from her family demonstrates how men can support fourth-wave feminism by speaking out against actions that dehumanize and objectify women.

3.4 Postfeminism: From Victimisation to Power

Even though Abdulali does not identify as a postfeminist, her writing contains some aspects that do. What does rape have to do with postfeminism? Researchers and academicians now frequently use the term postfeminism. While some theorists advocate for postfeminism, others decry it as being anti-feminist. "However, those to whom the postfeminist label is most often attached by the media do not generally regard themselves as part of any kind of anti-feminist movement" (Gamble, 2006b, p. 37). Many feminists contend that postfeminist ideologies are hostile to feminist achievements from various eras, particularly those of second-wave feminism. Additionally, they argue that postfeminism represents a denial and betrayal of feminist struggles. Whether the prefix 'post' refers to a distinct entity that rejects the accomplishments of feminism is a matter of significant debate. Sarah Gamble (2006b) argues that,

> The prefix 'post' does not necessarily always direct us back the way we've come. Instead, its trajectory is bewilderingly uncertain, since while it can certainly be interpreted as suggestive of a relapse back to a former set of ideological beliefs, it can also be read as indicating the continuation of the originating term's aims and ideologies, albeit on a different level (p. 37).

Postfeminists claim that the goals of second and third wave feminists have been accomplished, and that feminism is no longer necessary for the present generation. It gives emphasis on individual empowerment as distinct from collective women's rights movements. According to Ann Brooks (2003), postfeminists assert, "the conception of a collective feminist identity may be perceived as totalitarian

and dangerous" (p. 22). The fact that the first and second waves of feminism addressed the issues of women's oppression as being common to all women worldwide was one of the main criticisms levelled at them. "But postfeminism rejects this idea and believes in multiple identities and calls for every woman's recognition of her own personal mix of identities" (Thakur, 2013, p. 13-14). Abdulali gives each woman the freedom to live out her individual identities through her book. This includes women of colour, low caste women and women from other unprivileged groups.

Abdulali talks about Michelle Hattingh who wrote her thesis on rape in South Africa, her home country. Abdulali (2018) says, "on the morning she defended it, she spoke about how a South African woman has a higher chance of being raped than of learning to read. She did well. That evening, she went out to celebrate her success – and was raped on the beach near the party" (p. 176). As mentioned earlier, rape has distinct effects on marginalized people than it does on privileged individuals. Ann Brooks (2003) claims, "postfeminism facilitates a broad-based, pluralistic conception of the application of feminism, and addresses the demands of marginalized, diasporic and colonised cultures for a non-hegemonic feminism capable of giving voice to local, indigenous, and postcolonial feminisms" (p. 4).

"Postfeminism started in the 1980s as a reaction against feminism which presented women as victims and oppressed and in need of freedom and empowerment" (Thakur, 2013, p. 15). Katie S. Roiphe in *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism* (1993), asserts that presenting women as victims is like disempowering them. According to her, the depiction of women as victims is equal to celebrating their vulnerability rather than their strength. She argues;

> Feminists are closer to their backlash than they think. The image that emerges from feminist preoccupation with rape and sexual harassment is that of women as victims…This image of a delicate woman bears a striking resemblance to that fifties ideal my mother and the other women of her generation fought so hard to get away from… She (the image of woman as victim) represented personal, social and psychological possibilities collapsed, and they worked and marched, shouted and wrote, to make her irrelevant for their daughter. But here she's again, with her pure intentions and her wide eyes. Only this time it is feminists themselves who are breathing new life into her (Katie Roiphe, 1993, as cited in Gamble, Sarah).

Abdulali in her book prefers to use the term 'rape survivors' than 'rape victims'. She sees herself as a rape survivor who went to college weeks after the rape. Because the term 'victim' carries a negative connotation that could induce the survivors to feel weak and powerless. Instead, using the term 'survivor' emphasizes their strength and fortitude to overcome the traumatic incident. Like Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfeld criticised second-wave feminism's notion of female victimisation. Sarah Gamble (2006b) writes,

> For Denfeld, the term 'feminism' has come to stand for an extremist cabal which alienates a younger generation of women in its insistence on pursuing an agenda based on an unswerving belief in female victimisation at the hands of an all-powerful patriarchal system, open hostility to heterosexual practices, and the embracing of New Age goddess worship (p. 39).

In the twenty-fifth chapter "Good Girls Don't", Abdulali shifts her focus from women as victims to men as rapists. She says "talking about prevention is tricky, because, if we know that the fault lies with the men who rape, why should we talk with women and girls about prevention at all? If we tell our daughters (and sons) how to keep themselves safe, aren't we also saying that it's their fault if something happens?" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 182). Abdulali narrated how the convent school nuns taught her lessons on morality and order. Those lessons delighted her. However, the nuns were concerned not only with increasing the knowledge of their students, but also with increasing the length of their skirts. They were required to attend moral science classes where they were taught proper behaviour. The nuns taught them "that socializing with Boys would be our downfall. We must avoid Boys under any circumstances" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 185). "Despite helping raise strong girls, their gender politics were very suspect" says Abdulali (2018, p. 184). In Abdulali's words, the lesson concluded that if anything untoward happened to one of us, it was our fault. The nun's assertion that women are more susceptible to rape if they interact with males is criticised by Abdulali (2018). She doesn't want to think of raped women as more vulnerable. She disputes the notion that women who wear shorts, women who hang out with boys, and women who had sex before are more susceptible to being raped.

Caroline Blyth (2014) argues that, "according to the logic of victim blaming ideology, if women commodify themselves as sexual objects, they should not be surprised if men treat them as objects, rather than human beings deserving of agency and respect" (p. 5). He also asks "if women actively seek to make themselves so attractive that no man can resist them, how can we fail to blame them when men lose all control and act impulsively on their desires?" (Blyth, 2014, p. 5). Abdulali (2018) provides an illustration that refutes this notion of women's sexual emancipation and states that, "it is possible to have the same standards for both" (p. 132). She narrates an incident that her friend told her. While reading Osamu Tezuka's 'Budha' graphic novels, the friend's nine-year-old brother asked her, "why are the women naked" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 132). The friend asked him to take a closer look stating that "they are topless just like the men, not naked" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 132). According to Abdulali (2018), the boy felt that, "men could expose their chests and remain dressed, but women had to be fully covered" (p. 132). She argues that such conversations are necessary.

According to Caroline Blyth (2014), the "postfeminist discourse about the empowering potential of women's sexuality is that this discourse stands in uneasy tension with the still prevalent sexual double standards that remain ubiquitous within many contemporary cultures." He argues, though the postfeminist outlets may promote women's sexuality as a source of power, these same outlets never refrain from 'slutshaming' these women when they use this power. Abdulali (2018) claims,

> If you need evidence of double standards, you can find plenty in the unsavoury dynamics in many households – the ones where the dear little boy is his mummy's *ladla,* little darling, and is used to being served and getting whatever he wants, chop chop.

> These little boys might grow into men who are fond of their mothers, but that doesn't necessarily translate into respect for women like their wives or every other female on the planet. It is more a kind of appreciation that there's a whole world of worshipful slaves-with-sexy-parts out there (p. 132).

As Abdulali emphasizes, although a woman dresses according to her choice and if it is meant to attract men, it does not mean that they are objects to be raped. It all comes down to consent. If a woman says "yes means yes and no means no" (Abdulali, 2018).

Abdulali defines rape culture as the sum of all the things we do, say, and believe that ultimately lead to the conclusion that rape is okay. She says,

> Serving your son first like a good Indian mother doesn't mean you condone rape; making fun of lady drivers doesn't mean you condone rape; saving for your daughter's dowry doesn't mean you condone rape; saying "boys will be boys" on the playground doesn't mean you condone rape. But each of these chips away of women's and girls' self-respect, and gives boys permission to feel a little more entitled, a little more important, a little more as though they have a free pass to maraud through the world and take without thinking (Abdulali, 2018, p. 133).

4. Conclusion

In *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, Susan Brownmiller establishes rape as a means through which men retain patriarchy. She defines rape as "man's basic weapon of force against woman… It is nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 14-15). *What We Talk About When We Talk About Rape* is a plea to rape survivors to raise their voices against their perpetrators. Having been born in 1963 and being the only rape survivor in India, she is a living testament to the various waves of feminism and postfeminism. She tackles the problem of rape at the global level by using elements from both feminism and postfeminism. She never confines the topic of rape to a specific race, class, or gender. Even though Abdulali is skeptical that rape can be eradicated, she asserts that talking to someone about the incident will lessen the burden. In the twenty first century, social media plays a vital role in helping rape survivors feel less alone. but there are still a lot of women who are reluctant to speak up. Some of them hold themselves responsible for the rape, while others are afraid that others, including their family members, will blame them. Here, Abdulali stresses the importance of family support in overcoming the trauma of rape.

Sexual abuse should be a matter of discussion in the household. As Abdulali asks, "if we can expose our children to talk of genocide, racism, bikini waxing, and the inevitable melting of the planet, why should we leave out sexual abuse?" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 3). The older generation has to understand that rape is one of the many ways men attempt to maintain dominance over women under the patriarchal system. To put an end to this, we should abolish the patriarchal system and the conventional gender roles. It is not a woman's fault if she is raped. According to Abdulali (2018), "the only ones responsible for sexual assault are those who choose to rape" (p. 182). Giving children safety tips and training on how to avoid being raped is similar to telling them that it is their fault if something goes wrong. There are numerous lectures and courses available for women on how to prevent rape, but there is no course available for boys on how not to commit rape. Girls don't need to be advised to wear long skirts, stay away from boys, or refrain from going out late at night. Men who chose to rape should be held accountable if she is raped. Not every man chooses to rape. There are men who believe that "there is no reasonable reason to rape" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 196). Rape implies using aggressive means of sexual violence by threat or force for one's sexual gratification who "don't care that the other person does not want it" (Abdulali, 2018, p. 196). There are men who justify rape and as Abdulali (2018) puts it, "the only people who openly justify rape are those who run blatantly woman-hating societies, where women are objects" (p. 196). She vehemently refutes the notion that men can't stop themselves once they are sexually aroused. She contends that a woman always has the choice to say no at any point, even in the bedroom. This includes sex workers too. The patriarchal system and the conventional ideas of masculinity and femininity should be questioned to educate the next generation on how to be good human beings and respect themselves and others. Men need to realise that women are no longer merely objects of sex that can be conquered through intimidation or force. Abdulali exhorts women to bear responsibility for themselves, not for being raped, but for speaking out against the perpetrators.

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