

Sartrean Insights on Understanding the Repercussions of Rape Trauma in the Gripping Narratives of Roxanne Gay and Neesha Arter

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Abstract

Women have been subjugated to violence from time immemorial. One of the most horrific forms of violence is sexual violence and rape. Their voice was not heard until the rise of second wave feminism which began around 1970. Women started to write about their experiences in the form of memoirs to bring to light the atrocities of rape and the implications of trauma and its impact. Sexual assault inflicts profound psychological and emotional wounds that give rise to a condition referred to as 'Rape Trauma'. Rape Trauma Syndrome includes of a wide range of physical and psychological signs such as insomnia, nightmare, flashbacks, anxiety, and depression and so on and they last for a long period of time in one's life. The research uses two memoirs written by American women, Roxanne Gay's *Hunger: A Memoir of my Body* (2017) and Neesha Arter's *Controlled: The worst Night of my Life and its Aftermath* (2015). The research uses Sartre's perspective on embodiment, freedom, self to analyse rape trauma. The research uses Jean Paul Sartre's concept to analyse the immense effects of rape trauma on the lives of the two women as documented in their memoirs. Using the framework provided by Constance L. Mui, the research delineates how rape trauma destroys the fundamental project of the protagonists and how rape trauma annihilates an individual from her own body and isolates her from the world.

Keywords: Memoirs, Sartre, Embodiment, Rape, Emotion, Fundamental Project, Rape Trauma

1. Introduction

"Rape has something to do with our sex. Rape is something awful that happens to females: it is the dark at the top of the stairs, the undefinable abyss that is just around the corner, and unless we watch our step it might become our destiny" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 309).

Across the world from generation to generation women have been suffering from violence. Women from their birth, their childhood during their teen age as years go on as they age and mature they are subjugated to violence. It includes a variety of offensive acts that are derogatory and disdainful that is targeted against women because of their gender and cause physical and psychological wounds. Only by 1993 the United Nations General Assembly declared violence against women a breach of human rights. It is not only illegal but also violates the human rights of women.

Without any skepticism or dubiety some of the most horrific and nefarious acts of violence against women include rape and sexual violence. The term 'Rape' is uprooted from the Latin word 'rapere' which literally means 'to snatch, to grab, to carry off'. Rape is defined as violent and unlawful sexual intercourse against the victims will, inflict upon by force or threat or on minor, or when they are inebriated or unconscious and deceived (Holmstrom & Burgess, 1975). Sexual assault causes an emotional and physical scar that often leaves the victim with the feelings of alienation, remorse and humiliation. It causes psychological and interpersonal problems, the long term effects include PTSD, cognitive distortions, emotional pain, avoidance, an impaired sense of self and interpersonal difficulties (Briere & Elliott, 1994). "Rape is not an 'affront to women chastity' but rather a profound violation of her bodily integrity and her right to dignity, security and freedom from discrimination" (Fried, 2003, p. 88).

The genesis of rape and sexual violence is very complex and multifaceted and it cannot be ascribed to a particular cause or source. They have consistently been present throughout human history across cultures. The occurrence of rape is not new and novel. Historical documents have documented instance of rape dating back to pre-Biblical times. Archaeological evidence of rape is absent, yet it is presumed to have occurred throughout human history (Isikozlu & Millard, 2010; Henry, 2016).

Rape has its roots from ancient times of war and conflict where women have been raped and it is inevitable. War is an ancient occurrence that has existed for thousands of years, and rape has been widespread in many battles. It is been defined as 'war rape' or 'conflict related sexual violence' rape during wartime is terrifying and the soldiers use it as a strategy to intimidate, dominate, degrade and demoralise not just women but also their entire communities. "The body of the raped woman becomes a ceremonial battlefield, a parade ground for the victors trooping of the colours. The act is played out and upon her is the message passed between men- vivid proof of victory for one and

loss and defeat for the other" (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 38). Rape is mentioned in early accounts of the Bible and in records of the crusades, indicating that it may have been as common in the past as it is today. Historically, rape has often been viewed as a regrettable outcome or adverse result of conflict, primarily impacting women. Rape was not commonly acknowledged as a viable strategy or 'weapon' of war until the conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda in the early 1990s (Isikozlu & Millard, 2010; Gottschall, 2004; Card, 1996; Kivlahan & Ewigman, 2010; Henry, 2016; Weitsman, 2008; Fox, 2011).

Rape has accompanied wars of religion: knights and pilgrims took time off for sexual assault as they marched towards Constantinople in the First Crusade. Rape has accompanied wars of Revolution: George Washington's papers for July 22, 1780, record that one Thomas Brown of the Seventh Pennsylvania Regiment was sentenced to death for rape at Paramus...Rape was the weapon of terror as the German Hun marched through Belgium in World War I. Rape was a weapon of revenge as the Russian army marched to Berlin in World War II. Rape flourishes in warfare irrespective of nationality or geographic location. (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 31-32)

Many societies and communities from ancient till now, which still follow strong patriarchal norms create an imbalance in power dynamics where men hold supreme authority and tend to dominate and suppress women, creates an environment for sexual violence. Mostly the concept of rape is viewed in cultural hierarchy in which women are placed in subordinate position to men. Rape reveals large patters of gender inequality, suppression of women and abuse of power by men. Female are regarded as male property and rape has been considered as an offence of one man against another (Millet, 1970)

Rape was once considered to be as result of uncontrolled sexual desire, but in contemporary times lot of female researchers made substantial contribution in the form and prevalence and it is recognised as pathological effort of men to control and intimidate women (Brownmiller 1975 & Millett, 1970). Susan Brownmiller a notable American feminist argued that,

Rape became not only a male prerogative, but a man's basic weapon of force against women...his forcible entry into her body despite her physical protestations and struggle, became vehicle of his victorious conquest over her being, the ultimate test of his superior strength...Rape is a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear. (Brownmiller, 1975, p. 14 - 15)

2. Rise of Voices

In the ancient times, gender based violence and violence particularly related to rape are conferred in whispers and endured by women in silence. Their anguish and cries often go unheard and male patriarchal society does not acknowledge it. "The legal history of rape is male domination. Definitions of offence, evidence, legal defences and appropriate penalties were passed by males in accordance with traditional perspectives of propriety and the nature and character of female" (Giacopassi & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 368). The chaste and the unchaste were the two categories women were historically categorised. "The rape of the chaste female brought forth the full force of law; the rape of an unchaste woman often not only went unpunished but often resulted in the trial being a public degradation ceremony of the non virtuous female" (Giacopassi & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 368).

Rape was an essential element in an extensive system of social control that perpetuated the racial, gender and class hierarchies (Dorr, 2009). "Prior to the 1970's, the US rape law, based on traditional rape myths and laws passed down from centuries of British history, focused on protecting the accused rapist" (Cuklanz, 1996, p. 14). The United states were perpetuated by racist belief that "Black and other non white men were most likely rapists and that white women were most frequent victims" (Cuklanz, 1996, p. 14). "Black women were vulnerable to sexual assault, especially at the hands of white men. White women were theoretically placed on a pedestal, on which their protection from sexual violence came to protection of white supremacy" (Dorr, 2009). In the United States of America, prior to the feminist movement, the prevailing image of rape victim was delineated to a 'white women'. Black women, sex workers were debarred from being deemed to be lawful victims of rape. Based on the intersection of gender and class there is a difference on how sexual assault cases are viewed, black people and people of colour frequently tolerate prejudices that have an effect on both their encounter as victim and defendant. During their time of slavery black women encounter with rape was disregarded as unimportant and the white offenders were set free (Dorr, 2009; King, 2014; Cohen, 1994). African American women faced a lack of protection from the period to the 1960s making rape a powerful tool for oppressing them. The legal system did not consider the rape of a slave woman as a crime unless it affected her owners property rights. This allowed slave owners to exploit their slaves without fear of repercussions (Dorr, 2009).

But only after the 1970's, with the rise of second wave of feminism there was a public awareness about the prevalence of violence among women. Women who are victims subjugated to violence started to voice out the truth. "In the early 1970's female rape victims began to share their experience with each other and to realize that their ordeals were not reflected in legal and social knowledge about rape. They embarked upon an organised effort to change both statutes and cultural beliefs" (Cuklanz, 1996, p. 15). In the early 1970's, the rape reform movement emerged, because of criticisms of traditional rape law and to growing public concern about increases in reports of rape (Spohn, 1999). "The rape reform legislation of the 1970's probably would not have passed had it not been for the modification in the attitudes towards women's roles and the development of politically active feminist groups" (Giacopassi & Wilkinson, 1985, p. 370). After 1970's rape has tended to dominate the debate from the late 1960s to the mid 1990s (Sielke, 2004).

Before 1970, sexual assault was considered as a private and personal affair and this privacy rendered women's suffering invisible. After the rise of feminist movement the causes and effects of rape was discussed both in academic and popular culture. The argument of what constitutes rape was been disputed in classroom, courts and other through other forms of popular media. Rape and sexual violence came out

of the shadows and it became a societal issue because of the copious amount of political battles that took place over the definition and subtext of rape. As a result of various feminist movements and their efforts the term 'rape' underwent great metamorphosis, rape definition grew to include wide range of behaviours. Incest, marital rape, date rape were pulled from the shadows and became conventional components in both academic and popular discussions. The main focus was to delineate the meaning of 'rape' in a way to shift the perspective to women's perspective thereby clearing women from the blame from the violence they underwent (Cuklan, 1996; Sielke, 2004).

The New York Radical Feminists initiated the public demonstration of rape in the year 1971. The first International Tribunal on crimes against women was set up in Brussels in 1976. In 1975 a rape study centre was established under National Institute of Mental Health where it gave space for women to become active participants than subjects of investigation. After the feminist movement the first rape crisis centre in United States was established in 1971. These centres have organised 'consciousness-raising' groups which offered counselling and guidance for victims of sexual abuse. They aimed to empower women and recognise and discuss the realities of being subjugated in the male dominated society. Initially the rape crises organisations had very limited budget they were dependent on donors and grants that were secured by their founders. These organisations aimed at raising awareness, conducted many workshops, offered guidance, counselling and self defence classes and played a significant role in establishing activist groups that focuses on legal aspects and medical approaches to address rape.

3. Writing by Women

After the rise of feminist movement by 1977, nearly seventy four law review articles and various have been published on the subject of rape. Within a span of five years in the United States more than four dozen books have been published in the fields of law, sociology and psychology. "These books began with the discussion of the myths or misconceptions about rape which the authors felt needed to be dispelled and replaced in the minds of readers. In addition each work supplied alternative facts to replace the original myths" (Cuklanz, 1996, p. 16).

"Classic texts of debate such as Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), Susan Griffin's essay *Rape, the All American Crime* (1971) and Brownmillers text *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) see rape not as sexually motivated act, but as a form of oppression, social control and political power; in fact as the most significant expression of male dominance and a primary mechanism of male supremacy" (Sielke, 2004, p. 368). Works like *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* by Susan Brownmiller (1975), is considered to be a foundational text in aspects regarding rape. Brownmiller explores the historical aspects and discusses about patriarch and power dynamics that usually revolve around rape. In her work she disregards the myth surrounding rape and she addresses the victim blaming attitudes that perpetuate the society (Baxi, 2014 & Cuklan, 1996). *Trauma and Recovery* by Judith Herman (1992) explores the social and psychological issues of trauma particularly caused by rape and sexual violence. She bring to light that victims of rape experience the same psychological disorder and trauma faced by combat veterans during and aftermath of war.

"Self representation is important to the survival in the aftermath of sexual assault" (Gilmore, 2019, p. 163). Because of their gender throughout history women have been ruled out from the annals of autobiographical texts. "Women writers relationship to pen as an instrument of power and their access to the public space have been severely obstructed in a male dominated society" (Smith, 1987, p.2). Since women writers do not conform to the normative prescription of theme and structure, the mass of women's life and their autobiographies have been ignored (Smith, 1987, p.8-9). During the 1970's and 1980's many feminist activists and critics also encouraged women to speak out and give words to their experience and feeling repressed in the patriarchally organised home (Smith, 2010, p.84). Autobiographies help to break the silence of marginalised voices. Women writers can be born again in the act of autobiographical writing, experimenting with reconstructing the various discourses of representations, of ideology in which their subjectivity has been formed (Gilmore, 1994, p.85)

#Me Too movement is an important hallmark in American Feminism. The #Me Too movement has made public sympathise with survivors, shifted the blame from abused to abusers (Gilmore, 2019 & Tambe, 2018). "The #Me Too represents emergence of speech in a place where patriarchy has clapped its hand over the marginalized subjects to keep them from speaking or screaming" (Gilmore, 2019, p. 162-163). After the rise in #Me too movement there is been a bloom in memoirs. Women started to write about their abuses in the form of memoirs, blog posts etc. Through writings they expose the abuser and through writing they get justice and validated from their readers (Gilmore, 2019) "#Me Too taps into life writing by queer people of colour, Indigenous women and those struggling against the isolation of trauma and shame to find their into self representation. #Me Too began as an autobiographical eruption of shared pain and witness and became an autobiographical signature with agency. It exposed histories o oppression, shifted shame from the abused to abusers and demanded accountability. It also cleared new forms of listening and understanding to emerge" (Gilmore, 2019, p. 165)

Works like *I Never Told Anyone: Writings by Women Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* (1983) edited by Ellen Bass and Louise Thornton was first non fictional work to be published. It encompasses thirty three testimonials from women who were sexually abused when they were kids. *Lucky* by Alice Sebold (1999) and *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson (1999), *The Other Side* (2014) by Lacy Johnson, *Washed Away: From Darkness to Light* (2016), *Know my Name* (2019) by Chanel Miller are notable memoirs by women who suffered from sexual violence. In all these memoirs women candidly talk about their horrific encounter with rape, delving more into the agonizing physical and emotional anguish. In these memoirs women bring to light post rape consequences especially the intense psychological impact it had on them. Women in detail, discuss the long lasting effects of rape that include emotional and psychological wounds that last long after

the event. Women who have endured the assault often suffer from post traumatic stress disorder with consistent flashbacks, nightmares and high level of anxiety (Bagley & Ramsay, 1986; Briere & Runtz, 1988; Burnam et al., 1988; Sedney & Brooks, 1984). These symptoms have the capacity to prolong for a long period of time affecting one's normal life and day to day activities. Women who have been sexually abused suffer from the onset of depression, melancholy, and they lose the capacity to enjoy and experience pleasure in things they appreciated previously. They also suffer from low self esteem and diminished self (Briere & Runtz, 1989; Courtois, 1989; Finkelhor, Hotaling, Lewis & Smith, 1990).

4. Rape Trauma Syndrome

In the aftermath of rape, there is a profound psychological injury which gives rise to the condition known as 'Rape Trauma'. Rape trauma is a multifaceted and a severe psychological and emotional wound that takes place after the assault. The Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) affects the cognitive, physical, emotional and interpersonal functioning. Judith Herman in her work gives an insight in this syndrome which was discovered at the onset and rise of feminist movements.

In 1972, Ann Burgess, a psychiatric nurse and Lynda Holmstrom, a sociologist embarked on the psychological effects of rape...They interviewed and counselled any rape victim who came into the emergency room of the Boston City Hospital. In a year they saw 92 women and 37 children. They observed a pattern of psychological reaction which they called 'rape trauma syndrome'. (Herman, 1992, p.31)

Lynda Holmstrom and Ann Burgess studied the effects of sexual abuse from victim's point of view. Sexual Abuse is a enforced violent sexual penetration against the victims will. The trauma which progress from this assault includes two phases acute phase and long term process. The acute phase disorganizes the victim's life style which includes many physical symptoms such as muscular tension, sleep pattern disturbance and a variety of emotion reactions. The long term process involves repetitive nightmares and phobias, changing residence and seeking help from family and community (Holmstrom & Burgess, 1975). Holmstrom and Burgess in 1974, found a compilation of reactions which they categorized as Rape Trauma Syndrome. It is a subcategory of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The victims immediate reaction to assault include shock, fear, anxiety, betrayal, disbelief and in the aftermath they grapple with fear, humiliation, anger, revenge, self blame (Raitt & Zeedyk, 1997). Rape Trauma Syndrome is categorized as the acute and long term stress reaction experienced by the victim. They delineate a wide range of emotional and physical reaction. Following the attack rape victims may show feelings of anxiety, fear, shock and in the aftermath they begin to feel embarrassed, angry, vengeful. The physical trauma includes skeletal muscle tension, gastrointestinal irritability and genitourinary disturbance and in the long term they deal with anger and hatred towards rapist, they change their residence and deal with frequent nightmares and phobias which include fear of sexual relations, fear of people indoor and outdoor and fear of being alone or in the crowd (Lauderdale, 1984).

5. About the Authors & Texts

Roxanne Gay in her memoir *Hunger: A Memoir of my Body* talks about her battle with trauma, body image and her weight crises. She talks in depth about the trauma she experienced after being gang raped at the age of twelve by her boyfriend Christopher and his friends in a cabin. She writes in details about how this tragedy affected her life, how it destroyed the relationship she had with her body and how it diminished herself. In her memoir she talks about the unhealthy obsession she had with her food, her constant weight gain and her battles with depression, anxiety and addiction.

Neesha Arter in her memoir *Controlled: The Worst Night of my Life and its Aftermath* talks about how she was sexually abused at the age of fourteen by her friends Rob and Will. In her memoir she talks about how she suffered from existential crises and how she resorted to eating disorders in order to gain control and agency. She discusses in detail about her constant battle with anorexia nervosa, of how she wanted to punish her body for betraying her.

These two women grapple with Rape Trauma Syndrome (RTS) which impacts their physical psychological and emotional well being. They suffer from eating disorders, anxiety, constant nightmares and flashbacks of the events. They suffer from addictions and they dissociate from the body. They want to escape from the body that has betrayed them. How they treat their physical body is core concept in these memoirs. Gay consumes lot of food intentionally to appear big and unattractive whereas Arter does not consume food in order to punish her body and to become inconspicuous. Using these memoirs as the key texts the research analyses the drastic and profound impact of 'rape trauma'. The research is based on Sartre insights and applying the structured outline framework given by Constance Lui to gain a in-depth understanding about the implication of sexual assault.

Jean Paul Sartre is a well known intellect and most famous existential philosopher of the twentieth century. His famous works include *Being and Nothingness* (1943), *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946), *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), and in all these works he explores the philosophical concepts of existentialism, freedom, embodied consciousness and many more. He is a prolific novelist and a playwright who wrote *Nausea* (1938), *No Exist* (1945), and *The Flies* (1943). His insight on embodiment, freedom, the body for itself, bad faith and authenticity are key concepts explored in this research.

6. Sartre's View on Rape Trauma

To elucidate Sartre perspective on Rape Trauma, two memoirs Roxanne Gay's *Hunger: A Memoir of my Body* (2017) and *Controlled: The Worst Night of my Life and its Aftermath* (2015) by Neesha Arter are considered for the study. Using these memoirs as the key texts the research analyses the drastic and profound impact of 'rape trauma'. The research is based on Sartre's insights and applying the structured

outline framework given by Constance Mui to gain an in-depth understanding about the implication of rape trauma. Though Sartre has not specifically worked on trauma, by rereading his works, feminist writers can get a lot of insights on sexual trauma through his entwined theories on freedom, emotions and embodiment. The research analyses Sartre's views in a broader framework with an understanding on the phenomenology of rape trauma.

Body provides an important framework to explore the aspects of trauma associating with sexual violence. "People learn about the world and about themselves their bodies; thus body is the basis or subjectivity and self expression" (Chrisler & Robledo, 2018, p. 3). In a more fundamental sense there is no self without the body. The physical body is a vessel for the self. Body plays an important role in constructing the self and identity as people navigate through the world with their bodies. On cases on rape and sexual violence not only the body is injured but their self and identity is also destroyed. By analysing the two memoirs, Gay and Arter recollected their own experience of rape trauma, they discover that they were not the same person prior to the assault, they describe their loss of self in many psychological and physical responses which includes changes in the perception of the body, suppressing their desire, clouded with nightmares, depression, fear, anxiety and numbness. "My life is split into two... There is before and after... Before I was raped. After I was raped" (Gay, 2017, p.12).

When applying constructivist theory to the study of trauma, "Individuals actively construct their own representations of the world based on their unique experiences" (Mui, 2005, p. 153). Thus trauma threatens to harm the physical and emotional existence and disrupts the victims perspective about their self and the world. "For Sartre the self is not an unchanging, underlying essence that guarantees personal identity over time; rather it is an ongoing project that is founded in our being-in-the-world as embodied freedom, on our concrete relations with others and our emotions" (Mui, 2005, p. 153-154).

Rape and sexual violence is a traumatic event, because they have three elements that defines traumatic event such as suddenness, lack of controllability and extremely negative valence which makes the individual to feel utterly vulnerable in the face of force that is identified to be life threatening (Carlson & Dalenberg, 2000). Rape trauma is an event that basically destroys the basic structures of self. While analysing the two gripping narratives not only the body is violated but their self is shattered completely, Gay and Arter recollects that their child like self is destroyed irrevocably, they recollect that they weren't the same person anymore. In numerous study of rape victims researchers have found that the self of the survivors have been 'shattered', 'fragmented', 'integrated', 'destroyed' (Herman, 1992 & Briere et.al, 1994). Thus rape violates the self of the individual.

To answer the question how self is irrevocably changed in aftermath of traumatic event, one should look into the very structure that constitutes the self. To analyse self, the 'fundamental project' developed by Sartre would be a useful tool.

For Sartre, self is constructed through freely chosen actions. Since our actions are embedded in an intricate web of projects, it cannot be understood in isolation. This brings us consider Sartre view on 'fundamental project'. According to Sartre, fundamental project is a key factor in existential philosophy. Fundamental project refers to an individual's life's purpose, their direction that leads their choices and actions. It is the core of one's existence and it is tied to their freedom and responsibility. It is a self determined path an individual chooses in a world and it reflects their commitment towards their ambitions and goals and it shapes their identity and actions as they navigate their existence in the world

The self is a fundamental project. "For Sartre, the self is not a series of fundamental behaviours, but a totality. The fundamental project manifests itself in every act, big or small. But the fundamental project is not equated with some event, decision or fantasy in the past. Rather it is recreated at each moment through the choices we make and actions we perform" (Palmer, 2006, p. 107). "By 'fundamental project' one must understand the unity of one's life as projecting oneself towards a future. Every little project is an expression of this fundamental project. Every desire, every act and each single tendency of the subject reveals the whole person" (Daigle, 2010, p. 46). "The meaning of the world are a consequence of our fundamental project" (Levy, 2007, p. 105).

"Nothing can happen that would motivate us to change our fundamental project. Nothing can ever provide us with a reason to reject it; on the contrary, every experience, every perception, confirms its validity" (Levy, 2007, p. 107). "Since the fundamental project constitutes a closed and total system, since the entire world is made available for only through its lens, rationally we are unable to ever reject it. Nothing could ever motivate such a rejection...If then the project collapses ... it cannot be a result of a rational or a conscious decision...It can be the result of a sudden, inexplicable catastrophe that disrupts our world without our cooperation or consent" (Levy, 2007, p. 108)

As observed in the two gripping memoirs what makes trauma a self annihilating experience is that it shatters a person's fundamental project and collapses the platform that supports the victims basic orientation to the world. "In sketching a phenomenological description of rape trauma we can now say that traumatic event constitutes, first and foremost, a radical, undesired and abrupt breakdown, in the face of a violent and often life threatening force, of one's fundamental project. In this serious breakdown, one's coping mechanism are damaged or disrupted to such an extent as to throw one into extreme disorientation"(Mui, 2005, p.156). Gay and Arter are thrown into existential crises, along with their self their world is also undone, and they feel alienated in the world devoid of meaning. Radical changes to one's fundamental project associated with catastrophe such as rape trauma would involve radical alterations of the self and the world. Intentional changes to our "fundamental project requires a radical conversion from within, the undesired change brought on by trauma involves a radical alteration from without" (Mui, 2005, p. 156). Sartre questions if he/she could change but 'at what price?' "The price would amount to choosing a new self, it would amount to choosing a new fundamental project, because the choice would manifest itself not only in that moment, but in hundred of other ways" (Palmer, 2006, p. 106). Gay and Arter suffer greater existential cost of radically altering their

fundamental project and moreover it is a price they did not choose to pay.

Constance L. Mui in his article *A Feminist Sartrean Approach to Understanding Rape Trauma* argues that

A person's fundamental project is disrupted in at least two respects. First, one sexual project that is one's chosen sexual being in the world is radically altered and in this way all of the other embedded projects such as one's relation to others, one's capacity for pleasure etc. are similarly affected. Second one's sense of safety and trust are seriously undermined, as is made evident by such commonly reported post traumatic stress disorder symptoms such as hyper vigilance and heightened startle response. (Mui, 2005, p. 157)

Even after the assault Gay and Arter suppress their sexual desires and since they are abused by their loved ones they lose their trust in everyone which includes their friends and family. Traumatized people lose their trust in themselves, in other people, and in God. Their self-esteem is assaulted by experiences of humiliation, guilt, and helplessness. Their capacity for intimacy is compromised by intense and contradictory feelings of need and fear. Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. "They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis" (Herman, 1992, p. 59).

Traumatic events shatter the sense of connection between individual and community, creating a crisis of faith. The impact of sexual abuse extends into the survivor's interpersonal relationships and daily functioning. The belief in a meaningful world formed in relation to others begins in earliest life. Basic trust, acquired in the primary intimate relationship, is the foundation of faith (Herman, 1992, p. 62).

The damage to the survivor's faith and sense of community is particularly severe when the traumatic events themselves involve the betrayal of important relationships. A sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to the most abstract affiliations of community and religion. When trust is lost, traumatized people feel that they belong more to the dead than to the living. (Herman, 1992, p. 59, 60)

"The feeling of alienation, of being in a world devoid of meaning and vitality appears to be a common experience among rape survivors" (Mui, 2005, p.156). "I quickly absorb myself in loneliness" (Arter, 2015, p. 85). "Avoiding volleyball and avoiding friends, I continue to immerse myself in solitude. Selfish and Isolated" (Arter, 2015, p. 165)

Since sexuality and safety are important aspects of embodiment Mui demonstrates that in case of rape trauma, "what is radically being altered to one's own body as for itself, which in turn affects one's being for others and others being for me" (Mui, 2005, p.157).

According to Sartre's insights on embodiment, human consciousness is entwined with embodied experience. Though there are natural limits to what we can and cannot do, the fact that we have a body is a testimony of our contingency in the world. Sartre reasons that our commitment to the world is one in which the body is relentlessly in play and always inherent in action. "Rape destroys the authentic relationship a woman is supposed to have with her body. In rape, the woman's body is severed and reified into an object-for-the-other (Mui, 2005, p.157). For victims of sexual violence the body becomes an object as it is reduced to a flesh and it becomes an object for other.

Women are treated as objects in the present society. Due to the rise in media, women are constantly portrayed and treated as sex objects. What distinguishes the objectification associated with rape trauma from other forms of objectification is that

Rape trauma compromises the victims status as conscious subject, not simply by turning her into an object at the rapist disposal but also by incapacitating her from performing many of the activities that dignify her as an autonomous subject. These activities include asserting one's will, determining one's goals, choosing one's meaning and forming one's life plan (Mui, 2005, p.158)

Gay and Arter suffer immeasurably from rape, due to the traumatic incident their whole life undergoes a transformation, and they are not the same person as they were before the traumatic incident. The trauma they suffer reduces their will to do anything thing, they constantly battle with existential crises. The trauma destroys the person they were before.

Borrowing the term used by Robert Lifton, 'the paralysis of the mind', it is a persistent condition that impairs the victim's will to claim herself as an independent subject.

Mui argues that "we experience the other as freedom, but a freedom that has the power to destroy our own freedom. Rape invokes a fear of the other's freedom, of what other can wilfully perpetrate upon us" (Mui, 2005, p.158)

The body becomes the object of fear.

Unlike an ordinary glance that momentarily turns our body into object rape trauma disrupts sometimes permanently our most primordial relationship with our own body as for- itself. The victims violated body can no longer be so inconspicuously 'passed over' and 'forgotten' as it might have been before the attack. Indeed a rape survivor becomes frightfully aware of her body, not merely as a target of objectification but as a target of violence. (Mui, 2005, p.158)

The problem of self objectification offers a third way of distinguishing rape trauma from most other forms of objectification. The survivors heightened awareness of her body's vulnerability often turns her body into a persistent object for her, clouding her consciousness and colouring her sense of reality. (Mui, 2005, p.158)

“To undo their objectification as body-for-the other, rape survivors often resort to various forms of self objectification, including constant body washing and eating disorders, as a way of conquering or rejecting a body that has betrayed them” (Mui, 2005, p.158-159). In most severe cases the victims engage in alternate behaviour such as self cutting or body mutilation to take control and agency over their bodies. One forms of self objectification is dissociation, it is a mechanism in which the survivors mentally detach from their bodies.

In many cases the victims desexualise themselves, Gay eats more food to make sure that she is not sexually appealing. She does not want to appear thin and attract man’s gaze, because to attract the gaze is to invite more pain, so she eats more so that she appears strong and feel safe. “To desexualise oneself represent in essence the undoing of the self, since a person’s sexual being-in-the world, as her way of being, constitutes the fundamental project that shapes her thoughts and actions” (Mui, 2005, p.159).

The victims try to accept and reject their bodies, irrespective of the choice the self objectification ultimately leads them to bad faith. According to Sartre, “given that human being is fundamentally anguished is a state that any individual would rather escape, it is natural that any individual will attempt to flee anguish. This is what bad faith is to Sartre, the attempt by consciousness to lie to itself” (Daigle, 2010, p.61). Since one cannot distinguish between body and mind the attempt at self objectification ultimately fails. According to Sartre, one cannot separate the body from the self, the consciousness and body are immersed together. Violence, torture and rape are extremely traumatic because they severe this unity. Thus in cases of rape trauma one does not feel comfortable in his/her own body. They suffer from alienation and disorientation, the inability to feel comfortable in their own body that is feeling of being alienated from the body and the incapability to feel comfortable at home in the world that is the feeling of being disoriented in the world.

Thus using the framework provided by Constance Mui in comprehending Sartre view on rape trauma, through the protagonists Roxanne Gay and Neesha Arter how rape trauma disrupts and alters one’s fundamental project and how it disrupts the sexual- being-in- the- world and their sense of safety. As sexuality and safety are core concepts in embodiment, in cases of rape trauma destroys the relationship between body as subject and body as for-itself. Thus to defend the argument the crises the protagonist felt during the assault as how their body was treated as mere flesh and how their subjectivity was violated does not end there even in their later stages of life the protagonist feel that their will and their desire to do anything gets robbed and thus keeping them from re-establishing themselves as an active and independent subject. Thus the protagonists furthermore become aware that their body is a vulnerable target that betrayed them and they develop a condition affects the basic ‘at-easiness’ that one is supposed to have with their body. To disengage and undo their objectification as body- for- other, the protagonists resort to various forms of self objectification where they indulge in eating disorders and other harmful behaviours by treating their own body as objects they ultimately suffer from bad faith. Thus Sartre view on embodied consciousness in which body, self and world form an undeniable unity by our chosen fundamental project, acknowledges that in cases of rape trauma one fundamental project is destroyed and the unity of body, self and the world is severed.

In understanding Sartre’s take on emotions, he believed that an emotion comes from one’s fundamental freedom and the choice one makes in his/her life. Emotions are not pre-existing nor they are predefined rather they are the product of the mindful resolutions of how one chose to perceive and act to situations. Emotions are not passive rather they are active response to the world mirroring individual’s freedom and responsibility. In providing a rationale for rape trauma the emotional response of victims, the emotions are not fixed nor they are predefined, rather they are shaped by the victims of how they perceive the traumatic event and how they interpret the event. The protagonists become survivors than victims. “Inspite of being made an object for the other, the women nevertheless retains her status as subject, as doer, as fighter and survivor who prevails through determination and perseverance... To be feeling any emotion at all, as painful as it is, is an indication that the survivor is, in her own way on the path to healing” (Mui, 2005, p.162).

“Feeling can be understood as primordial mode of communication through gestures, moods and body language... Showing one’s feeling, even it is numbness is all that one feels, is a critical step in the struggle to reconnect with humanity through sympathetic responses of others” (Mui, 2005, p.63).

The self is part constructed upon our trust and our dependency on others. “Survivors are dependent on caring others, who respond sympathetically, sensitively and generously to their needs to become whole again. Because trauma disrupts the victim’s sense of connection to others, a successful healing process must involve ways to reconnect with others” (Mui, 2005, p.163). As Herman in her works observes on how healing is achieved by establishing a basic sense of trust which is achieved through asserting safety and the promise of protection from others. “The survivor’s sense of personal worth can be restored by caring individuals who respect her as an autonomous subject by listening to her” (Mui, 2005, p. 163). “Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of social order and for the healing of individual victims” (Herman, 1992, p.1). Thus through writing Arter and Gay constructed their self which was destroyed by trauma and through writing they were able to connect with audience and rebuilt their original self. Writing serves as a cathartic process in which individuals release their emotions and seek affirmation and comfort from their readers. Their autobiographies have served as their salvation. By writing, individuals express themselves and seek justice and validation in a society that has not provided them with justice. “I recognised my mistakes. I realized I couldn’t live like this anymore... There was something I need to do. I reached over to my dresser and picked up a ball point pen...Grabbing the yellow notepad, I began to write”. (Arter, 2015, p. 192). “You controlled my life, every second of everyday...I am writing... You won't control me anymore” (Arter, 2015, p. 194). “The book has been my redemption” (Arter, 2015, p. 197).

Writing this book is the most difficult thing I have ever done. To lay myself so vulnerable has not been an easy thing. To face myself and what living in my body has been like has not been an easy thing, but I wrote this book because it felt necessary. In

writing this memoir of my body, in telling you these truths about my body, I am sharing my truth and mine alone...here I am showing you the ferocity of my hunger. Here I am finally freeing myself to be vulnerable and terribly human. Here I am revelling in that freedom. (Gay, 2017, p. 278)

7. Conclusion

The research delves into the origins of rape, specifically focusing on instances where women were raped on battlefields. Exploring how men make use of rape as a weapon of warfare and a male entitlement to oppress and dominate women. Many women do not speak out about their suffering due to the stigma, shame, and secrecy that exist in society. Following the feminist movements, rape laws were revised, leading to an increase in the number of women reporting instances of abuse. The #Me Too campaign led to an increase in personal testimonials, blogs, memoirs, and life writing where women share their experiences of abuse. By reading their memoirs, one may comprehend the profound impact of rape on their lives, resulting in conditions such as PTSD, cognitive disorders, substance abuse, and engaging in self-destructive behaviours including eating disorders and self-harm. Two memoirs were chosen for the study Roxanne Gay's memoir *Hunger: A Memoir of my Body* (2017) and Neesha Arter *Controlled: The Worst Night of my Life and its Aftermath* (2015). Though Sartre has not specifically worked on trauma, using his theories on freedom, embodiment and emotion with a broader ontological framework and an understanding of the phenomenology of rape trauma, the research brings to light that Gay's & Arter's fundamental project is annihilated. This throws them in an existential crisis where they are alienated from the world. Rape trauma destroys their relation they had to their body. "My body was nothing. My body was a thing to be used. My body was repulsive and deserved to be treated as such" (Gay, 2017, p. 219). "I had no love in my body at all. I didn't love myself anymore"(Arter, 2015, p. 65). "My fragile broken body was like a ragdoll. It was a ragdoll that everyone was playing with. It was the ragdoll that the two boys had played within the exercise room. It was a ragdoll that my parents would try to fix. It was a rag doll that was permanently torn" (Arter, 2015, p. 65). In spite of being made as an object for the other, Roxanne Gay and Neesha Arter they retained their subject as survivors and they overcome through determination and perseverance. They never forgive their abusers rather they seek justice through writing. They write to heal and reconnect with their innerself. Their memoirs have been their redemption.

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