



Mapping Trauma and Affect: Reading Child Body as Commodity in Patricia McCormick's *Sold*

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Abstract

This paper aims at situating sexual abuse, violence, and the body as a commodity in the context of affect and trauma. The study analyses Patricia McCormick's *Sold*, a narrative of a child who is sold into sexual slavery. The child body loses its livelihood, protective cultural artifacts, and social relationships when exposed to the commercial sex trade. The body's exposure to such horrific and awful experiences, which eventually induces inhibition, and diminution of the self, amplifies suffering and pain. This paper analyses McCormick's portrayal of a child sex worker's traumatized bodily experiences through Michel Foucault's concept that the body is disciplined to perform tasks efficiently, produce value for capital, and symbolize and perform political roles based on cultural expectations and societal norms. The scholarship of trauma advocates for a social constructivist process of thought and understands the significance of the body in structuring traumatized experiences in language. The sex worker's body is treated and controlled like an object and a commodity that is bargained, traded, or appropriated in divisible and fractional components. The paper consults Affect theory, such as Gilles Deleuze and Brian Massumi's concepts and its contemporary development, which focuses on cultural forms as sites for articulating embodied experiences.

Keywords: Commodity, Sexual violence, Trauma, Affect, Child body.

Introduction

Patricia McCormick's narrative *Sold* (2006) depicts the subject of commodification and exploitation of the human body by the people in power. Due to poverty and sexual abuse at the brothel, poor young girls and women lose their voices and become quiet. Capitalism perceives them as no more than a commodity to be sold and exploited. Marginalization is one of the

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primary reasons why people are often abused and exploited economically, socio-culturally, verbally, emotionally, and even physically. McCormick's novel deals with child sex trafficking, sexual abuse and violence, and the emotional complexities of body (affect) and trauma. The protagonist, 13-year-old Lakshmi, is trafficked to India in Kolkata's red-light area from a destitute family in a tiny Nepalese town. She agrees to work as a domestic helper to support her family financially since she is poor and unaware of the harsh reality of the world. Lakshmi is uninformed that her stepfather sells her to a lady and illegally takes her to India through an intermediary. Lakshmi finds herself in a brothel named Happiness House after arriving in India, bewildered that she has become a victim of sex trafficking. She is treated like an indentured sexual slave by the brothel owner, who uses her body as a commodity to earn profits. Understanding sex trafficking in its entirety necessitates locating the problem within society's current political, economic, and societal structures. Poverty, violence, natural disasters, and other factors intersect with entrenched patriarchy, leaving women and children vulnerable. These aspects are responsible for gradually marginalizing vulnerable communities and confining individuals and families in a cycle of poverty, forced migration, and trafficking (Ray, 2015, p. 322).

A female child's body is tragically placed at the nexus of patriarchal views, socio-political upheavals, and perverted sexual consumption when imbued with eroticized ideals of purity, innocence, fragility, delicacy, and vulnerability. Multiple aspects of exploitation and oppression have influenced marginalized people in various ways (Nabutanyi, 2014, pp. 81-82). These sections of society are more vulnerable and subjected to trauma because they are children, female, from low-income households, and both socially and economically impoverished. Lakshmi's body is continuously bargained over and finally becomes the component that decides her price in the brothel. The humiliation she endures and the repulsive nature of her work of getting sexually harassed repeatedly illustrate the trauma of a trafficked child. When trauma is wrought on the body of the child victim, it leaves an indelible mark on the child's psyche because childhood is considered an influential phase. In a bid to focus only on the trauma experiences of the child, the role of cultural belonging is often neglected, which lends an incomplete picture of the child's position. The trauma of sexual abuse as a trope standardizes and naturalizes idiosyncratic and unique emotions through the bodily conduct of the victim (Flynn, 2002, p. 5; Smith, 2005, p. 118). Such emotions and feelings about the body expand the efficacy of trauma as a category by virtue of its overextension and point to the trivialization that results from societal and cultural codes.

The experiences of trauma are generally associated with sensations and emotions such as anxiety, fear, shame, guilt, and wrath. The experiences of sexual abuse usually trigger emotions related to the victim's own body. Children and women lack self-awareness, adaption, and flexibility when encountering atrocities such as sexual harassment and violence. As an aftermath of trauma, these victims struggle with the articulation of their suffering and are unable to comprehend their feelings and emotions; as they are sold into sexual slavery, their body is commodified and controlled through the power that eventually steers them to traumatization. McCormick uses Lakshmi's voice in the first person to analyze many facets of the trauma, including her unease, agitation, disillusionment, and fragmentation. This paper aims to contextualize child sex trafficking and sexual violence through situating the relationship between the human body, its assessment in the global market, and the trauma associated with it. Furthermore, the research combines Foucault's views of the body in power and how controlling the body (in physical and sexual terms) forces the victims to exist in societal and cultural codes that precede trauma. The study also identifies the emotions connected with the body that further trigger traumatic experiences.

Body as Commodity

All capitalized commercial social ties in which human bodies serve as the symbol of economic transactions often disguise themselves as other emotions like love, generosity, satisfaction, or compassion included in the broad notion of commodification (Scheper-Hughes, 2002, p. 3). The body is often perceived and handled in the global economy as an object, albeit a hypersexualized one, and as a commodity that may be traded and negotiated in divisible and alienable components (Scheper-Hughe, 2002, p. 1; Berlinger, 1999; Sharp, 2002). The commodification of the body involves cultural, social, economic, and political factors that shape how bodies are perceived. Elements like gender, class, and age also influence this process. Within specialized areas of knowledge and power, different constructions of the body emerge, showing how they can be fragmented and eventually commodified. The idea of commodification comes from Marxist theory, where products, services, and even people are turned into objects for profit. In simpler terms, commodification means treating people and their services as items that can be bought, sold, or used like animals or inanimate objects. For Douglas Rushkoff (2005), Commodification in the capital refers to the process by which anything with no economic worth is granted a value and hence the practice of replacing other social values.

Drawing on gender discourse, in the colonized country, women confront and endure more oppression because they are double marginalized. The perspective that women are a source of sexual pleasure is the hallmark of masculinist sexual culture, where the bodies of the girl-child and women are exploited and used as utility. This notion ignores the existence of their being and treats their bodies as products (Praphan, 2022, p. 99). Moreover, women have been time immemorially viewed as men's assets that might be sold or exchanged for something. Due to low socioeconomic status, some parents even resort to selling their daughters. Traditionally, fathers have traded their children's bodies for money and make them into sex objects for men (2022, p. 100). From a Marxist perspective, Rosemary Hennessy (2000) contends that the bodies of young girls and women are used for both sexual pleasure and the production of capital. Further, their labor is undervalued, despite the fact that it provides men with numerous advantages and pleasures. Hennessy also explains that patriarchy is a part of the social and cultural organization that underlies most socioeconomic systems, which plays a significant role in generating capital and exploiting humankind (2000, p. 23). In other words, women are victims of domestic abuse as well as violence wreaked by larger societal systems. In McCormick's narrative, the brothel owner throws Pushpa as she is not functional and beneficial for the brothel profit and snatches her little daughter for sexual slavery in lieu of her mother. In the case of Lakshmi, her father sells her for Rs. 800, and later, the middleman sells her for Rs. 10000 to the brothel owner. "You belong to me," she says. "And I paid a pretty sum for you, too." She opens to a page in her book and points to the notation for 10,000 rupees (McCormick, 2006, p. 112). Mumtaz, the brothel owner, is indulged for the profit that she refuses to bribe the police when they take Sahanna away. "Now that Sahanna is gone, Mumtaz says we must service her customer as well as our own" (2006, p. 218). The narrative surfaces the exploitation for financial gain with Lakshmi and the other girls having to amuse and earn profit from Sahanna's customers. Sahanna's worth is also commodified, treating her as an inanimate product devoid of morality.

One of the main components of a materialist society is alienation, which is the state of being cut off from the outside world and causing misery and suffering in life. Karl Marx used the term reification in *Capital Volume III* (1999), which refers to the treatment of individuals as commodities devoid of personality or character. McCormick depicts each character (victim) who belongs to the working class with a touch of alienation. The street boy loses contact with

Lakshmi. Monica is rejected by the brothel and her own family. Lakshmi is forcibly separated from her loved ones and family. All of the victims, including Lakshmi, are estranged from the money they make from sexual slavery and fall short of paying Mumtaz to free them. *The German Ideology* (1845) defines objectification as the process of equating humans and animals with lifeless objects or things devoid of intrinsic worth. When an individual is objectified, they are compared to a lifeless object, owned, purchased, or sold, and their feelings and emotions are crushed or shattered. The narrative depicts the street boy as an object, someone who must be punished severely and fired. Lakshmi is subjected to sex slavery, experiencing intoxication, starvation, and continuous rape for three days and nights. When Anita tries to leave the brothel, her face reveals a half frown, suggesting that she is a living dead devoid of feelings. Also, when Monica develops a sickness, she is abandoned. “Don’t bother looking for your friend,” she says. “She’s out on the street, Mumtaz has no use for her anymore, she has the virus, but for the virus, there is no remedy” (McCormick, 2006, p. 210). Such depictions convey the reification of humans and how they are seen as nothing more than commodities to be exploited for financial gain and then discarded when no longer needed. McCormick’s work illustrates the horror of human suffering produced in a capitalist system where one person’s repression, dominance, and exploitation by another is greatly aided by commodification, objectification, and reification. The fundamental rationale- the idea of commercialization and objectification- that led to victims’ sales into sex slavery, their severe abuse, dismissal from their jobs, and their alienation from society is based on money.

People usually forget their family and relationships when poverty surpasses them. The capitalist market substitutes societal values with the trading of human values as commodities. They abandon their sentiments and emotions, and their relationships with the family are disregarded (Skolimowski, 1997, p. 79). Lakshmi’s family epitomizes the notion of commodification that is related to the working class of society. They lack the capacity to fulfil their fundamental needs. The concept of the commodity is based on reducing human value to the matter. Lakshmi is compared to the cucumber she planted in her garden, signifying her worth. Human feelings, perceptions, and morals are engraved with commercialization in a capitalist society that they are only commodities to be bought and sold. Commodification is the process of converting anything valuable into monetary worth through the sale or purchase of things or people. Human suffering gets overlooked, and life is valued at an increased rate in a capitalist society. People in positions of authority find a great deal of entertainment in human activity or exploiting them. Lakshmi’s low socioeconomic status and her stepfather’s money-grubbing tendencies force her into prostitution, which severely damages her both physically and emotionally. She finds herself entangled in the web of capitalism and endures dehumanizing pain as a result of her sexual enslavement.

The two sources of dominance that colonized women face are notional abuse from colonial society and domestic violence. Robert Young postulates that “Women, therefore, had to fight the double colonization of patriarchal domination in its local as well as its imperial forms” (2001, p. 379). Their bodies were utilized for a variety of reasons, including the production of things and for providing sexual pleasure. The female body becomes valued because it creates revenue for her family. It is considered normal for parents to treat their daughters nicely and properly; but they are abused, exploited, and treated like private property. In order to maximize profit for the owner of the brothel and the customers it serves, capitalism and patriarchy, both turn Lakshmi into a victim of sexual exploitation. According to Rosemary Hennessy (2000), capitalism is founded on the ideas of class, gender, and race, and through these notions, the capitalists possess the benefits of profits through others’ bodies. Female children and women suffer from severe transformations of their bodies and identities as a result of sexual abuse and assault, as well as turning their virginity into a commodity for profit, which

leads to trauma. As a girl child, Lakshmi becomes a source of income and enjoyment for the owner of the brothel as well as the clients she is forced to serve. This turns her silent and mute, and she stops talking to anyone. Her trauma results from both familial patriarchy (when her father decides to sell her) and colonial patriarchy (when the brothel owner and her customers abuse her), which silence her voice. According to David Kinchin, the psychological condition of being passive, rejecting surrender to sexual slavery originates from a circumstance where an individual faces an incident that is different from a normal human life experience (2005, p. 2). Such incidents contain a significant risk to that individual or the surroundings. When her father sells her, she is unable to speak up, and when men rape her, she is forced to acquiesce. Lakshmi's passivity derives from her being sold and the brutality she witnesses, both of which remain in her memory. The atrocity against her body had a profound effect on her.

Violence and Body in Power

In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, Michel Foucault (1977) describes the body, for the first time, as becoming the target of authoritarian and demanding investments. The body was under the control of highly rigid powers in every community, which put limitations, penalties, or responsibilities on it (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). It was decided to implement a policy of coercing the body and purposefully manipulating its parts, gestures, and behavior. The world of machines and power now investigates, disassembles, and reconstructs the human body (1977, p. 138). Foucault is not imposing that that body stands inherently opposed to what society and culture define it to be as a natural object (McWhorter, 1989, p. 609). In Foucault's discourse, the body does not operate as it has to naturally, which is a 'pure truth' to be emancipated. The natural body is a discourse in itself and in reality (1989, p. 612). The body is what continuously interrupts the movements of the discourses of identity through which fear starts incepting in the belief system of society.

According to Foucault, the body is a nexus of power where certain cultural and historical practices are performed that are susceptible to political and economic powers (King, 2004, p. 30), and the significant function of discourse in generating and determining the social identity of the body is to control it. Foucault asserts that the human subject is not a natural body it is actually "amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies" (Foucault, 1977, p. 217). Foucault follows the cultural changes that resulted in prison domination through the body and power. For him, the body is a site of confrontation for different discourses. For female subjects, it is not only a location of inequality that goes beyond economic efficiency, sexual or ethical differences, or (sub)cultural divisions but also interchangeable, intermixed, and frequently in conflict with one another. Foucault observes that the body is immediately implicated in the political sphere, and power dynamics that have direct control over it. He also uses the language of investing and marketing to emphasize the external influence of power on the body (Punday, 2000, p. 509). Lakshmi considers Uncle Husband protective towards her as he provides food and clothes for her. Simultaneously, she is afraid of him because he speaks hard words to her. Uncle Husband tries to impose power on her when they have to pass from different lines at the railway station by threatening her; he says, "Come right back. Don't try anything. Or your family will not see a single rupee" (McCormick, 2006, p. 90). Foucault argues that to control the body is to mark the victim, which leaves scars on the body, or a socially recognizable spectacle on the body to take control over it (Foucault, 1977, p. 34). To make Lakshmi work for her, Mumtaz warns her by chopping her hair and then threatening to kill her by placing a scissor at her neck. Also, she starts beating Lakshmi to get control over her body. "Each morning and evening Mumtaz comes, beat me with a leather strap, and locks the door behind her" (McCormick, 2006, p. 115). She breaks Lakshmi each day and night until she submits herself and is ready to work for her.

The focus placed by society and culture on the male/female dichotomy frequently diminishes the worth of the female body relative to the male. The devaluation of women's bodies results in more body monitoring. As a result, explicit control mechanisms are put in place to regulate them (King, 2004, p. 33). A woman, as the other, symbolizes all that men hate and despise, which includes clothes (in terms of styling) that invite sexual gratification to men while also restricting and correcting it (2004, p. 34). Men impose retribution on the female body for being the other by beating and dominating it, which signifies an assertive declaration of dominance and superior strength (Foucault, 1977, p. 49). But this kind of retaliation goes beyond the exploitation of women's bodies; males also place a high value on how a woman's body shapes and appears. Sandra Lee Bartky suggests that a woman's skin is expected to be soft, smooth, and hairless, showing no signs of age, experience, or deep thoughtfulness (1988, p. 68). In the world of the commercial sex trade and brothels, young bodies are valued and asked for. In the novel, when Lakshmi ends up in the brothel, unknown to the place, she sees girls wearing colorful dresses, silver bangles, anklets, gold earrings, and jewelry. The young girls make their eyes look like tiger eyes with 'black crayons' and paint their lips as 'red chilis.' Lakshmi being unfamiliar with the situation, thinks that this is the place where movie stars live. Further, Mumtaz asks other girls at the brothel to decorate Lakshmi and get her into the business. They started to brush Lakshmi's hair, paint her nails, and make her face red as a pomegranate. Lakshmi, in dreams of being a city girl, by looking at the mirror, says, "I smile at this new Lakshmi. And she smiles back. Uncertainly" (McCormick, 2006, p. 107).

Foucault (1977) explains that during the classical period, people began to see the body as something that could be controlled and influenced by power. The focus of power exercises shifted to the body. It is simple to uncover evidence of the attention that was then devoted to the body that is controlled and molded, and that obeys, reacts, develops its skills, and fosters its capabilities (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). In his chapter "Docile Body," Foucault posits that there is a scale for regulating the body, and because the body is an independent entity, it should be retailed individually rather than handled wholesale. While retailing the body separately, the agenda was to obtain indirect pressure on the very level of motions, gestures, and attitudes. The indicating aspects of behavior and the language of the body are no longer concerned with controlling the body but with the economy and productivity. Mumtaz, being the owner of the brothel 'Happiness House,' first shows how her words are to be followed by her workers. She shows her authority and is only concerned with profit and productivity from her prostitutes. "You will take men to your room," she says. "And do whatever they ask of you. You will work here, like the other girls, until your debts is paid off" (McCormick, 2006, p. 112). She orders Lakshmi to get ready for work and gain profit from the customers. The only motive is to exercise the forces for domination to get the output (Foucault, 1977, p. 137). Foucault further argues that the political entity is also an emerging form of power which is known as outlining how to exert control over the bodies of 'others.' In doing so, this entails not merely performing what one's body desires but also how to function one's wishes with tactics, force, and effectiveness (1977, p. 138). Lakshmi's refusal not to work for Mumtaz lead her to become the victim of physical torture. Mumtaz beats her to death, and then, "... there is no part of me unmarked by her strap" (McCormick, 2006, p. 117), leaving no choice to Lakshmi rather than to give up. Mumtaz asks, "Now will you agree to be with men?" (2006, p. 117) and then Lakshmi nods her head, giving control of her body to Mumtaz.

In terms of Foucault, the body of each individual is created with distinct traits that are closely and intimately linked to power structures (Cahill, 2000, p. 50); in his concept, bodies are texts that can be read to decipher the unspeakable discourses in the dominant discourse. The female body often stands as the subject for women, but in the discourse of power female

body is frequently treated as an object by the woman (Pettman, 2000, p. 55). The idea that the female body is a fragile, delicate entity that can be controlled and convinced to have power and that it is something to act upon is the foundation of the female body's existence in society (Young, 1980, p. 150). Thus, the woman perceives her body as different from others, clumsy, and a frail object based on the requirements, either transforming the body with huge alterations (outside of the scope of the body) or taking care of it like a child. The woman seeks to safeguard her atrociously fragile body by limiting its range and action when they confront vulnerability around it (Cahill, 2000, p. 51). In order to take control over Lakshmi's body, Mumtaz targets the vulnerability and delicacy that a female has to her private body parts. She gives freedom to roam around the brothel but intimidates her by saying, "... I will grind hot chillies and put them in your private parts" (McCormick, 2006, p. 139). The woman (female body) trains herself to recognize her body as risky, delicate, and intimidating by understanding bodily conduct. The dodgy controls over the body and responses reflect the female behaviors that are instilled and designated at a young age and then repetitively reconstructed and conserved. This entails continuously menacing the body, and through regular vigilance, power controls the body from being violated (Cahill, 2000, p. 56). A substantial part of the sexually abused and rape victim's suffering and trauma is linked to a power discourse that portrays and constructs her body as powerless, fragile, and different from her actual identity (2000, p. 58). If the concept that the female body is constructed as an object within the power structure is dismantled and replaced with the idea of combating sexual harassment and violence, the power structure that perpetuates the common issue of rape will be diminished (2000, p. 61). The humiliation of being socially shamed prevents Lakshmi from seeking help from the American man, as Anita warns Lakshmi that the Americans strip them and make them walk naked in front of people. "I am afraid. Afraid that Mumtaz will beat us senseless. And I am afraid that the Americans will shame us and abandon us in the streets. But most of all, I am afraid to imagine a life outside this place" (McCormick, 2006, p. 214). The physical torture and wild talks intimidate Lakshmi, and she becomes frightened of everything.

Affect, Trauma, and Body

Affect theory understands the role of the body in constructing emotions and experiences in social and cultural codes. In every vital stage of human life, the body plays an important role. It is visible to the outside world and functions as a physical container as well as a vehicle of expression and communication. It can also function as an emotional container (Leys & Goldman, 2010, p. 666). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank (1995) posit that the conceptual distinction between feelings such as amusement, disgust, humiliation, or outrage becomes void in the recent discourse. For them, genres should be characterized and defined by the absolute amount of presence of a rare substance called affect rather than the type of affect the genres produce (1995, p. 17). So, a particular emotion necessitates a specific description.

The humiliation of sexual abuse and rape is difficult and painful to talk and write about because it affects the body, and it has a public exposure of one's own feelings and experiences. These painful experiences increase awareness around the functioning of the many affects in the body, such as fist and jaw clenching and muscle twisting, which heighten emotions and tension (Probyn, 2010, p. 72). Gilles Deleuze defines the individuality of the body according to its motion, rest, speed, and slowness (1992, p. 625), which leads to Brian Massumi's concept that an individual body can have and feel a whim of emotions in conflict with other feelings (Probyn, 2010, p. 77). William James' theory of emotions also highlights the various emotions of different feelings in conflict. The body views itself as sensing the emotional trigger which causes shaking and clenching and is subsequently labeled as fear. Lakshmi becomes fearful of men, and a feeling of disgust grows towards her own body, which she wants to erase but is unable to do so. She says, "I cannot seem to rinse the men from my body" (McCormick, 2006,

p. 135). Lakshmi's emotions take a turn when she encounters a man who is not like the others (who abuses her); she feels warm, which reminds her of the Himalayan days. The sexual encounters that used to hurt her now make her emotions conflicted with this man.

But I could feel myself, my true self, give in to the simple pleasure of being held. His body warmed mine the way the Himalayan sun warms the soil. His skin was soft – like the velvet of Tali's nose. And his contentment soaked through to me like an evening rain shower. And so I held him, too. Slowly, I put my arms around him and allowed them to stay (McCormick, 2006, p. 182).

The body responds to the humiliation of sexual assault in certain ways. One body has the ability to influence other bodies and be influenced by them. The capacity to affect and be affected also defines the individuality of the body and is called dynamic interactions with other bodies (Deleuze, 1992, p. 625). The emotions and feelings of the body for being shameful could be understood in relation to other bodies; it feels and works in the social parameter of seeing a chastised body and a violated body (Van der Kolk & Ducey, 1989; Van der Kolk & McFarlane 1998, p. 12; Probyn, 2010, p. 76). According to Moira Gatens, revealing one's own vulnerabilities, boundaries, and the horrors wherein collective emotions arise affects, questions and ideas about the integrity of the body. (2004, p. 115). The interconnected concept of thinking about the body and the feelings, both harsh and nuanced, is influenced by the direction, intensity, and sensitivity of experiencing the emotion (Connolly, 2002, p. 100). This entails how listening to atrocities or thinking of any violence and then conveying them to the listeners connect the words, gestures, memory, and particularly the emotions (2002, p. 102). Deleuze argues that the mind is reliant on the body, and shame would be meaningless without this reliance, this inclination towards destitution, and the objectification of the body. That is to say, the body embarrasses the mind, which seeks to conceal the body until its shame subsides (1997, p. 123). Lakshmi's experiences of being recruited and sexually abused for the very first time are restored when she sees another younger girl wearing the same brighter yellow dress as her with a bundle of clothes entering her room. She recollects her experiences when she sees the new girl and thinks, "... as if she is clenching her feet inside her new shoes like a poor frightened bat clinging to a branch" (McCormick, 2006, p. 140). The violence on Pushpa when she is sick leaves Lakshmi in fear. Also, when Pushpa pleads to have mercy on her little daughter, Lakshmi is awestruck; the howling and mournful raging cry of Pushpa is labeled as a sound beyond language. Lakshmi becomes susceptible after seeing the atrocities on Pushpa's body as well as the violence her little daughter is going to face in the future.

The victims of sexual abuse and rape, in their accounts of violence, utter that they were unable to bear the trauma of separating apart from their bodies. Deleuze, in this line of discussion, pronounces that the mind observes what the body does; at first, it witnesses, then gets affected, and it experiences the emotions for itself, which not only simply affects the body but also criticizes it, judge it, and become the emotional entity (1997, p. 124). Massumi argues that affect should not be misunderstood as pre-social, as it is open-endedly social in a manner that it could be separated from the individual (2002, p. 9). Feminists developed a narrative highlighting the ongoing trauma that persists after the initial violence. They emphasized how psychological and emotional trauma, often invisible, is reflected in accounts of sexual abuse (Waldby, 1978, p. 6; 1985, 4; Featherstone, 2021, p. 146). In theory, the new notions about child sexual abuse and trauma were not necessarily gendered (Featherstone, 2021, p. 146). Familial dysfunction is the root of any kind of child abuse, which leads to emotional responses (Connell, 1978, p. 362). For children, sexual harassment and abuse are horrific occurrences from which they become profoundly emotionally disturbed. They may survive but endure the mental and psychological scars for the rest of their life (Grunseit, 1983, pp. 527-28;

Featherstone, 2021, p. 148). In the novel, Lakshmi is surprised to see Monica again in the brothel who left the brothel after her debt is paid. She asks why she returned to the brothel, and Monica replies, "When they heard I was coming," ... "they met me outside the village and begged me not to come back and disgrace them" (McCormick, 2006, p. 200). Also, she adds what her family told her daughter, "They told her I was dead" (2006, p. 200). The humiliation is rooted in the societal system, where familial rejection leads to a traumatized state. Lakshmi becomes sceptic about returning to her home, and doubts whether her family would accept her violated body.

The victims' traumatic nightmares are a result of the political terror that deepens their anguish, trapping them in isolated, secret worlds. This creates a metaphorical world that continues to inflict pain long after the initial violence has ended. Elaine Scarry, Leslie Adelson, and Bruno Bettelheim have discussed how the traumatized self and the emotional aspects of the body can resist violence and cruelty. Adelson posits that the self is understood as a profoundly spiritual subject that, for a moment, seeks disembodiment but can express itself only against the body suffering the anguish (1993, p. 20). Thus, the emotional dimension of the body and the self creates a space for humanity and compassion to manifest themselves. Trauma induces a condition of anxiety triggered by the unexpected presence of danger, dividing, or destroying individuality and identity. The subjective voice and trauma begin to narrate the body as an object to depict pity and compassion for it when atrocity obliterates the individuality of the body (McWilliams, 2009, p. 149). Lakshmi tries to explain her feelings and experiences of sexual harassment, and the trauma of being abused and sold in sexual slavery puts her in a conundrum, such that she is unable to differentiate between reality and nightmare. "In between, men come. They crush my bones with their weight. They split me open. Then they disappear. I cannot tell which of the things they do to me are real, and which are nightmares" (McCormick, 2006, p. 129). She manifests the emotional dimensions of her body being tortured, which becomes the victim of violence and abuse along with her psyche.

Trauma, in a narrative, presents itself as nightmares, fragmented flashbacks, vivid images, and emotions, which are unintegrated and unprocessed with a lack of linguistic context. This creates difficulty for children, who are often ignorant of violence and bodily conduct, to articulate the painful recollections and emotional responses of the body into words (Dubovsky, 1997, p. 47, cited in Miliora, 1998; Etherington, 2003, p. 29). Children who have not encountered any kind of violence learn a plethora of abilities through their sensory world, whereas traumatized children frequently lose out on many fundamental abilities. The bodies of traumatized children are often used, neglected, violated, or injured (Scaer, 2014, p. 137). In this context, these traumatized children are more likely to grow as dysfunctional adults.

I hurt. I am torn and bleeding where the men have been. I pray to the gods to make the hurting go away. To make the burning and the aching and the bleeding stop. Music and laughter come from the room next door. Horns and shouting come from the street below. No one can hear me, not even the gods (McCormick, 2006, p. 131).

As Lakshmi is a 13-year-old child, it is difficult for her to comprehend what is actually happening with her body. She is in physical and mental anguish, and all she can feel is pain. For her, the memories of her days in the mountains become the vehicle to survive at the brothel, unconsciously ignorant of the fact that escaping from places like a brothel is almost beyond her control.

Conclusion

The trauma of sex trafficking and abuse is augmented when the victim's body is commodified,

and she comes to terms with the realization that her life is worth almost nothing. If the body is not able to make money, it is considered redundant. The pain of being separated from their loved ones and the fact that their loved ones sold them for money keeps coming into flashbacks and nightmares as well. The children and women are treated like animals, beaten, and thrown, particularly by men as sex slaves, which horrifies their existence. Lakshmi is at first traumatized by the fact that she is sold by none other than her family, and now to leave that awful environment, she must pay off a significant amount. Lakshmi's body is used by men for sexual pleasure, and the brothel owner gets profit from dominating her body. The trauma of human suffering created by money mongers is incepted by violence, exploitation, and dominance of one's body by another. The body of female children and women suffer and are exposed to trauma when their identities and bodies are transformed. Lakshmi's trauma is profoundly rooted in the atrocities her body suffered. In this process of domination of the body, power works in a dual manner. Power protects the body and simultaneously intimidates it. Controlling the juvenile female's body is projected as a part of the protectionist ideal, and torturing is naturalized. In other words, power casts the female body as per the constraints because her body is perceived as fragile, vulnerable, and stripped of power. Lakshmi considers Uncle Husband protective of her, but he ends up selling her in a brothel, whereas Mumtaz uses her power to control Lakshmi's body and continuously tortures her both physically and mentally. The regular controlling of the body and menacing it to exist in the cultural codes of society traumatizes her.

The commodification of the body, controlling it through the power and humiliation of sexual abuse and rape, creates intricacies of emotions and feelings that lead to trauma. The mind keeps thinking about the violated body, which has an effect that can be seen through words, gestures, and bodily conduct. The victims' minds desire the body to remain concealed, and the link between body and mind makes them feel ashamed of their bodies, which ends up in traumatization. For children, as they are less informed about their bodies, unexpected danger, violence, and the feeling and anxiety of destroying their bodies induce trauma. Lakshmi's emotions and feelings for her body have a subjective voice that narrates the trauma of her sexual harassment. She tries to get rid of her skin that has been touched by men, but the loss she is suffering affects her mind. Touching the body, as well as physical and sexual harassment, play a crucial part in relational and developmental trauma. The body vividly retains the memories of violence and pain. Thus, violence and trauma cause victims to respond to a specific conflict of reality and identity on a personal and cultural level. The cultural context of pain is inextricably linked to its phenomenology. The loss of one's home, means of support, relationships, and belongings—cultural artifacts and social connections that serve as barriers—signifies the deterioration of the self and increases the intensity of pain and suffering as the body is immediately subjected to agony and discomfort. So, whatever is identified as trauma is always mediated through filtering cultural codes.

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Mapping Trauma and Affect: Reading Child Body as Commodity in Patricia McCormick's *Sold*

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Mapping Trauma and Affect: Reading Child Body as Commodity in Patricia McCormick's *Sold*

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