

## **Rape As a Tool of Suppression & Radha as The Representative of The Suppressed: Sujata Parashar's the Temple Bar Women**

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### **Abstract**

Women are perceived to be fragile and submissive, often remaining powerless both in real and virtual worlds. "Rape" remains an (ill)effective tool that is often been used to remind women of their fragility and their place in the society. The post effect of rape not just stops with physical injuries but also causes certain psychological effects such as Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, Schizophrenia, inferiority complex and etc. The paper aims to throw light on how rape is handled and sustained as a tool by those handful of corrupted perpetrators to suppress women. It also tries to prove how the assault suppresses a woman physically and emotionally with reference to the novel *The Temple Bar Woman* by Sujata Parashar. The androcentric notion of treating women powerless and silencing their voices through rape is mostly less debated. The paper tries to highlight the unnoticed tool of suppression, which is used to put woman in her place and also calls out to our society, to support her which is the need of the hour.

**Keywords:** Suppression, rape, women, men, powerlessness, tool

### **Introduction**

Women in India, have been suppressed for centuries that continues even today. Especially now a days, crimes against women have increased immensely. There are various forms in which women are suppressed, such as in the name of education, class, gender, etc. All the forms of suppression start with the patriarchal mindset; irrespective of their gender, it can be found in both men and women. To imagine a situation, where a superpatriot, works under a female boss and finds it highly uncomfortable and irritating to work under a woman. He finds her, highly undefeatable in the workplace. The high degree of his male chauvinistic behaviour results in a situation where he wants to find an unfair reason to put her in shame. One such unfair reason he finds to defeat her is rape.

It is not true that only strangers rape women, whereas close relatives and family friends of the victims too commit this heinous crime. For instance, a man from Bhopal, raped and killed his daughter in the name of honour killing. He raped his daughter, strangled her to death and buried her five-month-old baby alive beside her, just for marrying a man from a caste that he thinks, is lower. In this context, rape has been used as a weapon to show the caste dominance by a man. To achieve a lot more like this, rape is the unfair reason used by male chauvinists

most of the time. The main plot of the novel *The Temple Bar woman* revolves around the character called, Radha. Since Radha is the unfortunate victim of rape, the paper revolves around her character, to justify the title. The antagonist of the novel, known as Vikram Pratap Singh, is a devotee of androcentrism and undoubtedly is the perpetrator.

## Literature Review:

Using rape as a tool to suppress women, is proved by various studies and research conducted in this area. Excerpts from such research articles are followed.

[Geeta Sahu, et al., \(2005\)](#) in their study, identifies the most vulnerable groups at risk of getting raped and comments on the cruelty of rape. The study only involves sex offences and sex offences with kidnapping. It provides statistical data regarding the same. The results from the study are heart-wrenching to know that the most vulnerable victims of rape are largely from low socioeconomic groups.

The article by [Richard Traunmüller et al., \(2019\)](#) deals with the widespread sexual violence during war. The target group of the study is the war victims from Sri Lanka, especially the Tamil minorities of Sri Lanka. The study provides statistical details of the victims of rape. The article gives pieces of evidence of sexual crimes that have been done against Tamil minority women by government forces. The paper throws light on sexual violence during war and demands policy implications that can support the victims.

The study by [Andrea Hollomotz \(2009\)](#) talks about the people with learning difficulties who are vulnerable to sexual violence compared to other students, in the light of the ecological approach. It analyses the crucial role of society in the process of risk creation against them. This model of ecological approach provides a means to examine society's role in an individual's learning. The paper suggests developmental opportunities that are capable of increasing the self-defense skills of people with learning difficulties.

The study by [Laurie S Ramiro et al., \(2005\)](#) talks about sexual violence in one of the South African communities shortly. It reveals various levels of risk creating factors that influence adolescent girls and boys who are susceptible to become victims and perpetrators of sexual violence respectively. The paper suggests the necessity of prevention programs to protect them from becoming either victims or perpetrators of sexual violence in the context of South Africa.

[Loren Horan & Eric Beauregard \(2018\)](#), in their research article, prove that offenders use various techniques to stop the rape victims from disclosing what happened to them. It says that offenders degrade their victims by using a variety of torture methods. The method of torture differs between the marginalised and the non-marginalised victims; the marginalised target is tortured with objects whereas non-marginalised targets are killed by strangulation. The study proves that the socio-economic condition of the victims is also a deciding factor in the vulnerability of the rape victims.

The above-mentioned research articles talk about the predisposition of victims at the hands of perpetrators and deal with the rape victims from various aspects such as marginalized and non-marginalised, prone to be victims, the age factors of the victims, physical and mental disabilities. They talk about social and economic factors which are the major reason for the increasing number of rapes. They show that minority and majority clashes led to mass rapes and other crimes. Whereas this research paper sheds light upon the idea that rape itself is a tool

of suppression used against women. In this way, the paper stands apart from all the above-mentioned research articles.

### **Radha: Representative of The Suppressed:**

Rape is used as a degrading device to prove women are fragile and inferior to men. Rape, revolves around the concept called 'honour'. Indian families always link their 'honour' with their daughters', sisters', and wives' virginity. News articles we see daily, provides many examples, where in some cases, if a man wants revenge another man from a different family, the best way he finds is to rape a woman from that man's family. They treat the women of the families as mere assets. A woman in these families is not treated as a living being with feelings and emotions, whereas merely an object that produces next generation to carry forward the lineage of the family and their body that is the storehouse of the family's honour. If rape should be stopped, treating a woman merely an object should also be stopped.

'Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code defined rape as followed:

"A man is said to commit "rape" who, except in the case hereinafter excepted, has sexual intercourse with a woman under circumstances falling under any of the six following descriptions: -

First: Against her will.

Secondly: Without her consent.

Thirdly: With her consent, when her consent has been obtained by putting her or any person in whom she is interested in fear of death or of hurt.

Fourthly: With her consent, when the man knows that he is not her husband and that her consent is given because she believes that he is another man to whom she is or believes herself to be lawfully married.

Fifthly: With her consent, when, at the time of giving such consent, because of unsoundness of mind or intoxication or the administration by him personally or through another of any stupefying or unwholesome substance, she is unable to understand the nature and consequences of that to which she gives consent.

Sixthly: With or without her consent, when sixteen years of age.

Explanation: Penetration is sufficient to constitute the sexual intercourse necessary to the offence of rape.

Exception: Sexual intercourse by a man with his wife, the wife not being under fifteen years of age, is not rape." (Shome)

The above-mentioned definition is overwhelmingly comprehending enough on rape. Yet nothing stops a perpetrator like Vikram from abusing a woman, regardless of him being a politician.

According to NCRB's 'Crimes in India 2019' report, the number of rape cases against women stands across thirty thousand in India. According to Merriam Webster dictionary, the word 'rape' has been defined as an "unlawful sexual activity and usually, sexual intercourse carried out forcibly or under threat of injury against a person's will or with a person who is beneath a certain age or incapable of valid consent because of mental illness, mental deficiency, intoxication, unconsciousness, or deception." ("rape").

The number of rape cases registered in India are only the tip of the iceberg, if the unregistered rape cases are counted, the rates may break the sky. A society becomes civilised with the spread of education. Yet, education could not stop rapes from occurring; educated men too rape women; the degree of education, has actually equipped perpetrators to commit the crime without being caught.

One such story of rape is Radha's from the novel *The Temple Bar Woman*. Radha is the pride of her father, a lovable teacher and a beautiful woman. "He loved his only child unconditionally from the moment she was born. She was fair, petite, almost delicate, and with eyes that were deep and smiling. To him, she was perfect in every way" (Parashar 6). Her beautiful and simple life fades away with her encounter with Vikram, the son of a powerful politician and a misogynist. Radha's only mistake is correcting a misogynist who misbehaved with her and her friend. The perpetrator is an educated one, yet his education did not stop him from committing a heinous crime.

Radha is a lovely teacher and daughter to a father from a well to do family. She is a motherless child, brought up by her widower father with a lot of love and care. Radha is everything to him and he is the same for her. This beautiful and loving girl's life changed totally when she encountered the antagonist, Vikram. "When a girl like you comes in front of me, I go blind. Tell me, what I can do madam... When an ill-mannered man like you come in front of me, my hands automatically move! Tell me, what can I do, Sir?" (Parashar 17). The above mentioned is the dialogue between Radha and Vikram. Radha is raped, just because she raises her voice against an immoral man like Vikram. To think from the perspective of the rapist in the novel, he wants women to keep their mouths shut irrespective of his misconduct. He expects all the women around him to be the same but Radha is not so. Radha slaps Vikram for his immoral behaviour which makes Vikram angry. He wants to take revenge on Radha. The very first thought he gets is to kidnap and rape her, to destroy her dignity.

There is no connection between dignity and virginity. Many of us would have met with accidents, and we would have had mild or severe injuries. These injuries are cured over time. And our health gets back to normal and we start our routine as usual as we were before the accident. To think from a broader perspective, rape is similar to an accident where a person is disgracefully torn into pieces both physically and mentally. We should help the rape victim to heal, the same way we help an accident victim to heal. We get healed after an accident and get back to normal life, in the same way, the rape victims should be treated without being degraded. Dignity and virginity are not interrelated.

"That was it! A look at the pathetic condition of the girl in torn, soiled clothes, and with fresh scars all over her body, told her what the matter was. The dirty coat that covered her body could hardly hide her condition from Habiba's scrutiny. The girl's condition was not new to her. She was certain that she'd not only been raped but had been cruelly treated by her captors." (Parashar 35)

Vikram wants to kidnap and rape Radha because he was brought up in a way that treating women as fragile is a part of life. He assumes, Radha is not physically strong enough to protect herself from Vikram and his friends; and that her mental strength can be broken by breaking her body through rape. What lies in our conscious mind was indeed practiced for a long period and we can regain it whenever needed without any special effort. In this conscious mind lies the teachings of our society and what we learn through the course of our life. The stereotypical idea of treating women as fragile was strongly influenced Vikram to kidnap Radha and to use rape as a tool to suppress her, as she cannot defend herself.

“A menacing smile spread across his face, ‘I...I’ll, of course, be busy...’ He left his words hanging in mid-air and winked instead. ‘The bitch will learn her lesson well,’ said he confidently, as the first one left to his black SUV that was parked nearby.” (Parashar 20). There is an abusive word “bitch” which is to be noted in these lines. There are a lot of abusive words which refer to the female organs of women. Even to scold men, abusive words denoting women are used. Therefore, ‘suppressing women’ has become a cruel practice in our Indian society. Vikram used the word “bitch” to denote Radha just because she raises her voice against him and not because she is an ill-mannered woman.

The word ‘Bitch’ is now a commonly used term to denote a woman that a man doesn’t like. During the 2016 US election, Hillary Clinton was called a “bitch” by the supporters of Donald Trump.

“The term "bitch" has been used to refer to a female dog since about 1000 AD, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, and began to be used as a pejorative term for women in around the 15th Century. The 1811 edition of the Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue by Francis Grose said it was "most offensive appellation that can be given to an English woman". The Oxford English Dictionary defines its modern meaning as "a malicious or treacherous woman" or "something outstandingly difficult or unpleasant". But other dictionary definitions mention its premier use is no longer as a term of abuse.” (Taylor-Coleman, *pars.* 23-37)

‘Bitch’ has become a fascinating word to people nowadays, especially for youths. What is to be much worried about this is that people are using this term without any concern about what it means. What we practice now will become the habit of our future generation. We should be careful with the terms and phrases that we use.

There is an important thing to discuss that not just do men suppress women but women also suppress women. The same way not just women but also there are men have fought for the equality and freedom of women. A social activist and a feminist writer, Kamla Bhashin’s words will greatly substantiate the above-mentioned idea which goes, “I know enough anti-women and patriarchal women; who do nasty things to other women, and I have known men who have worked for women’s rights their whole life. Feminism is not biological: feminism is an ideology” (Kamla Bhashin; *Feminist Activist & Social Scientist*). Feminist movements are such examples to show that men too helped women to get their equal rights. Worst among all is that in a few rape cases women are the masterminds. Supporting rape directly or indirectly is unforgivable. Sex trafficking is one of the ways that women suppress their gender. They are the major suppressors of women from ancient times to the present time.

Habiba Bi in the novel *The Temple Bar Women* is one such example of a woman suppressing a woman. She runs a brothel house. She cares for fragile women who are raped and left behind. She involves the rape victims in a brothel; thinking that she helps them to survive. Pushing someone into prostitution cannot be a help at all. Habiba herself is a rape victim, who finds no escape from the brothel; she involves many more rape victims and poor women in the brothel. She could have not helped many women who would have either died or found some other way to survive. Thinking of helping others Habiba misguided other women. Habiba, despite being a woman herself misguided other women into the brothel. Though the brothel brings money for living, it would have been a forced choice on many women, chosen by Habiba.



Habiba had not just misguided many rape victims and poor women, she had supported the perpetrators by entertaining men with these victims. Though she feeds these victims and poor women, she ruined their lives which is irreversible. This could be a possible argument to support that, women are suppressed by their gender too.

### *Dignity Vs Virginity:*

Radha's post-rape life is a debate between her loss of virginity Vs dignity. There is a common belief that a woman is defeated and ashamed when her virginity is snatched away from her. For instance, there is a woman who is successful in her workplace and she is the boss. Her subordinates, especially a few men are not comfortable working under her, just because of her gender. This inequality brings chaos in the working place; since those men couldn't accept a woman as a superior. Imagine a situation, where a male subordinate of this successful lady boss is not an efficient employee and is often corrected by her. Since the man is gender-biased and ashamed of being corrected by a woman, he wants to pay back her in the future. It ends with the rape of his boss. As per the socially constructed stereotype, she leaves the job ashamed of being called 'a rape victim', which cannot be wiped off. The man at the end feels triumphant over the woman. Finally, he thinks a successful woman was defeated.

But it is not so. "So, why is rape used to silence a woman? Because rape is considered the ultimate shame committed against a woman after which she is considered impure." (Singh 2020) The practice of considering a woman impure after the rape, is utterly impetuous. For the crime that is never committed, the victim suffers in the hand of the society whereas the perpetrator is unaffected and less punished for the crime. There are many rape cases in which the perpetrators are set free by the law, on the ground of lack of witness. There seems to be a great difference between law and justice and both are disproportionate to each other. Even after the brutal gang rape, Radha decides to live through the pain and sufferings and not to kill herself. So tells the author, "As God is my witness, as God is my witness, they're not going to beat me. I'm going to live through this". (Parashar xx)

Chauvinism is all about showing power and treating women weak. One will be considered weak if she/he is dependent on others for every need. The dependency politics germinate by breaking one's self into pieces and convincing him/her that he/she is good for nothing and not worth doing anything independently. Thus, the acceptance of her weakness leads to dependency that finally leads a woman to be a parasite for her lifetime, where living independently is of no meaning. Below quoted lines from a news article published in The Guardian by Narayan substantiate the point very clearly.

"Women whose sense of self has been worn down, by definition must depend on others, which only serves to breed fear and violence. Over 50% of Indian men and women still believe that sometimes women deserve a beating. One woman is killed every hour for not bringing enough dowry to a husband. But dependency is still presented as a virtuous habit and independence as a bad characteristic. Dependent women have no separate identity and are legitimate only as mothers, wives and daughters. Such women are trained to put duty over self – the suicide numbers are highest for housewives." (Narayan, 2018)

A perpetrator always feels triumphant over raping a woman. Raping someone could not be a pride to anyone. The lady boss has to leave her job, for being a rape victim which is no fault of her, because we as a society blame the victims and set the perpetrators free. We claim that men are men and it is women's responsibility to not seduce men with their appearances. This is a dangerous trend that prevails commonly in society that to be rid of. Society should stand for the victims. The victims should not be ashamed of themselves, because they didn't

plan their rape. And the perpetrators must know that the cost of rapping someone will always be paid. Parashar too mentioned the same through Radha's voice that says, "Vikram Pratap Singh had underestimated her. He was still unaware of the fact that she was the same girl he had destroyed. But she had neither forgotten nor forgiven him. He would pay the price for it now." (Parashar xvi)

## Conclusion

For the exercise of power over women, rape has been used as an instrument in our society by a few men to remind women of their place in a patriarchal society. Rape is often justified stating that it is unavoidable when women wear short dresses or so-called dresses that arouse sexual desire in a man. Priyanka Dubey, an Indian journalist and author of the novel *No Nation for Women*, where describes rape as a reflection of the desire to 'put a woman in her place'. In a satirical manner, through rape Radha of *The Temple Bar Woman* was taught a lesson by her perpetrators, of her fragility and her place in the society which is unacceptable.

We have suppressed women within four walls for centuries. We say we have empowered them. We talk about equality. We support reservations for women. But we never stopped suppressing them. We suppress them wherever they go and in whatever they do. I refer "we" here to the society. It's us who do not let women live in peace. Let's join hands to not suppress women rather to support them.

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