Pakistan Journal of Gender Studies 111
Vol. 26(1), 2026, pp.111-128, ISSN: 2072-0394(Print), ISSN: 2663-8886(Online)

Resilience through Memories, Dreams & Imagination in Female Sex Trafficking Victims: A Textual Analysis of Patricia McCormick's '*Sold*'

Noreen Zainab
Bahria University Islamabad
Foundation University, Islamabad

&

Shaheena Ayub Bhatti
Foundation University, Islamabad

Abstract

This study intends to explore the representation of psychological resilience within a literary work, i.e., Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006), a young adult novel that focuses on the life and circumstances of Lakshmi, a thirteen-year-old mountain girl who belongs to Nepal. As Lakshmi faces the events leading her to a sex trafficking network working at the heart of Mumbai, this narrative highlights the global context of devastating psychological consequences of human trafficking. This research specifically investigates how human beings utilize their internal resources, such as memories, dreams, and the power of imagination, to function as internal mechanisms for building resilience. This research draws on the neurobiological model of resilience presented by Linda Graham, while keeping in view the psychological trauma theory by Judith Herman. Additionally, Tedeschi and Calhoun's Post-Traumatic Growth framework is utilized for the triangulation of the study for better analysis of evidence of resilience presented through Lakshmi's character. The study offers an in-depth study of Lakshmi's journey of self-navigation as she tries to find her way towards resilience. It is revealed through textual analysis of *Sold* that the episodic memories, symbolic dreamscapes, and the imagined futures of sex trafficking victims presented in fiction offer a textured map of inner strength. It demonstrates that resilience for the victims of sex trafficking is presented in unconventional ways, as it does not necessarily require physical agency. The article argues that *Sold* redefines resilience not only as an endurance of pain, but also as a process of reclaiming one's identity, hope, and moral agency. This analysis intends to positively contribute to trauma literature by further focusing on human trafficking discourse by foregrounding the role of victims' inner resources in the journeys of trafficked individuals towards resilience.

Keywords: Psychological Resilience, Human Trafficking, Memory and Dreams, Imagination and Self-Navigation, Trauma Literature.

This work is Licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Introduction

"Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendor in the grass,
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind."

— William Wordsworth

Human trafficking, specifically sex trafficking, remains one of the gravest violations of human rights globally. The United Nations defines human trafficking as the recruitment, transport, or harbouring of people with the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the sake of exploitation. For many decades, millions of women and children are trafficked across national borders each year or within their own countries, often into the commercial sex industry (Schepp, 2016). According to the Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (UNODC, 2020), women and girls account for nearly 72% of all trafficking victims worldwide, with sexual exploitation as the most reported purpose. The psychological, emotional, and physical toll of trafficking is devastating (U.S. Department of State, 2022), and survivors often suffer from long-term trauma, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Brewin, Dalgleish & Joseph, 1996). However, despite the extensive suffering, many of these survivors demonstrate an exceptionally outstanding psychological resilience (Luckhurst, 2008).

In recent years, scholars have started to turn towards fictional literature to examine how the narratives of trauma and survival articulate this resilience (Whitehead, 2004). The Literary works that mainly identify and analyze various themes of sex trafficking only manage to offer a limited account of violence and victimization. Additionally, their critical insight into how the memories, imagination, and the inner self of trafficking victims play a significant role in their endurance and healing. As literary trauma studies have emerged as an interesting field of research, the works of fiction based on sex trafficking has managed to occupy a significant place. McCormick's '*Sold',* a work of literature published in 2006, is a raw presentation of the heinous crime and its severe impact on the victim's psychological well-being. Written in a very unconventional manner, i.e., lyrical prose, '*Sold'* narrates to the readers the story of young Lakshmi, a thirteen-year-old Nepali girl who, in a tragic turn of events, was eventually sold into sexual slavery by her own stepfather and brought to a brothel in Mumbai, India. What makes the novel especially powerful is its true and unfiltered portrayal of Lakshmi's inner world, which includes all of her memories, her dreams, and her imagination. It is an inspiring depiction of Lakshmi's functioning as a psychological refuge in the face of sexual abuse and trauma.\

This study investigates one of the very crucial questions, i.e., how *Sold* presents the interior architecture of resilience and its growth in the individuals within the oppressive context of sex trafficking. It asks the question of how human memory, dreams, and imagination help a young victim hold on to a sense of self, moral clarity,

and above all, hopes for a better tomorrow. While the brutality of sexual exploitation is not downplayed within the novel, the emphasis of the narrative is mainly on the strength of Lakshmi's mind and her spirit. This suggests that resilience is not solely a result of external intervention or the process of escape from certain circumstances; it is built from scratch, as a narrative process built from within. In this context, *Sold* becomes not just a story of survival but a literary exploration of psychological resistance within the context of traumatic conditions.

To examine the internal mechanisms of resilience and its process, an interdisciplinary theoretical framework is adopted by the paper. It mainly draws on the neurobiological model of resilience (2013) presented by Linda Graham**.** Graham, in her framework, defines resilience as a skill that could be learnt, with its trainable capacity rooted in somatic, emotional, and generative intelligences. The study also incorporates Judith Herman's trauma recovery model (1992), with an emphasis on narrative reconstruction. Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1995) theory of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) is also used for triangulation as it identifies how survivors can experience positive psychological change following trauma. These models help interpret Lakshmi's mental and emotional responses not as passive symptoms, but as adaptive tools of resilience**,** revealing how the memories and dreams for Lakshmi served both symbolic and functional purposes.

This article argues that *Sold*, through its portrayal of characters such as Lakshmi, brings about such elements of their characters that enable resilience, even in extreme conditions of captivity and dehumanization. Lakshmi's vivid memories of her mother and her village, her metaphorical dreams of escape, as well as her imaginative projection of a future beyond prostitution, function not only as survival strategies but as assertions of identity and agency. By mapping her internal journey, McCormick challenges the dominant representation of trafficking survivors as mere voiceless victims. Instead, she offers a varying portrayal of trafficking victims alongside resilience as a narrative as well as an act of imagination. '*Sold*' presents to its readers a much-needed literary discourse on trauma, human trafficking, and recovery. The present study further affirms that resilience is not merely the opposite of endurance, but a creative and powerful process of holding on, of remembering, and dreaming to finally reclaim one's own story and life**.**

Digging deep into the literature and previous research, it has been explored by the researchers that scholarly analysis of *Sold* is missing regarding its psychological aspects of resilience among female victims of human trafficking. The previous studies have emphasized more on social injustice and structural exploitation, etc., and less on the victim's sustenance and internal psychological mechanism faced by the victims. Since this study has used Linda Graham's resilience model, Judith Herman's trauma theory, and

Richard G. Tedeschi and Lawrence G. Calhoun's post-traumatic growth framework to analyze the narratives of trafficking. Therefore, this study has addressed the research gap by exploring the contribution of inner psychological resources to resilience in Lakshmi's character and, as a result, offering a deeper meaning of resilience in terms of trauma.

Theoretical Framework

Mapping Resilience: Linda Graham, Judith Herman, and Tedeschi & Calhoun

This study uses an interdisciplinary theoretical framework with its foundation in neuropsychology, psychological trauma theory, alongside narrative psychology to understand how the memories and dreams often function not only as distractions, but also as the instruments of resilience within trauma literature. This theory also serves the purpose of a tool for the analysis of selected text. Furthermore, Linda Graham's integrative model of resilience is adapted for the discussion on the subject. This framework is then further contextualized by Judith Herman's specific trauma recovery stages given in the framework alongside Tedeschi and Calhoun's theory of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG). Integrated within the text, both selected frameworks illuminate how many literary characters—particularly the ones presented within Patricia McCormick's *Sold*—activate the use of internal resources such as memories, imagination, and dreamscapes to process trauma and create resilience.

Linda Graham (2018), in her work, tried to conceptualize resilience as a dynamic, learnable capacity that is grounded in the five interrelated domains, including somatic, emotional, relational, reflective, and generative intelligence. While Graham claims that these five intelligences tend to work in coherence with each other to restore the psychological balance, this study only focuses on somatic resilience, i.e., body-based resilience, which, as defined by Graham, is the 'use of inner resources by the victims for resilience building' after trauma. Another form of resilience, Reflective intelligence as presented by Graham (2018), is the ability to observe one's mental states and to derive meaning through narrative reconstruction. Thus the gradual shift in perspective—from self-blame to a critical understanding of the system that exploits—illustrates the reflective intelligence in action. Within the conception of both emotional intelligence and reflective intelligence, the role of memories and dreams is clearly discussed by Graham.

Dreams and memories alongside imagination are a few of the personal resilience strategies utilized by the victims of sex trafficking and exploitation. This paper aims to look at the strategies discussed by Graham within the category of personal resilience building, whether it is physical resilience or emotional resilience. When one seeks to look for the power of endurance within themselves, it is the most powerful form of self-expression that exists. While Graham's framework provides a detailed

neuropsychological account of resilience, Judith Herman's (1992) trauma and recovery model situates these processes within broader therapeutic and narrative arcs. While Graham conceptualizes the techniques for resilience building, Herman outlines a four-stage recovery trajectory: safety, remembrance, mourning, and reconnection. These stages map very well onto the development of trauma narratives. In *Sold*, the protagonist endures extreme violations of both bodily and emotional safety. The next section of the text is saturated with intrusive memories and dreamlike flashbacks, as Lakshmi tries to make sense of her experience.

Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1995) Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) theory puts an emphasis on exploration of the profound individual through the exploration of individual personalities post-trauma. The post-traumatic growth framework presents five domains of growth, with personal strength and interpersonal relationships as two major domains. This theoretical triangulation will help in the broader revaluation of trauma and its portrayal in fiction—not as a static wound but as a dynamic field of psychological reworking. It further supports the core argument that in texts like *Sold*, the internal world of the protagonist—composed of fragmented memories, dreams, and re-imagined futures—is the real space of survival where resilience is built. By analyzing these internal narratives through the combined frameworks of Graham, Herman, and PTG, this study situates literary trauma within a constellation of healing practices that span the emotional, cognitive, relational, and symbolic.

Research Objectives

1. To find out the portrayal of psychological resilience through Lakshmi's character in the novel Sold.
2. To assess how the internal coping mechanism functions for resilience among the female victims of sex trafficking (as depicted in the novel).
3. To construe how the character of Lakshmi recovers from psychological trauma towards resilience by using the neurobiological model by Linda Graham.

Research Questions

1. How the novel *Sold by* Patricia McCormick portrays the internal mechanism of resilience (imagination, dreams, and memories).
2. How does the novel represent the post-traumatic growth and resilience experienced by the female victims of sex trafficking?

Review of the Literature

Resilience emerges as one of the significant themes within trauma literature. This is why it is often presented within the narratives as well as characters within works of fiction through memories, dreamscapes, or in the form of powerful imaginative powers of the victims. This is done with the help of the presentation of the unconscious mind of the characters. Across many forms of literature as well as cultures, these elements do hold a lot of power as they are not only used for decorative purposes in the text's patterns (Levine, 2010; Hicks, Simonds & Morison, 2024). These few elements tend to serve as functional features of growth within literary characters rather than ornamental ones. It is because these are the psychological mechanisms that enable the characters to navigate while transcending through the traumatic experiences of their lives (Krakow et al., 2001).

Both memories and dreams work together as instruments of narrative agency. The tools that not only help but are able to reframe their suffering further help in fostering reconstruction of their identity; this, in turn, catalyzes resilience (Randazzo & Ammari, 2025). Recent advancements made in the fields of neuroscience and psychology help us even further, as they confirm that the process of memory regulation, in the form of retrieval suppression and narrative coherence, also helps in the enhancement of emotional resilience, which comes after experiencing trauma. For instance, van Schie and Anderson (2018) demonstrate that the individuals who were exposed to early trauma ended up developing stronger memory suppression abilities. This suggests a neurocognitive mechanism that is needed for the process of coping. McKinnon and Levine (2021) similarly concluded through their research that the near-death survivors retained intense and coherent autobiographical memories. Developing such memories, according to them, was an indication of psychological stability.

These affirmations directly challenge the prevailing assumptions that the traumatic memory is necessarily fragmented. The fragmentation of traumatic memories is only one of the possibilities and not a rule (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). In fact, Rubin, Boals, and Berntsen (2010) found through their research that both PTSD and non-PTSD individuals are often able to retain structured and accessible trauma narratives. These are a few of the findings that support the arguments that narrative coherence—particularly in the cases of self-defining episodes—is not simply an indication of mental health. On the contrary, it is rather one of the key contributors to the resilience (Dobbin & Ross, 2019).

Barrett (2009) argues in his work that dreams in the context of trauma victims evolve through distinct phases. It means that it ranges from literal recreations to metaphorical adaptations. This trajectory is also aligned with psychological healing, as this is

where the mind starts to process experiences of trauma less reactively, hence, they start to understand it more symbolically as patterns (Hicks, Simonds & Morison, 2024). As dreams continue to shift from unmediated horror towards the structured allegory, they indicate an internal progress as well as emotional reorganization. Leckie et al. (2024) also emphasized in their work that coherent and positive dreams were found to be linguistically richer and more emotionally integrated rather than being the distressing ones (Krakow et al., 2001). The dream's structural order, therefore, can serve as a barometer of narrative resilience.

Fictional characters who articulate complex or symbolically charged dreams often display increasing psychological integration—reflecting a transition from fragmentation to coherence. The explorations within literature that are written in the context of historical and collective trauma are also an example. Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After* (1995) is written as a kind of haunting testimony of Holocaust survival. In this work, where memory is more than a cognitive function, human memory after traumatic endurance is portrayed as an existential necessity. The images that repeatedly appeared in the form of dreams and recollections serve as repetitive invocation and become a strategy of bearing witness and reclaiming agency. Similarly, Panter-Brick et al. (2015), in their study of Afghan youth, identified that the collective and spatial memory served as a stabilizing force during an extensive exposure to violence.

Other than the memories, dreams also act as a representation of the human subconscious. Hence, they also play a very significant role in the exploration of trauma through research on literary works of fiction. According to Dickson (2020), the sequences of dreams presented within the narratives are the exact spaces where both past and present intermingle. Similarly, in Oksana Zabuzhko's *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, the representation of trans-generational dreams enables the characters to access their ancestral memory and suffering on a communal level, underscoring how imagination can connect individual resilience to historical continuity (Zabuzhko, 2012). These dreamscapes also act as the repositories of cultural resilience rather than the coping mechanisms of psychological trauma. Postcolonial and conflict narratives also bring forth memories and dreams as vehicles of resistance and survival. Hanif and Ullah (2018), as well as Ullah and Kamran (2021), analyzed the Kashmiri war fiction to show how spatial and ancestral memory work as the foundation for identity under siege. In such works, dreams and memories map the geography of loss and recovery, enabling protagonists to understand their trauma and escape into their subconscious when the literal escape is impossible. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), although based on themes of migration rather than war, similarly engages narrative resilience through memory. Schönfelder (2023) observed that the protagonist's personal history becomes a site of reclamation, which allowed her to construct an identity beyond the limitations of race and exile. Culture also plays a vital role

in the encoding and representation of memories and dreams. Barrett (2009) emphasizes that the content as well as the interpretation of traumatic dreams is culturally inflected. Hence, it must also be understood through symbolic traditions as much as through neurobiology. This points out the need to understand the literary depictions of resilience in memory and dream through their socio-cultural context. The metaphors, the symbols, and the narrative patterns that shape trauma recovery within literature are not universally fixed but depend on both the author's cultural landscape as well as the reader's interpretive framework.

The works of literature often stage resilience at the threshold of memories, dreams, and imagination, where the dream functions to bridge the past and future, and the memories defy erasure. Lastly, the imagination helps render the power of hope, future, and possibilities amid utter despair. McAdams and McLean's (2013) theory of narrative identity suggests that it is the work of resilient individuals to construct the life stories that are characterized by agency, by communion, and by redemption. The model of post-traumatic growth by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) identifies the five domains of positive change following trauma, including enhanced relationships, personal strength, spiritual development, and a renewed appreciation for life. Literature captures these shifts not only as the clinical outcomes but also as the narrative arcs—where the transformations are forged with the help of memory work. Leckie et al. (2024) reinforce this idea as they show that the linguistic structure of dreams is also observed to evolve from incoherence to story-like order. It is, in turn, aligned with the process of psychological integration.

Despite all the research under discussion, the gaps continue to exist within the literature. There is a need for research that, through an in-depth analysis, investigates how various cultural traditions form narrative use of memory and dream in the trauma texts. While adult trauma is well documented and researched, children's and young adult literature—such as *Sold*—also deserves a deeper exploration, specifically in how the internal narratives help in the facilitation of resilience in the protagonists that, in their true essence, represent the young victims of trafficking. Finally, more work related to embodied memory is needed to establish how fiction and literature communicate trauma with the help of physical sensation and how the body of the presented victim becomes a narrative text. To conclude this section, we may say that this research further builds on the concept that both memories and dreams are not merely poetic embellishments in trauma narratives. Rather, they act as the engines of resilience within the narratives. Grounded simultaneously within the fields of neuroscience, psychology, and literary theory, they enable the characters to reclaim agency alongside coherence to find out the purpose of their lives. Whether it is done through flashbacks, through metaphoric dreams, or with the help of symbolic images, a shift from victimhood to resilience is observed quite definitely. In texts such as *Sold*, representation of sex trafficking victims' dreams and memories is more than an

attempt to escape—these act as the tools of endurance, as her acts of resilience will grow further to form the seeds of recovery.

Research Methodology

For the analysis of the selected text, the method of textual analysis has been adopted. Alan McKee's method of textual analysis is particularly effective for the analysis of literary works of fiction. It is because of an emphasis on how the meaning is constructed within the texts rather than an assumption of a single and fixed interpretation. McKee (2003), in his book titled '*Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide'*, argued that the text generates multiple possible meanings while holding a solid structure, as it completely depends on the cultural context, other than reader positioning, as well as the discursive frameworks.

This approach is most valuable for fictional research, as within works of fiction, symbolism, narrative voice, and characterization in connection with the thematic layering invite diverse interpretations. Through its focus on the patterns of representation, linguistic choices of the author, and the underlying ideologies, this method allows the researchers to systematically understand how a work of fiction, either a novel or a short story, can produce meaning and engage with the broader social, political, or cultural discourses.

Furthermore, McKee's model of textual analysis also encourages close attention to the internal structures of the selected text in the form of plot development, dialogue, and imagery. Meanwhile, it also situates the work within a suitable historical and cultural context. This balance is the reason why it is highly suitable for the analysis of literary fiction, reflecting or presenting critiques on the societal norms. Instead of treating literature as merely an aesthetic, the method of textual analysis recognizes it as a place where meanings are not only understood but also negotiated as well as contested.

Discussion and Data Analysis

"Resilience" as a concept is defined by Graham as: "the capacity to bend with the wind, go with the flow" and to "bounce back from adversity," there are several experiences of trauma that leave the people "*susceptible to falling apart quite easily*" and "*being unable to recover*" (Graham, 2018, p. 17). Lakshmi, the protagonist of McCormick's "*Sold*," offers her readers a heartbreaking tale of female trauma and resilience in the rawest form. Lakshmi, the girl at the heart of this tale of psychological trauma and resilience, is a thirteen-year-old girl from Nepal who is raised in poverty. She sees her mother working from morning to evening while her stepfather gets to be the man of the house. From a very young age, she observes her

mother playing all these roles all day long "*trudges up and down the mountain, a heavy basket braced on her bac*k" (McCormick, 2006, p.14). Seeing her mother this way has made Lakshmi more sensitive than girls of her age; she sees her mother "*bending under the weight of her own burden*" (McCormick, 2006, p. 14). While she works all day, at night she serves "*my stepfather's dinner, she kneels at his feet*" (McCormick, 2006, p.14). While her mother's days and nights were filled with duties and responsibilities, like "*oiling his hair, puts on his vest and wristwatch, who goes up the hill to play cards, talk politics and drink tea"* (McCormick, 2006, p.15). The juxtaposition of the roles presented by McCormick presents us with insight into the gender roles of both men and women that become the source of learning and oppression for young girls at a very young age.

Lakshmi further digs into her observation of the gender roles in her village, where "*time was marked by women's work and women's woes*." They had to climb mountains, bring firewood, feed their kids, and endure hunger. Women are also the ones to bear children and to "*bury the children who die from coughing*" (McCormick, 2006, p.17). As readers see Lakshmi's world through her eyes, it is quite evident that she has internalized trauma as a way of a woman's life, as they are the one dealing with hunger, pain, work, children, household, and husbands. It becomes quite evident that to be a woman is to learn endurance. Lakshmi learnt it from seeing her mother, who had buried four babies, that women must be thankful for the least they receive, i.e., a shelter. The next strategy device to torture her was "*starve her until submission*" (p.96). After the physical torture, shaving of her head, and abuse did not work, Mumtaz decided to starve her until she submits to being with men. Here once again, Lakshmi had to shift her response to further strengthen her resilience as she decided not to give up, as she "already knew hunger".

It was her *"memories and imagination*" once again to her rescue, strengthening her resilience. She already knew hunger, as she had been living through starvation for most of her life. She calls up all her memories to reorient her direction and decide her response to this new challenge with resilience.

> "I also know how to swallow my spit and pretend that it is soup and how to tie your waistcloth so tight that, at least for a few hours, you can fool your belly into thinking it's full." (McCormick, 2006, p.96).

She was kept in the locked room for a long time, where each morning and each evening "*Mumtaz comes, beats her up with a leather strap"* (McCormick, 2006, p.94). She was imprisoned, that too is in isolation, and her only crime was to dream of a better life for her family. She was abused, beaten, and locked like an animal. At that time, it was her memory that helped her stay strong and resilient. It was her mother, the memory, as each

night she dreamed of her mother, both sitting outside their hut, while she "*is twining her hair into long dark braids*" (McCormick, 2006, p.94). According to Graham, memories play an extremely significant role in resilience building, i.e., living in the world of imagination where you can be anyone and do anything. Memory is one of the most powerful tools for resilience, as Lakshmi was able to endure all the beatings while seeking refuge from her dreams and memories of her mother, one person who loved her unconditionally. It was her power of imagination and her memories that she stood up to Mumtaz without giving in, for she was only a fragile girl, after all.

Memories play an extremely important role in the process of resilience building as "'*memory deconsolidation- reconsolidation' has been the basis of trauma therapy for decades*" (McCormick, 2006, p.29). Graham argued in her framework for resilience building that negative memories are much more powerful and make you re-experience trauma as compared to positive memories. However, in the case of Lakshmi, her positive memories were the only source of hope and resilience as it was her way of sticking to her identity, a way to not lose herself to this "*dirty business*". So, after every dark night, she faced her trauma and shared the way to survive.

> "Between the twilights, unwrapped my bundle from home and buried my face in the fabric of my old skirt. I inhale deeply, drinking in the scent of mountain sunshine... I breathe in the cool Himalayan breeze, a smell that crackles with the premise of warm tea and fresh roti" (McCormick, 2006, p.109).

These memories had healing powers as she was it appealed to all her senses, bringing sensations to her mind her body whether it is her sense of smell, taste, touch, breathing into her old clothes brought back home to her using her strong power of imagination she was transported back to the time when life was simpler, easier and she looked forward to life.
These memories, empowered by her imagination, gave her a sense of relief as, after breathing in all the scents and smells of home through whatever source available, she says that now "*I can get by, until the next twilight"* (McCormick, 2006, p. 109). Not only her resilience, but rather her survival in that brothel was possible due to these memories of her home, dreams of her mother, and imagination of a meal freshly cooked with love. As she said, this is what kept her going, kept her alive until the next day.

Memories of her past helped her to stay connected to her origin. To have a sense of identity so that she does not lose herself to a mere shadow of what she used to be. Remembering her old life, the life before she was forced into this life of disgust, shame, and trauma, kept her sane. It was her way of staying resilient amidst chaos; she kept trying to remember the "*velvet of Tali's pink nose, the rough-edged notch in the school bench, the tinkling music of ama's earrings. The silver white sheen of the mountain in*

moonlight" (McCormick, 2006, p.114). All these images, the memories of her life as an innocent mountain girl, were necessary to reassure her that she is still that girl, she is still her mother's daughter, and she belonged somewhere. It was her way of staying rooted, keeping in touch with the hope for the life snatched from her.

While memories were her refuge in times when she was on the verge of losing herself, it was not that easy to seek refuge and stay resilient through her memories, as she noticed that her memories were fading, slipping away from her with the passage of time.

> *"*At first, the recollections were unbidden. Soon, though, I had to work to recall them. But eventually, with much tracing and retracing, they became threadbare, thin as the blanket on my bed, until one day my heart nearly stopped when I could not summon them up" (McCormick, 2006, p.114).

As indicated, it was a frightening thing for her when she could not recall her memories; the memories that helped her go through her days and nights without breaking down. Memories in this context become part of Lakshmi's somatic resilience as Graham defines somatic intelligence as "*the innate intelligence of your body — involves using body-based tools, such as breath, touch, movement, and visualization, to manage the stress and survival responses of your nervous system*" (McCormick, 2006, p.37). Memories of her past were her way of managing her stress, it was her survival, her resilience as after facing the episode where she was unable to recall her memories, she developed a system as she "*practiced these memories each morning and each night*" just like one is asked to remember the miasmatical drills (based on Measma theory) (McCormick, 2006, p.114).

Positive memories for people facing trauma have a very relaxing effect. However, there were some images, some memories she wanted to get rid of, "one stubborn memory" that nudged the other out of her head. It was the memory of her "*ama's face as she imagined the comfort of a tin roof"* (McCormick, 2006, p.114). And that is the time she identified that if it is challenging to remember, it is rather next to impossible if one is "trying to forget" as it is just like "*trying to hold back the monsoon*" (McCormick, 2006, p.114). The painful memories kept visiting her as well, while she wanted to hold on to the pleasant ones only.

When Lakshmi comes to live with the rest of the girls of Happiness House, it is beyond her understanding how the girls go on to pretend as if they were living a normal life, "*clapping, cheering, and crackling like hens*" (McCormick, 2006, p.124). They watch TV and seem to enjoy it too. Many of the women have kids as well, and the ones who do not have kids "treat them like pets, buying them sweets". Everything she sees surprises her and Lakshmi unable to understand the workings of this brothel asks her why everyone

behaves the way they do and she is given a response that *"we all need to pretend, if we donor pretend how would we live"* i.e. the strong imagination, the role play where they all pretended to be a part of family, a community as if it is their own choice is not because this is how they felt. It was because it gave them the sense of relief from the painful reality that they did not want to accept and run away from (McCormick, 2006, p.124). Hence, along with the memories and dreams, the strong sense of imagination was one of the techniques used by the sex trafficking victims living across the brothel to survive, to live, and find some relief. It was their way of resilience in the face of collective trauma (Shalev & Freedman, 2005).

As time passes by, Lakshmi was now become used to her new life as she no longer noticed the smell of the indoor privy. The blows of Mumtaz's strap do not bother her as well. The memories of her home, of her old self were also leaving her as when she "buried my face in the bundle of clothes from home, there was no hearth smoke in the folds of my skirt, no crisp Himalayan night air in my shawl" she was losing her imagination, her memories with each passing day and she already predicted that this might happen and this is the only reason why she was "*not daring to unwrap the bundle more than once a day, for the fear that it would lose its magic*", the magic she is referring to is the magic of being transported back in time, the time when she was an innocent girl, the girl who was pure and innocent, the girl who was not violated every day by multiple men (McCormick, 2006, p.126). It was the magic she needed to survive, the magic that gave her the strength to live for another day. However, the deeper she was getting into the quicksand of brothel life; she could see her coming that one day, this day, "*it became just a rag skirt and tattered shawl*" (McCormick, 2006, p.130). The strength and resilience she needed from this clothing had already been received. Now she was able to live with herself; she was not dependent on her clothing to remind her of her home; she carried it within her heart now.

While memories played a very significant role in the survival of Lakshmi when she was brought to the brothel, it was her sense of imagination that she had learnt and experienced, which became her way of resilience against trauma. As she was forced into this life, the life she could not stand, even in her worst nightmares, she had to find a way, using her strong sense of imagination, she took refuge. At times, it was a game of pretension, where she pretended.

> That's what goes on at night when the customers are here, it's not something that is happening to me, I pretend it is a TV show that I am watching from far away. I pretend I have a button I press to make everything go quiet. And another one that makes me disappear (McCormick, 2006, p.133).

This helps her mind find peace and get a sense of relief, even if it was only for a short time. It helped her live thinking as if it were not her life, but rather a character she happened to live in the body of. To a very huge extent, it was true, and it was quite literally something she could not have done if it were not to her. It was the cruelty of circumstances that she was stuck in the life she never wanted for herself. Other than using her imagination to sign off and stay blank, she also used her power of imagination to entertain herself, and even enjoyed it for a brief time. The young boy, son of Pushpa, and a few sex workers went to the school. When he was out playing, Lakshmi would steal from him. However, it was not money that she stole; it was his life. "While the other girls watch TV, I take his brightly coloured storybook and make it mine" she did not understand the words, pictures did not seem to make sense to her As well however above everything only for a few moments "*I pretended as if I am in school, with Gita and my soft moon-faced teacher, and I am number one girl in the class*" (McCormick, 2006, p.132). She was in another world whenever she was holding this book, just like her memories of home in the past, this book also possessed magical powers for her as she was transported into an alternative reality where everything was different and she was living a life she wished to live. She "*lingered on to her make-believe school*", her imagination running riot, giving her soul the strength it needed. The fire in her was still there, and the strength of her imagination proved that (McCormick, 2006, p.133).

When we talk about imagination in the context of McCormick's characters, the trafficking and manipulated women in her work are guarded by this bubble of imagination in multiple ways. A minor character named Monica, in a conversation with Lakshmi, told her that she was the mother of a girl, and her daughter was able to afford school because of her. She said to her*, "My little one can write, I am paying her school fees. I paid for her medicine, Monica says, and for an operation for my father and for a pair of spectacles for my sister*" (McCormick, 2006, p.142). While Monica went on to share how she contributed to the well-being of her family, Lakshmi responded that "*I am buying a new roof for my family*," thinking and imagining their families in prosperity, being able to afford things that they couldn't otherwise give them the sense of peace and satisfaction. In their imagination, they were the heroes not only of their own stories but also in the lives of their loved ones, who would not have wanted anything more. Monica continued to say, "*they will thank us and Honor just when we go home*" (McCormick, 2006, p.152). In their imagination, fantasies, they were returning home as victors, where they were warmly welcomed. Their sacrifices will be acknowledged, and they will be respected for what they endured for the sake of their families. However, it was all only a dream as none of this could ever happen.

The truth was that they couldn't live the life they dreamed of, as when Monica left for her home after years of imprisonment, she returned in no time. She was smiling, it is the anger filled happiness as she told Lakshmi that her father is going just fine, however, he

might "*need a cane*" as she revealed her "*arms and shoulders covered in angry purple bruises*" It was her father who beat her up with his cane. Lakshmi was confused, and shocked as she had only imagined her father thanking her for everything she did for them but Monica told her that "*when they heard I was coming, they met me outside the village and begged me not to come back and disgrace them"* and as far as her daughter was concerned it was also taken care of as "*they had told her that I (Monica) was dead*" (McCormick, 2006, p.163). While the girls, counting their days in this brothel, imagined their lives once they were free, it was only a far-fetched dream for them to live a normal life after living the life they did. While they imagined their families welcoming them warmly in their dreams, they were rather beaten and rejected, only to understand that what they were handing on to as their last hope was only a far-fetched dream, a fragment of their imagination that could never become reality. It is when the narrative progresses that the readers come to this realization that even after suffering several disappointments and heartbreaks, it was the only possibility for them to continue to be alive, i.e., by believing in those dreams, imaginations, and hopes kept them alive.

Findings and Conclusion

Through detailed textual analysis of the selected text, it is revealed that memories, dreams, and imaginations of the victims of sex trafficking do play a very significant role in resilience building. While resilience is defined as "the capacity to bend with the wind, go with the flow, bounce back from adversity" (Graham, 2018, p.17), it is the memories of their past, of good times, of their families that keep them going, help them adapt and tolerate what comes their way. While McCormick portrays the victim's characters as weak and vulnerable, the ones who are used to the abuse, it is observed that the characters mature as they experience the brutality of the world (Seery, 2011). However, to stay sane and to keep going, it is necessary for one to believe in miracles, and stay hopeful for circumstances to be favourable, and for this strength, one may seek help from their past, their unconscious, as well as their optimism towards the world that we live in.

Most specifically in the selected work of fiction, it is presented through Lakshmi's character that resilience is a choice that is made by the victim throughout their victimhood. Lakshmi, being a naive young girl from the mountains of Nepal, made a choice to seek her resilience. Whether it was in the form of her refusal to accept rape or her unbreakable will as she was isolated and starved, it all gives the audience an indication of a resilient soul, one that tends to endure and to fight back in ways that one may not imagine. Whether it was the power of her imagination that took her to her classroom or her dreams that transported her to her home, her mother, Lakshmi, had mastered the art of resilience through the years she spent in the brothel as a sex trafficking victim in the selected work of fiction.

References

Adichie, C. N. (2013). *Americanah*. Alfred A. Knopf.

Barrett, D. (2009). *The committee of sleep: How artists, scientists, and athletes use dreams for creative problem solving—and how you can too*. Oneiroi Press.

Barrett, D. (Ed.). (1996). *Trauma and dreams***.** Harvard University Press. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11013-009-9137-3

Brewin, C. R., Dalgleish, T., & Joseph, S. (1996). A dual representation theory of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Psychological Review, 103*(4), 670–686.

Delbo, C. (1995). *Auschwitz and After*. Yale University Press.

Dickson, M. (2020). Dickens's nightmare: Dreams, memory and trauma. *Interface Focus, 10*(3), 20190076. https://doi.org/10.1098/rsfs.2019.0076

Dobbin, A., & Ross, S. (2019). The role of memory in self-identity and emotional regulation: A review. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10***,** 2039. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02039

Graham, L. (2013). *Bouncing back: rewiring your brain for maximum resilience and well-being*. New World Library. http://www.books24x7.com/marc.asp?bookid=58238

Graham, L. (2018). *Resilience: Powerful practices for bouncing back from disappointment, difficulty, and even disaster*. New World Library.

Hanif, S., & Ullah, I. (2018). War trauma, collective memory, and cultural productions in conflict zones: Kashmir in focus. *SAGE Open, 8*(3). https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244018800912

Herman, J. L. (1992). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence—from domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.

Hicks, M., Simonds, L. M., & Morison, L. (2024). The effectiveness of imagery rescripting interventions for military veterans with nightmares and sleep disturbances: A systematic review and meta-analysis**.** *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy, 31*(4), e3025. https://doi.org/10.1002/cpp.3025

Janoff-Bulman, R. (1992). *Shattered assumptions: towards a new psychology of trauma*. Free Press; Maxwell Macmillan Canada; Maxwell Macmillan International.

Krakow, B., Hollifield, M., Johnston, L., Koss, M., Schrader, R., Warner, T. D., & Cheng, D. (2001). Imagery rehearsal therapy for chronic nightmares in sexual assault survivors with PTSD: A randomized controlled trial. *JAMA, 286*(5), 537–545. https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.286.5.537

Leckie, L. R., Alharthi, S. A., Shah, A., & Yu, M. (2024). *The content and structure of dreams are coupled to affect: A natural language processing study. arXiv.* https://arxiv.org/abs/2409.14279

Levine, P. A. (2010). *In an unspoken voice: How the body releases trauma and restores goodness*. North Atlantic Books.

Luckhurst, R. (2008). *The trauma question*. Routledge.

McAdams, D. P., & McLean, K. C. (2013). Narrative identity. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 22*(3), 233–238. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721413475622

McCormick, P. (2006). *Sold*. Hyperion.

McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis: A beginner's guide*. SAGE Publications.

McKinnon, M. C., & Levine, B. (2021, June 21). Remembering disaster without being shattered: Narrative coherence and PTSD. *Wired*. https://www.wired.com/story/remember-disaster-without-being-shattered-ptsd-covid

Panter-Brick, C., Eggerman, M., Gonzalez, V., & Safdar, S. (2015). Violence, suffering, and resilience in Afghan children. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 56*(1), 71–83.

Randazzo, C., & Ammari, T. (2025). *Kintsugi-inspired design: Identity reconstruction post-trauma* [Preprint]. arXiv. https://arxiv.org/abs/2503.17639

Rubin, D. C., Boals, A., & Berntsen, D. (2010). Memory in posttraumatic stress disorder: Properties of voluntary and involuntary, traumatic and nontraumatic autobiographical memories in people with and without PTSD symptoms. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 139*(4), 569–586.

Schepp, C. (2016). In the suitcase was a boy: Representing transnational child trafficking in contemporary crime fiction. In A. Hall & J. M. Pollard (Eds.), *The representation of children in contemporary crime fiction* (pp. 89–105). Palgrave Macmillan.

Schönfelder, C. (2023). Decolonizing trauma theory: *Adichie's Americanah* and the reshaping of the trauma narrative. *Arcadia, 58*(2), 227–245.

Seery, M. D. (2011). Resilience: A silver lining to experiencing adverse life events? *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 20*(6), 390–394. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721411424740

Shalev, A. Y., & Freedman, S. (2005). PTSD following terrorist attacks: A prospective evaluation. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 162*(6), 1188–1191. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.162.6.1188

Tedeschi, R. G., & Calhoun, L. G. (1995). *Trauma and transformation: Growing in the aftermath of suffering*. Sage Publications.

U.S. Department of State. (2022). *Trafficking in persons report 2022*. https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-trafficking-in-persons-report/

Ullah, I., & Kamran, R. (2021). Spatial memory and traumatic unspeakability in postcolonial narratives. *Kashmir Journal of Language Research, 24*(1), 89–105. https://kjlr.pk/index.php/kjlr/article/view/89

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2020). *Global report on trafficking in persons 2020***.** https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/glotip.html

Van der Kolk, B. A. (2014). *The body keeps the score: Brain, mind, and body in the healing of trauma*. Viking.

Van Schie, K., & Anderson, M. C. (2017). Successfully controlling intrusive memories is harder when control must be sustained. *Memory, 25*(9), 1201–1216. https://doi.org/10.1080/09658211.2017.1282518

Whitehead, A. (2004). *Trauma fiction*. Edinburgh University Press.

Zabuzhko, O. S., & Shevchuk, Murray, N. (Trans.). (2012). *The museum of abandoned secrets*. AmazonCrossing.

Noreen Zainab is a Lecturer (Ph.D. Scholar), Bahria University, Islamabad, Foundation University, Islamabad.

Prof. Dr. Shaheena Ayub Bhatti is a Professor, Department of English, Foundation University, Islamabad.