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DOI Number of the Paper: <https://zenodo.org/records/17200397>

Edition Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH, 5\(3\) Jul-Sep 2025](#)

Link of the Paper: <https://jar.bwo-researches.com/index.php/jarh/article/view/564>

HJRS Link: [Journal of Academic Research for Humanities JARH \(HEC-Recognized for 2024-2025\)](#)

CONDITIONING, DECONDITIONING & RECONDITIONING: A STUDY OF RESILIENCE BUILDING AMONG SEX TRAFFICKING VICTIMS IN PATRICIA MCCORMICK'S 'SOLD'

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Paper Information

Citation of the paper:

(JARH) Zainab. N., & Bhatti. S. A.. (2025). Conditioning, Deconditioning & Reconditioning: A study of resilience building among sex trafficking victims in Patricia McCormick's 'Sold'. In *Journal of Academic Research for Humanities*, 5(3), 54-64.

Subject Areas for JARH:

- 1 Humanities
- 2 English Literature

Timeline of the Paper at JARH:

Received on: 25-07-2025.
Reviews Completed on: 19-09-2025.
Accepted on: 22-09-2025.
Online on: 25-09-2025.

License:



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Recognized for BWO-R:



HEC Journal
Recognition System

Published by BWO Researches INTL:



DOI Image of the paper:

DOI [10.5281/zenodo.15649213](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15649213)

QR Code for the Paper:



Abstract

Sex trafficking remains one of the most serious violations of human rights, with women and girls across the globe as victims, causing profound psychological trauma. While much research has focused on the physical and structural aspects of trafficking, there is little focus on the inner psychological resilience of victims through literary depiction. This paper, therefore, attempts to explore the psychological resilience in Patricia McCormick's novel *Sold* (2006), represented through Lakshmi's character. Focused on Linda Graham's neurobiological model of inner resilience, the study takes into account the stages of conditioning, deconditioning, and reconditioning presented in her model. McCormick's dramatic presentation of Lakshmi's mental evolution from helplessness to agency is analyzed in this study. Using the method of textual analysis, the novel is shown to foreground transitional stages of female victims of sex trafficking alongside changes in their attitude as key mechanisms of resilience. Supporting frameworks from trauma theory and post-traumatic growth, the psychological journey of Lakshmi is further contextualized. Highlighting literature's capacity to humanize trauma and the survival of trafficking victims, this research contributes to the interdisciplinary discourse on gendered violence, resilience, and the transformative power of narrative. The analysis reveals that Lakshmi's resilience is enacted by reconditioning her mind through trauma.

Keywords: sex trafficking, psychological trauma, resilience, narrative, Linda Graham, conditioning, deconditioning, reconditioning.

*She outgrew the cage.
They built for her
The day she realized
She was the sky.*

-By Lang Leav

Introduction

Sex trafficking remains one of the most brutal and pervasive forms of human exploitation in the 21st century, disproportionately affecting women and girls across the globe. It is defined by the United Nations as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, and/or receipt of persons through coercion, abduction, fraud, or abuse of power for sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking operates through complex social, economic, and psychological mechanisms (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2020). According to the Global Estimates on human trafficking (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022), nearly 6.3 million people were trapped in forced commercial sexual exploitation in 2021, of which 77% were female, and most of these women were under the age of 24. Victims are not only physically enslaved but also psychologically conditioned into submission and isolation, through chronic abuse, threats and manipulation. The consequences of sex trafficking extend beyond the immediate physical trauma, leaving long-term psychological scars and challenges such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), dissociation, depression, and complex grief (Hopper & Gonzalez, 2018; Oram et al., 2012).

Despite the profound impact of this crime, the interior psychological lives of trafficking victims—particularly their potential for psychological resilience—are often overlooked in policy, media, and even academic discourse as they are presented as victims of trauma lacking willpower or strength. The narratives written on the subject explore how trafficked individuals, especially women, confront and gradually disrupt the imprisoning cycle of psychological conditioning imposed by their oppressors, leading to a slow process of reclaiming their agency and self-worth.

Patricia McCormick's novel, *sold* (2006), serves as a seminal text in this regard, offering a deeply personal and emotionally evocative account of a young girl, Lakshmi, who is trafficked from rural Nepal into a brothel in India. Written in a series of poetic vignettes, the novel presents not just the horrific realities of child sex trafficking but also Lakshmi's internal psychological journey from conditioned obedience to

the stirrings of resilience and reconditioning. Her story becomes a literary enactment of psychological resilience, framed through her memories of home, dreams of escape, and reimagination of self. The novel underscores the ways through which conditioning, deconditioning, and reconditioning are not only behavioural phenomena but also the narrative processes that reflect the neurobiological and emotional evolution of a trauma survivor.

This paper explores the literary representation of psychological resilience among sex trafficking victims in *Sold*, using Linda Graham's neurobiological model of resilience as the core theoretical framework. By analysing the work of literature and character experiences of protagonists through the stages of conditioning, deconditioning, and reconditioning, this study aims to illuminate the powerful intersections of trauma literature, psychology, as well as human rights. Ultimately, this research contributes to the growing field of trauma and resilience studies in literature, bringing attention to how fiction can bear witness to the realities of sex trafficking while offering models of emotional and cognitive recovery towards the journey of resilience building.

Literature Review

The literature on trauma reveals the complex psychological mechanisms as it helps the individual's transition from subjugation to survival through the internal processes of conditioning, deconditioning and reconditioning, while Linda Graham's neurobiological model of resilience (2013) provides the understanding for resilience as the learned process of neural development for learning, unlearning and relearning of their mental capabilities and capacities. Graham emphasized various forms of intelligence that help in building resilience among victims of trauma. While this study explores the journey of protagonist Lakshmi, from Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006), other works of literature have been approached previously using similar frameworks to explore the experiences of trauma and the journey towards resilience presented by authors.

Similar to the study conducted by Sevilla-Vallejo (2023), Eslit and Villanueva's research titled *Resilience in the Face of Crisis: A Literary Exploration of Pandemic Novels* (2024) examined pandemic fiction using the lens of resilience theory, postmodernism, and the Marxist theory of textual interpretation. The thematic analysis in this study

showcases how novels set up the symbols of survival and collective endurance to articulate resilience while in the middle of societal collapse (Eslit & Villanueva, 2024). This study, although focused on crisis literature, offers robust methodological tools that can be adapted to many other settings.

Resilience is a process that is best understood and further shaped through the acknowledgment and adaptation of the powerful voice. Murtaza and Nanj (2023), in their research, present the idea that trauma, in the form of child sexual abuse, blocks healing and weakens their resilience when it is silenced. In contrast to their idea, Wilson and Johnson (2023) reviewed the literary depictions of trauma to argue that the recognition of pain is the pathway through which recovery is shown, further leading towards empowerment. Another research work supports this idea by connecting it with their finding that resilience does help in reducing the stress for highly sensitive people (Iqbal, 2024). Davis and Miller (2022) further add to this point that trafficked women often show resilience through their reclamation of agency in their personal narratives instead of being seen as mere victims. Linked to each other, these studies very clearly point out that resilience is not a fixed idea—it may also grow with the help of acknowledgment, i.e. a simple act of giving voice.

Resilience may also be observed to develop within the spiritual, cultural and literary contexts. Sarwar, Khurram, and Fayyaz (2023) found through their research that simple practices such as gratitude can bring in resilience in everyday life, while Basman (2024) showed in his work that the faith-based approaches are often observed to encourage posttraumatic growth for humanitarian workers. Within the South Asian women's writing, Kapoor and Singh (2023) highlighted how the narratives related to trauma are transformed into collective strength, showcasing resilience in both forms, i.e. personal and shared. Thompson (2024) expands this view by building the connection of neuroscience with culture, to ultimately offer a broader way to understand resilience across different disciplines. Ahmad (2024) also demonstrates, through the character of Mary Tyrone, how literature portrays both suffering and endurance. Herman and Hirsch (2001) remind us that memory itself can serve as resilience when it bears witness to trauma and protects against forgetting. Taken together, these perspectives show resilience as a holistic process—built through psychology, culture, spirituality, and the ethics of remembering.

Many works of literature are based on female characters who present resilience alongside trauma to help understand both phenomena in relation to each other. In the context of South Asian literature, Fatma's study, focusing on the comparative analysis of trauma and resilience in works such as *A Fine Balance*, foregrounds how the characters build resilience with the help of social relationships and cultural resources (Fatma, 2025). While this study worked on resilience building through relationships, a study of resilience in Charlotte Delbo's survivor narratives conducted by Rosario Arias (2017) focused on survivor narratives and showcased that works of autobiographies within literature embody resilience through the help of artistic memory as well as narrative dialogue with trauma.

Studies with a focus on the humanities are also complemented by research works adapting the 'post-traumatic growth' framework within literature on resilience. It has been reported that 50–70% of individuals report positive psychological change using the method of post traumatic growth after adversity; cognitive processing as well as social support play a significant role in fostering PTG (Wu et al., 2019; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), conceptually linked with the reconstruction of narrative identity, personal strength, and relational growth—all of the qualities quite frequently explored in trauma fiction (Frontiers, 2022; Bitar et al., 2024).

Based on the frameworks of resilience from psychology and cross-disciplinary research, the analysis of literature can very effectively identify and analyze how the characters adapt and endure alongside the reconstruction of meaning through narrative. Bhamra, Dani, and Burnard's cross-disciplinary review of resilience (2011) presents resilience as both a process and an outcome, shaped by the individual capacity and contextual influences—a definition that is readily applicable to the literary characters (Bhamra et al., 2011). This review provides a theoretical foundation to interpret narrative agency and adaptability as they emerge within fiction. In contrast, Rutter's dynamic conceptualization of resilience (2012) and McCleary and Figley's trauma narratives collection (2017) also provide useful frameworks for narrative resilience, although their focus is not strictly literary. These works help bridge the psychological theory with the literary form, to support the argument that fictional survivorship can mirror real psychological processes.

This research work not only intends to identify

the patterns of resilience among the victims of sex trafficking through their representation in literature but also focuses on the impact of their childhood, upbringing and the role of parents in becoming resilient post-trauma. Hence, this study intends to generate a dialogue on the significance of strong parenting and resilient upbringing while shedding light on the possibilities of recovery and resilience post-trauma.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive literary analysis grounded in trauma theory and resilience psychology. Using a closed textual analysis model by Alan McKee as the primary method, the research analysis of Patricia McCormick's *Sold* (2006) examines how psychological resilience is constructed and expressed through narrative form, character development, and thematic symbolism.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical grounding for this study is [Linda Graham's \(2013\)](#) neurobiological model of resilience, which conceptualizes resilience as a learned, adaptive process that can be cultivated through emotional regulation, reflective awareness, and relational safety. Graham outlines a three-stage framework: conditioning, in which trauma hardwires the brain into fear-based responses; deconditioning, where these patterns begin to be interrupted; and reconditioning, where the brain rewires itself for safety, connection, and meaning. This framework will help analyze Lakshmi's psychological evolution. Another relevant framework is the post-traumatic growth theory proposed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995), which identifies positive psychological change resulting from the struggle with trauma, including increased personal strength, deeper relationships, and spiritual development. These theoretical perspectives together provide a robust framework for understanding how literature can depict trauma not only as a site of suffering, but as a space for resilience and transformation.

Textual Analysis

While "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](#)). McCormick's *"Sold"* offers 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 as all day long her mother *"trudges up and down the mountain, a heavy basket braced on her back"* (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 and night, she serves her stepfather dinner as *"she kneels at his feet"* (McCormick, 2006, p.14). While her mother's days and nights are filled with duties and responsibilities, her stepfather *"oils his hair, puts on his vest and wristwatch, 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 girls at a very young age.

The concept of *"response flexibility"* is presented by Graham in resilience theory, where she says that *"we see people closest to us, i.e. parents, family members, friends, teachers who demonstrate their capacity to cope with distress."* (McCormick, 2006, p.65). This process is the way nature efficiently helps our brain learn to regulate its own nervous system, the way it is regulated by the people in our surroundings. When Lakshmi is being trafficked across the border by a man who instructs her to call him *"uncle husband,"* she does not question him, nor does she find it unsettling. Later, he gave her a command that *"from now on, I will be your uncle, but you must call me husband"* (McCormick, 2006, p 69). She didn't trust him, but she nodded in agreement as she was conditioned to agree to everything that was told to her, especially by a man. She did not trust the man, but rather was afraid of him, but she felt *"grateful that he will protect me from the border men with guns"* (McCormick, 2006, p.69). He asked her to pretend to be his wife to get through the security, and she complied. This is because it was the only way she knew to survive, by accepting and never questioning the authority of a man. She had learned from her mother, growing up, that the mere presence of a man is worth your gratefulness. In this instance, she was able to recognize the danger; she could sense it very close to her, and therefore she

did not resist, nor did she dare to question why she was being told to treat a man as her husband and her uncle at the same time.

The next time she sensed an extensive sense of danger was the day she was sold to a customer for the first time at the brothel she arrived at. She was young, but not young enough to not recognize danger when it was standing right in front of her eyes. She "looked down at her red-painted nails and new shoes" and said to herself, *"Something is not right here. I don't know what is going on, but it's not right, not right at all"* (McCormick, 2006, p.89). As a matter of fact, she was right as she was forced into a room and thrown to the bed, only to be raped by the old man who had paid the price for her. As she was held down with *"the strength of ten men,"* she *"Cannot see or move or breathe"* (McCormick, 2006, p.90). It is a moment of enlightenment for her as realization hits her when the man violates her and tries to rape her. At that moment, when she *"gasped for air, kicked and squirmed,"* he thrust his tongue into her mouth. What happened next stunned everyone as she recorded her resilience and *"bit it down with all her might"*. While the man cried out in pain, she ran away, she was *"running down the hall, past the other girls, losing my fancy city shoes, until I am back in the room where I started, pulling my old clothes out of my bundle"* (McCormick, 2006, p.90).

To make it impossible for her to escape as a disgraced woman with a shaved head. *"She held still"* while her hair was being cut, *"soon she had the shaved head of a disgraced woman"* (McCormick, 2006, p.93). When they finally leave, leaving her alone in the locked room, it is her reaction that stuns the readers as she says that *"I pound on the door, I howl like an animal, I pray. I pace the room; I kick the door. But I do not cry"* (McCormick, 2006, p.93). In this instance, it is quite shocking to witness her resilience as she refuses to shed a single tear, a girl at such a tender age, away from her home, her mother, her country, violated, locked, shaved, and she refuses to cry as if it were a choice. She shows her resilience by refusing to accept her helplessness.

According to Graham, *"the key to coping with the situation is how we shift our perception,"* i.e. our attitude as well as our response/behaviour. And there is a huge possibility that the external stressors will continue to intervene, and negative messages about our coping will continue. This also needs to be the motivating factor for the shift in attitude and perception is how we strengthen our resilience

(Graham, 2018, p. 24). In this specific case, Lakshmi, after realizing her situation and its limitations, became resilient in ways one couldn't imagine. At first, we observe the shift in her response as she decides not to shed a single tear. After that initial response, she further navigates her strategies and decides that no matter what her body endures, she will not become part of this *"dirty business"*. She is brutally beaten, and when *"Mumtaz comes to her room, she sees that her strap has left raw sores on her back, neck, arms and legs"* so she decides to hit her on the soles of her feet (McCormick, 2006, p.92).

To tolerate this level of torture at such a tender age is beyond one's imagination, so the next day, when she comes to beat her up, *she sees that there is no part of me (Lakshmi) unmarked by her strap,"* so she asked the question once again, hoping all her beatings might have changed Lakshmi's mind. However, she shook her head once again in disagreement (McCormick, 2006, p.96). An ability to stand her ground after enduring continuous physical and mental trauma is resilience in its most raw form. Lakshmi was ready to go to any extent and endure all forms of physical pain to deny abuse. The next thought that comes to her mind right after reorienting her path was that *"Mumtaz, with her doughy waist and fat mango face, doesn't know the match she's met in me"* (McCormick, 2006, p.96). This thought does not come from the place of pride, but rather the strength of her will and persistence towards her resilience. She was resilient whatsoever, in the face of pain, torture, isolation, as well as starvation. Who would have known that a thirteen-year-old girl from the mountains would have her soul filled with resilience?

Graham (2018) points out in her resilience theory that our *"brain keeps learning and encoding new patterns of coping,"* it also keeps on shifting and relearning based on what works and what does not work (McCormick, 2006, p.31). Lakshmi, after making up her mind to stay firm, had to shift her attitude as she was left to starve for days. The strategy she adopted to stay firm was to restrict herself, as she said. *"I didn't let myself smell the onions frying in the kitchen... I don't permit myself to smell the aroma of the bowl of curried rice... even in my sleep, I don't allow myself to dream of even a single roti"* (McCormick, 2006, p.97).

Using this strategy she survived, coping with the pain of injuries from all the beatings, the emotional trauma of isolation as well as the starvation she was

put through for *"five days of no food and water"* she lost her dreams after five days, the dreams, where she was supposed to meet her mother, only person who loved her and she called family.

When her imagination, her dreams and memories started fading away, her Defence system started failing her, she went on survival mode. Graham talks about *"the automatic survival responses of our nervous system"*, the involuntary responses of our body, which cause us to change the course of our behaviour without any consciousness, i.e. the automated mode of survival. While Lakshmi was on the verge of life and death, she was offered a cup of tea, and she recorded her reaction. *"I sip, unwilling at first to let on how badly I want it, then I gulp it down greedily."* Seeing her reaction, the girl had to stop her, so she did not retch herself; however, *"soon, too soon, the cup is empty"* (McCormick, 2006, p.99). Although she had decided to stay strong through starvation, her automatic survival response took over when in charge.

Refusing and standing firm on her decision, Lakshmi was clinging hard to the slightest hope to dodge her fate; however, as it is noted by Graham that trauma is a *"catastrophic event"* that is quite inevitable. As readers and people with consciousness, it was quite clear that Lakshmi couldn't stay safe after being sold to a brothel, where life is brutal and unforgiving. After using all her tactics and facing failure, Mumtaz came to Lakshmi's room and said, *"I have decided to let you live,"* which could mean many things; however, in this context, she only meant that rather than killing you, I have decided to just keep your body for my financial benefit. This time, she was simply asked to drink a glass of lassi, and in a few moments she was floating as *"her arms and legs became distant things, their movements slow and liquid"* (McCormick, 2006, p.103). Once she lost all control of her body, she was sent to a customer, who *"unbuckled his belt"*. She was waiting for herself to resist, *"but nothing happens"*, as she was unable to move a single muscle of her body. In utter helplessness, she was raped for the first time. Soon she was hearing a sound that seemed quite familiar, a noise perhaps. Lakshmi recorded

"I work very hard to make it out

Finally, I identify it

It is the muffled sound of sobbing...

Then I understand: I was the person crying"

(McCormick, 2006, p.105).

The acute trauma she endured was repetitive as she did not have to cope with a one-time occurrence

and build her response; she had to reorient her direction, unlearn everything she had learnt, and this was an immensely difficult task. She was losing herself once trauma hit her with all its might. In the next few days, she was visited by many people, and she said, *"Some were real, some were not"* (McCormick, 2006, p.107). Lakshmi quite lost the track of reality and imagination, as through imagination she was trying to make sense of everything that was happening to her lately. She had a very clear imagination of all people responsible for her circumstances, including her stepfather, Baji Sita, as well as Auntie Bimla, who was her first buyer. *"They all seemed real,"* but Lakshmi knew they weren't.

While she battled with reality and imagination, she was visited by men, too, the ones who *"crushed her bones with their weight, split her open, and disappeared"* (McCormick, 2006, p.107). While she had hit rock bottom with men having their way with her and having zero control over her circumstances, it was a survival instinct of her mind, her conscience, to protect her from the pain of thinking of everything as a nightmare. It was a decision her nervous system had made for her. Being aware of it, she let herself believe that everything that she was going through was temporary and not real at all, so she could be at peace. Graham (2018) highlights this strategy as *"limited reactivity of the survival-oriented lower brain"*, as at such times when a person is hit with acute trauma, the *"functioning of the prefrontal cortex"* is shut down. Hence, her mind was unable to tell reality and imagination apart because this was a decision. As Lakshmi clearly states that *"I decide to think that it is all a nightmare. Because if what is happening is real, it is unbearable"* (McCormick, 2006, p.107). Hence, calling it a fragment of her imagination helped her cope with the pain.

While all she felt was *"hurt"*, as she was *"torn"*, she *"prayed to the gods to make the hurting go away"*. This was another one of her early entrainment and attachment conditioning, as she came from a religious family, and everything in their village required a lot of praying, whether it was a request for rain or to be bullied. In her time here, in the happiness house, she unlearned her own lesson, as said, *"no one can hear me, not even the gods."* (McCormick, 2006, p.108). This marks the transition in her thinking process as there is a shift in her attitude, her belief and her thoughts regarding what may or may not help her in current circumstances.

Religion, she was told to believe, was the solution to all human problems; however, as Lakshmi faces this trauma, she does not believe the Gods will be any help to her, as she had been involved in such dirty deeds that she was not worthy of their attention.

Reconditioning, the process of adopting new ways to strengthen your resilience. Lakshmi, in the past, had been going through several phases of trauma. However, she stood firm, not letting her circumstances break her. She defied all odds and refused to show any weakness as she did not cry. The only time she cried was the night she was raped for the first time. The time when she heard the voice of her crying, as she could not resist, she could not move any of her limbs. However, when she was told by Mumtaz that she must pay the sum of 20000 rupees in exchange for her freedom, the *"tears surged up in her eyes"* (McCormick, 2006, p.115). It was not the tears of helplessness, of misery or weakness, but rather anger and frustration as she had seen in her record book, where the figure was 10000, exactly half of what she was letting her believe. While Lakshmi is unable to understand how the women in the brothel pretend to laugh and smile, she sees the ones with kids and asks how they could live like this, to which it is responded that *"we all need to pretend, if we don't pretend, how would we live"* (McCormick, 2006, p.124). Referring to the reconditioning, these tricks and methods adopted by sex trafficking victims are their way of resilience building.

While some learnt what to do and what to say the hard way, others had to learn from the experiences of other girls, the ones who tried to leave. Such girls were the living lessons for others to re-navigate their path, decide and choose their way, keeping in view the possible consequences, i.e. Anita, a few-sex worker at a brothel who had her cheek and jaw smashed, and she *"could not smile, even if she had a reason to"* (McCormick, 2006, p.132). While there was a no-go zone, there were things one could do, rather than learn to keep the fire in their soul burning. Things that were not allowed, but one could not resist doing, for they were the bearers of hope and life for them. For Lakshmi, it was reading. When she was offered by the young boy, son of a fellow worker, to learn to read the words from his storybook, she responded in a heartbeat with a "yes". While he left with a promise for tomorrow, it was when she realized that it is after a long time that she is looking forward to something *"a tomorrow"* (McCormick, 2006, p.138).

Although Lakshmi had no control over her

circumstances, she realized she had control over her reaction to those circumstances. This realization brought her to the final stage, i.e. reconditioning of her mind, where she deliberately made this choice to think in a certain way to keep her mental health intact. She started looking at her world differently when she realized that it is all about your own perspective. When she deconditioned herself from the mindset of endurance and tolerance, something that she saw her mother doing, she elevated herself and made a conscious choice to shift her mindset. For this, she not only pretended that she had nothing to do with whatever was going on in her surroundings, the customers and the abuse. To further remove herself from reality, she pretended that *"it is a TV show that I am watching from far, far away"*, so that she could distance herself from the brutality of her circumstances. She made it seem like an easy task, so she was able to switch back and forth quite literally as well as metaphorically it is evident as she says that *"I pretend I have a button that I press to make everything go quiet"*, so she could find her mental peace, resilience in the face of abuse and trauma she was thrown into (McCormick, 2006, p.134).

While running away from your circumstances can be distressful on its own, Lakshmi rebuilt herself, reconditioned her mind to think of a different world, very much in contrast to the one she was forced to be a member of. As other members of her community, the girls who were trafficked and raped were dealing with their circumstances by only running away from the reality either in the form of drugs or alcohol, they were unable to recondition themselves and grow as individuals, they were constantly on survival mode as life was such a burden to them that only to live another day they had to take help from their addictions. Lakshmi, on the other hand, had found her purpose in learning, her education. She was learning English, and all day long she looked forward to her lesson, where she not only learnt to introduce herself in English but also started to understand many words, and understood the dynamics of holding a basic conversation in the English language.

With Harish as her teacher and guide, she learnt new patterns, new vocabulary every day, and it amused her to be a part of something significant, something useful, which she wanted to use in her future. Not only did she find a purpose in learning, but she also *"loved the way new words felt in her*

mouth," which was an achievement for her (McCormick, 2006, p.146). It was an indication that she is on the journey of deconditioning, as not only was she able to decondition her mind by blocking all the unnecessary noise, the voice that made her feel sick to her stomach, but she also took a plunge of self-improvement and was building herself towards self-worth by learning English.

Graham, in her theory of resilience, talks about interpersonal resilience where people with a history of trauma build themselves and become resilient through the power of their interpersonal communication, i.e. through the strength of powerful communal connections. While she learns the language, she also relearns to laugh with a full heart. As a victim of severe trauma, she found her solace in her classes, where, at an instance, Harish, in his struggle to make her guess a word, does an unnecessary act, which makes him laugh very hard, ultimately moving Lakshmi to laughter. When she laughs, she realizes that *"it was a strange feeling to laugh after all these months, odd and unfamiliar"* (McCormick, 2006, p.148). her laughter, and her ability to enjoy it to the fullest, acknowledging it as well, is evidence of her strength, her resilience, and the reconstruction of her character. And somehow, as odd as it may seem to her, it was *"not hard at all"* making it an embodiment of her successful reconditioning, where resilience is not the mere ability to run away from the circumstances, but rather a technique to survive, rather thrive despite the darkness of your circumstances. It is one's ability to hold onto their souls despite all the efforts of their perpetrators to kill them entirely.

Resilience, as we know it, is the art of *"thriving"* when the circumstances are not suitable. It is also your reaction to the events that are out of your control. Lakshmi was brought to this brothel, and even after staying resilient, she had to go through hell. Never in her wildest imagination would she have seen herself smiling and laughing in the same place that took away everything from her. Harish, the boy who taught her to read and write, on a festival of brothers and sisters, *hands her a shiny yellow pencil*". And there she was *"undone by the act of simple kindness of a small boy"*, as she felt the *"tear running down her cheek"* (McCormick, 2006, p.146). In the same place where she was disgraced and violated hundreds of times, she was moved to tears, undone by the unconditional love of the boy, who taught her how to read and write and thought of her as his sister.

Conclusions and Findings

An in-depth study of text helps readers in the identification of the patterns of conditioning and reconditioning, where these three stages act as the process of resilience building. While conditioning of one's mind, personality is not their own choice; deconditioning and reconditioning is the process of unlearning and relearning. We use their previous knowledge of the world as an example; people grow, evolve and become the better, stronger and more resilient versions of themselves. While resilience is defined as "your reaction to trauma," and may vary from one individual to individual. It is the deconditioning and reconditioning of one's mind that helps them shift their attitude as well. We may conclude from the textual analysis of the selected fiction that an openness towards change, rather than embracing it, can open many doors to better possibilities and opportunities for resilience in the face of atrocities.

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