

**TRAUMA ON TRIAL: THE PERFORMANCE AND SPECTACLE OF
RAPE IN NERU**



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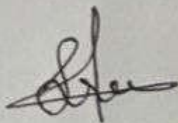

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I hereby declare that this project titled “Trauma on Trial: The Performance and Spectacle of Rape in *Neru*” is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Ms. Tessa Fani Jose, Assistant Professor, Department of English.

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Abstract

Trauma on Trial: The Performance and Spectacle of Rape in *Neru*

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This study examines how a rape survivor is “verbally raped” again inside the courtroom through victim-blaming, aggressive questioning, and character attacks that force her to relive and re-experience trauma. Using the Malayalam film *Neru* (2023) directed by Jeethu Joseph as the primary text, the project explores how the legal space, which is meant to deliver justice, often becomes another site of violence and re-traumatization for women. The analysis is carried out through Feminist Film Theory and Trauma Theory, revealing how patriarchal power shapes courtroom practices and how the survivor’s testimony becomes a painful repetition of the original assault. By closely reading key scenes, dialogues, and narrative structure, the study highlights the psychological impact of legal re-victimization and argues that *Neru* critiques the gendered cruelty embedded in judicial processes while emphasizing the need for a more survivor-sensitive approach to justice.

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Introduction

Sexual violence against women remains one of the most pervasive forms of gender-based oppression across societies and cultures. The contemporary society that is built on legal reforms and feminist activism continues to surround rape with stigma, silence and victim blaming. Feminist scholars and trauma theorists have long argued that the effect of such physical assaults do not end with the assault itself. But they posit that it seeps further into the victims suffering through societal judgements and institutional procedures. Legal systems often accentuate this by forcing the victim to narrate, defend and justify their trauma before skeptical audiences. The Malayalam cinematic universe tends to portray the legal systems as such a space where justice is not healing but rather a site of violation for women.

This project aims to undertake an analysis of the film *Neru* (2023) by Jeethu

Joseph applying the Feminist Film Theory by Laura Mulvey's and Trauma Theory by Cathy Caruth, attempting to understand how women survivor of sexual violence is often portrayed in films as an object of both visual and verbal abuse.

The movie *Neru* tells the story of Sara, a young, talented blind girl, subjected to physical abuse, fighting for justice in Kerala's courtroom while being continuously objectified and marginalized. The plot explores the resilience and strength of the physically abused girl. The

story starts with Sara being brutally raped by an intruder while she was alone at home. She can't see the abuser but understands and memorizes him through touch. Using her sculpting skills, Sara creates a clay bust of her attacker's face, leading police to arrest the criminal, Michael, an arrogant confident son of a

wealthy businessman. He tries to bribe Sara's family with a huge settlement offer, portraying his insensitivity towards his actions. The family rejects the offer and hires a lawyer named Vijayamohan (Mohanlal), a retired prosecutor returning to court after years of expulsion. He battles an arrogant and well established defence lawyer Rajashekar (Siddique), who attempts to bail out the criminal by undermining Sara.

The key courtroom drama unfolds as Sara endures vicious cross-examination by the defence lawyer, shaming her body and questioning her credibility, especially for her blindness. However, Vijayamohan through a series of trials exposes the witnesses' lie for Michael pointing at the contradictions of his alibi. Sara is often forced to narrate, recollect and justify her rape in the courtroom, casually objectifying and oppressing her. In the dramatic finale of the film, Sara is forced to justify her plea by proving her sculpting talent in the courtroom, wherein she sculpts the bust of the defence lawyer, while he verbally abuses her.

Fortunately, the court realises the truth of the case thereby legally declaring Michael for life imprisonment while Sara walks out confidently, reclaiming her dignity.

This project qualitatively analyses the film by applying the Feminist Film Theory by Laura Mulvey as explained in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). The key idea of this theory posits that mainstream cinema operates through male gaze, where men are positioned as active subjects while women become passive objects. They exercise control over the female body and voice, producing visual pleasure even from women's suffering. They ultimately reinforce patriarchal narrative authority over women. In the light of the film *Neru* the theory becomes

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relevant, as it reveals how the film challenges male dominance in legal institutions and systems.

This dissertation also applies Trauma Theory by Cathy Caruth's as explained in her book *Unclaimed Experience* (1996). This theory postulates that trauma is not fully experienced when it happens and it cannot be easily narrated nor spoken. It returns through repeated memories and flashbacks and is ultimately shaped by others' acts of listening or their failure to listen. This applies to the movie as Sara's rape is revisited in the courtroom continuously, establishing trauma in her. The theory becomes relevant since it explains how courts fail survivors through repeated recollection of their unpleasant experiences.

In addition to the key theories, this project also relies on other feminist film theorists for support. E. Ann Kaplan in *Women and Film: Both Sides of The Mirror* (1983) discusses how cameras make women

appear weak. Mary Ann Doane in *The Desire to Desire* (1987) illustrates how women are caught up in the narratives of men. Claire Johnston's essay "Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema" (1973) argues for films that resist the dominance of men (Kaplan 45-67; Doane 12-34; Johnston 29-32). For trauma studies, this research draws on Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), which outlines the process of psychological healing, Dori Laub's essays on testimony in "Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History" (1992), and Shoshana Felman's analysis of law and trauma in *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (2002) (Herman 7-15).

This research is divided into three core chapters. Chapter one is titled Interpreting Gendered Trauma: A Theoretical Framework and lays a foundational theoretical framework for this thesis. It explains Mulvey's feminist film theory and Caruth's trauma theory, postulating their argumentations. Chapter two termed Reading Power, Gaze and Justice in *Neru*, applies the Feminist Film Theory of Laura Mulvey exploring the various sequences of the film that reduces Sara into an object of male gaze and societal pleasure. Further, chapter three called Unspoken Wounds: Reading Trauma in *Neru*, applies Trauma theory of Cathy Caruth to the film, analysing the courtroom contestations as public exchanges that inflicts deep trauma in Sara.

Recently, a Karnataka MLA shocked the Rajya Sabha with a remark that "when rape is inevitable, lie down and enjoy it" laying bare the disturbing mindset that treats sexual violence as something to shrug

off or even revel in. This kind of statement feels like a verbal violation, wounding not just women who have survived rape but all women navigating a world that too often dismisses their pain. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's fierce response captured the outrage perfectly: "I wholeheartedly condemn the statement made earlier today by Sri. K.R. Ramesh Kumar. It is inexplicable how anyone can ever utter such words; they are indefensible. Rape is a heinous crime. Full stop." (Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, tweet, "NDTV").

Malayalam films like *Neru*, where courtrooms meant to deliver justice morph into sites of violation and trauma. By unpacking key courtroom trial scenes, this project argues that cinema should pivot to celebrating survivors' resilience instead of endlessly victimizing them. In doing so, it could inspire real-world courts to approach female suffering with the sensitivity

it deserves, fostering true justice and humanitarian considerations.

Chapter 1

Interpreting Gendered Trauma: A Theoretical Framework

This study examines the film *Neru* through the combined feminist and trauma informed lens by illuminating how women survivors of sexual violence endure further verbal violation within the courtroom's unforgiving confines. Rather than treating the court as an impartial bastion of justice, this research reimagines it as a charged performative and discursive space. It is where a survivor's deepest wounds are relentlessly questioned and exposed to public scrutiny. By thoughtfully integrating Feminist Film Theory and Trauma Theory, this chapter lays the groundwork for this thesis with a rich critical vocabulary and interpretive framework attuned to the dynamics of representations, power imbalances and female suffering. These lenses do not pretend to capture every nuance of cinematic storytelling or traumatic experience but they foreground the realities of gendered oppression and agonies of those who survive it, guiding the analysis through the chapters ahead.

Feminist film theory emerged in the early 1970s to study how women are portrayed in cinema and whether films support male dominance or allow women to exist as independent characters. It argues that in many mainstream films, women are not shown as autonomous individuals but are often treated as objects connected to male desire.

One of the most influential ideas in feminist film theory was introduced by Laura Mulvey in her landmark essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975), in which she developed the concept of the

“male gaze”. Mulvey argues that films are often constructed from a male point of

view, where the camera, narrative and audience attention are aligned with how men look at women. Mulvey unpacked this mechanism with piercing clarity. She explained that women in these films operate "on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium" (11). Although Mulvey primarily focuses on visual pleasure and narrative control, later scholars have extended her argument to include control over the female body and voice in films. She also discusses "pleasure in looking", by stating that "in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female" showcasing how cinema creates visual enjoyment by presenting women as objects, often linked to moments of danger, tension or suffering (11). Ultimately, the theory argues that men control the narrative in itself, revealing the patriarchal authority that shapes classical cinema.

While Mulvey's focus remained on visual pleasure and narrative mastery, subsequent feminist scholars broadened her insights to capture the full spectrum of control over women's bodies and voices. E. Ann Kaplan, in *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Mirror* (1983), critiques how Hollywood cinema constructs women as spectacles for male viewers and proposes feminist counter-strategies such as reflexive filmmaking to reclaim the gaze (Kaplan). Mary Ann Doane, in *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (1987), posits that although films in the 1940s focus on women and their experiences, they still confine women within traditional roles and portray their suffering for the gaze and sympathy of the audience. Claire Johnston, through *Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema* (1973), issued a

radical call that women filmmakers must dismantle classical forms altogether, forging narratives that grant women true strength and self-determination.

Together, these scholars reveal that feminist film theory seeks not only to critique the way women are portrayed but also to reimagine ways of viewing and representing women in cinema.

Trauma theory emerged prominent in the late twentieth century and has been studied across literature, psychology, history and cultural studies. Scholars became interested in how extreme experiences affect memory and how difficult it can be for survivors to narrate their traumatic experiences. Trauma theory does not view trauma solely as a medical or psychological issue; instead it examines it as a cultural and narrative phenomenon, showing how personal pain is shaped by social, political, and historical forces and how it is represented in texts, films, and media.

Cathy Caruth stands as a towering figure here, especially in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* ((1996). She argues that trauma exceeds complete comprehension in the instant it strikes, only to resurface later through flashbacks, memories and nightmares. Caruth observes that, "The pathology consists, rather, solely in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (4).

Trauma resists simple storytelling because it is experienced too suddenly and intensely to be processed immediately, appearing instead through fragmented narratives. Caruth elaborates that "Trauma is not a simple memory but a response to an overwhelming event that takes the form of

repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts, or behaviours stemming from the event" (11). At its core, Caruth urges us toward an ethic of deep listening for recovery rather than neglect and violation.

Caruth's framework has inspired vital extensions. Judith Lewis Herman portrays trauma's devastation across psyche and society, tracing its scars on emotional life and relationships. Dori Laub in "Testimony and Bearing Witness" foregrounds the need for ethical listening. Shoshana Felman further extends this theory by emphasising recovery and legal reproduction. These voices affirm Caruth while supporting trauma's psychological depths and communal dimensions, reminding us that no one heals alone.

Sexual violence lingers far beyond the initial violation perpetuated by institutions that demand survivors perform credibility on others' terms. Though this chapter holds back from close reading of the film, it plants the theoretical seeds for probing how justice systems, meant to heal, often erode dignity and voice. The courtroom, then, becomes a cultural crucible fracturing authority and empathy.

By applying Feminist Film Theory, this study highlights how control and patriarchal authority shape the representation of women in legal and cinematic spaces. At the same time, Trauma Theory helps us understand why such treatment is not merely uncomfortable but deeply damaging, as it forces survivors to relive their pain in repetitive and often silenced ways. Together, these theories allow us to see that the courtroom in *Neru* does not simply seek truth but also reflects border social attitudes toward women and sexual violence.

Chapter 2

Reading Power, Gaze, and Justice in the movie *Neru*

This chapter seeks to understand the movie *Neru* from a feminist perspective, viewing the courtroom as an institution shaped by patriarchal notions rather than as an equal space for justice. Johnston argues that mainstream cinema functions to “affirm and reinforce the dominant ideological discourse” rather than challenge it, even when women appear central to the narrative (24-25). From this point of view, a woman who has already been the victim of sexual violence is subjected to verbal assault, moral judgment and symbolic humiliation in the courtroom. In a space dominated by male authority and legal language that frequently fails to recognize women’s lived realities, the survivor is repeatedly forced to defend her dignity and credibility. The courtroom frequently transforms into a place where a woman’s trauma is not only performed but also scrutinized in front of the public in contemporary Malayalam cinema. This chapter argues that in *Neru*, justice is not just handed out; rather, it is staged and the voice and body of the survivor become objects of display and control in this staging.

Feminist Film Theory by Laura Mulvey offers an important framework for comprehending how power functions in film through viewing, speaking and narrating. This theory questioned how women were depicted in mainstream cinema and how visual pleasure was structured around male dominance, both of which emerged in the 1970s as part of feminist interventions into film studies. The argument in Mulvey’s essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” that cinema is shaped by patriarchal values that position men as active agents and women as passive figures

designed for visual and emotional impact became central to this debate.

Although Mulvey developed her ideas primarily through Hollywood cinema, her theoretical insights remain relevant to Indian and Malayalam cinema, especially in films that place women's suffering at the centre of dramatic narratives. As a result, a critical reading of *Neru* as a gendered cultural text and not just as a courtroom drama is made possible by feminist film theory.

Building directly on Mulvey, the concept of the male gaze, which is central to her theory, can be clearly traced in the courtroom sequences of *Neru*. Sara, as a rape survivor, is placed under continuous visual and institutional scrutiny. She is watched, evaluated, and judged not only by the cinematic camera but also by lawyers, judges, and spectators within the courtroom. Her silence, body and emotional expressions become places where other people, mostly men in positions of authority, can control how she is perceived. As a result, the courtroom becomes an extension of the cinematic gaze, transforming Sara from a subject who controls how she is represented into someone who needs to be seen and evaluated. She is subjected to a gaze that she cannot fully return because of her visual impairment, which reinforces her vulnerability in a male-dominated setting and deepens this imbalance. This exemplifies E. Ann Kaplan theory (23-35).

This visual dynamic intensifies through specific framing choices. The camera follows Sara closely in several courtroom scenes, isolating her from the rest of the room. She is frequently depicted either by herself or in contrast to the male legal figures who surround her. This visual pattern strengthens the idea that Sara exists within a system that watches her rather than listens to her. Even scenes intended to elicit sympathy heavily rely on displaying her fragility and emotional vulnerability. She is placed in front of the audience for

observation rather than as an agent who commands the narrative, and this visibility draws attention to her suffering. *Neru* shows how the male gaze operates through institutional and emotional surveillance as well as sexualization in this way.

Equally central to Mulvey's framework is the division between woman as object and man as subject, another important concept of feminist film theory, reaffirmed in Mary Ann Doane in her work (2). This is made clear by the way Sara's story is mediated in *Neru*. She has no influence over the story of justice, despite the fact that the film is centered on her experience. Her experience is shaped by male lawyers' legal arguments and institutional language, who speak for and against her. Instead of being something that she defines herself, her trauma becomes something that is interpreted, questioned and fragmented by others. By turning her lived pain into legal inconsistencies and evidentiary details, the defense lawyer, in particular, exercises power by making her experience an object of legal performance. The film's supporting male characters, such as the protagonist lawyer, operate within the same framework. They speak for Sara, defend her, and try to bring justice back, but their authority frequently takes precedence over Sara's own. As a result, the narrative shifts its focus from Sara's struggle to the heroism and intelligence of male legal actors. This is in line with Mulvey's contention that even when women are at the center of a plot, they are frequently denied narrative authority in film. Their stories are frequently filtered through male action and male decision making.

An important feminist question is posed by this narrative structure: should Sara be allowed to be the real subject of justice, or should she continue to be an object around which male authority exercises its moral and legal power? Even though the movie wants to help her, it can't because the story is

driven by men, and the woman's experience becomes the foundation on which men's power is shown.

This objectification extends to speech and voice, as feminist film theory also draws attention to how patriarchal systems regulate women's speech, and this is strongly visible in Sara's treatment within the courtroom. Her voice can only be heard within very specific legal restrictions. She is compelled to respond to intrusive questions, and rather than protecting her dignity, she is interrupted, redirected, and forced to do so. Her emotional responses are viewed with suspicion, while her silence is frequently interpreted as weakness. Despite the fact that she bears the entire burden of proof, the psychological reality of trauma is in stark contrast to the legal requirement for clarity and consistency. One striking aspect of the courtroom scenes is the way Sara's testimony is treated, not as a personal truth but as material to be tested, doubted and reshaped. She is repeatedly asked to recall intimate and painful details, as if the truth of her suffering lies in her ability to perform it convincingly within legal language rather than in her experience. In this sense, her body and voice no longer belong fully to her; they are taken over by the law's demand for evidence and performance. This control over Sara's speech, seen through Mulvey's eyes, is analogous to the general tendency of cinema to restrict female expression, allowing women to speak only in ways that advance dominant narratives. As a result, the courtroom becomes a deeply gendered space where power is exercised through language, tone, and the right to define truth in addition to physical authority. Sara's difficulty in answering certain questions is not treated as a natural response to trauma but as something suspicious or problematic. This is indicative of a broader social attitude in which male authority is unchallenged and women's suffering is constantly required to be justified.

When we observe how the movie depicts the legal language that is used in the courtroom, the feminist interpretation of *Neru* becomes even more complicated. Language itself is a tool of power, and it frequently becomes a weapon against women in patriarchal institutions like the court. Legal terms like "evidence," "credibility," and "consistency," which do not easily correspond with the emotional and psychological reality of trauma, are frequently used to describe Sara's experience. Feminist film theory allows us to see that this transformation of lived pain into legal discourse is not neutral but deeply gendered. Sara's suffering is reduced to something that must fit institutional logic rather than human experience as her body becomes a site where legal language and patriarchal authority intersect. In several scenes, the defence lawyer questions Sara in a manner that appears formally polite yet deeply violent in effect. Although the questions are posed in a professional, necessary, and rational manner, they carry moral doubt and emotional rage. She is not merely asked what happened; she is asked to justify why it happened, how it happened, and whether it could have happened differently. The focus of this line of inquiry shifts subtly from the crime itself to the woman's conduct, memory, and credibility. This is consistent with a long-standing cultural pattern in which women are held accountable for acts of violence against them, from a feminist perspective. The theory of Mulvey contributes to the understanding of how these instances are related to narrative control as well as legal procedure. The questions posed by the defense attorney serve patriarchal logic attempting to reshape Sara's experience into something that can be questioned, rearranged, or dismissed. Sara's trauma is no longer her own; it becomes a text to be read and rewritten by male authority. The courtroom thus becomes a space not only of legal judgment but also of narrative domination.

Mulvey's concern about the transformation of women's suffering into spectacle is also deeply relevant to *Neru*. Emotionally charged courtroom confrontations, close-up shots, dramatic silences, and musical cues that heighten the emotional intensity of Sara's experience are all used to repeatedly emphasize her suffering. While this may produce sympathy in the audience, it also risks turning suffering into something to be watched and emotionally consumed. The repeated return to her trauma, especially during cross-examination scenes, transforms pain into performance. The film revisits the same emotional terrain each time Sara is forced to recall and describe her assault, reinforcing her suffering as the narrative's central spectacle. Even though the intention may be to show the cruelty of the system, the cinematic form itself relies heavily on Sara's pain to generate emotional depth and dramatic force. This reflects Mulvey's larger concern that women's pain often becomes a visual and narrative resource for cinema, even when the film claims to speak against injustice. Although visual and narrative structures continue to place Sara in a position of vulnerability and exposure, the viewer is drawn into an emotional relationship with her suffering.

The emotional labour Sara is required to perform is another significant feminist concern in *Neru*. She is expected to remain calm yet expressive, strong yet vulnerable, and truthful yet controlled. She runs the risk of being perceived as unstable if she exhibits excessive emotion, while if she exhibits insufficient emotion, she runs the risk of being perceived as indifferent or dishonest. This double expectation reflects the impossible standards placed on women within patriarchal systems. We are able to comprehend how women are required to perform their suffering in a manner that is socially acceptable and legally convincing, despite the fact that this performance goes against the

nature of trauma. This is made possible by feminist film theory. The movie repeatedly puts Sara in situations where she must "prove" her pain through emotional display rather than just medical or factual evidence. The court and the audience judge her truth based on her tears, silences, and breakdowns. This transforms her trauma into a kind of emotional currency, where her suffering must be visible, dramatic, and legible to others in order to be validated. Sara becomes an actor in a script written by patriarchy and legal authority, and justice becomes dependent not only on facts but also on performance.

Additionally, feminist film theory encourages us to investigate spectatorship, including who is invited to look as well as how. The audience in *Neru* is positioned as a mute observer of Sara's misery. When she is being vulnerable, the camera often stays on her face, allowing the audience to feel her pain. In addition to putting the audience in a position that is comparable to that of courtroom viewers witnessing a woman's trauma unfold in a public setting, this can also foster empathy. This brings up a significant ethical issue: does the film encourage the audience to consume it, or does it allow the audience to comprehend Sara's suffering? Even though the pleasure is not sexual but emotional, Mulvey's critique of visual pleasure becomes relevant in this case. Emotional intensity becomes a part of the film's appeal as the audience is drawn into the suffering spectacle. Even though it condemns the injustice that causes trauma, the film runs the risk of turning it into an emotional form of entertainment.

How gender operates in relation to authority and credibility is yet another important aspect of *Neru* that is important to feminists. Male characters, particularly lawyers and judges, are given legitimacy and seriousness by default. Their words are rarely questioned, and their feelings are rarely examined. On the other hand, Sara is

constantly required to demonstrate that she is logical, trustworthy, and morally acceptable. Men's words have institutional weight, whereas women's words require validation, which is reflected in this uneven distribution of credibility. This imbalance is particularly evident when Sara's memory is questioned. According to trauma studies and feminist film theory, women's memories, particularly those of sexual violence, are frequently treated with suspicion. Sara's inability to recall specific details or her hesitant responses to questions are presented in *Neru* as flaws rather than as a natural response to trauma. The court, which represents patriarchal rationality, believes that memory should work like a recording device, but traumatic memory is actually unstable and fragmented. Sara is further marginalized in the legal process as a result of this discrepancy between expectations and reality.

The film also reflects how female sexuality is indirectly policed through legal discourse. Even though Sara is portrayed as a victim, the questions she is asked frequently have a moral undertone that subtly evaluates her character and actions. This reflects a cultural tendency to measure women's worth and credibility through moral standards that are rarely applied equally to men. We are able to identify this moral surveillance as yet another form of control over the female body and identity thanks to feminist film theory.

Feminist film theory also helps us understand how silence functions in the film. As significant as Sara's speech is her silence. She keeps quiet sometimes because she can't, sometimes because she's not allowed to, and sometimes because talking hurts. However, the court rarely honours these silences. Instead, they are interpreted as signs of weakness or uncertainty. The legal system's profound misperception of women and traumatic experiences can be seen in its inability to recognize silence as a form of expression.

When we consider how time relates to Sara's suffering, a further feminist aspect of *Neru* emerges. She is forced to relive and rearticulate the violence long after it occurred due to the fact that the legal process stretches her trauma across time. This prolonged exposure is a form of structural cruelty from a feminist perspective, not just a procedural necessity. Even though the law says it will bring about justice, it keeps people from feeling better and keeps reopening old wounds. With the help of feminist film theory, we can see how institutions ruled by men manage and control women's pain by extending their traumatic experience into the present. As a result, the courtroom not only shapes and prolongs violence but also responds to it. Sara is forced to justify her existence as a victim at every hearing, questioning, and confrontation. The narrative suggests that justice can only be served when male authority figures sufficiently demonstrate, test, and validate her pain. This raises an unsettling feminist question: does justice require women to suffer publicly in order to be believed? *Neru* seems to suggest that it frequently does in the current system.

The film also demonstrates the limitations of male centred justice at the same time. Even though male characters appear to be supportive and sympathetic, they operate within a system that values rationality, control, and emotional distance characteristics that are typically associated with masculinity. Sara's emotional reality, which does not follow neat logical patterns, remains difficult for this system to accommodate. We are able to recognize through feminist film theory that this is not merely a character or institutional design issue. The law, like cinema, has been historically shaped around male experience and values, leaving little room for the complexities of female trauma.

A critical examination of how femininity is constructed in the film is also encouraged by the film's repeated emphasis on Sara's vulnerability. Sara is depicted as gentle, morally pure, and vulnerable on an emotional level qualities that make her a "sympathetic" victim. This portrayal may garner support from the audience, but it also raises questions about the kinds of women who are regarded as deserving of compassion and justice. We are reminded by feminist film theory that representation frequently favours particular images of womanhood over others. The film may unintentionally convey the message that only women who meet these moral and emotional standards deserve protection and faith by depicting Sara in this idealized form. This has significant cultural repercussions. Women who do not fit this stereotype run the risk of being marginalized if films repeatedly portray survivors as fragile, silent, and morally flawless. In both legal and cinematic narratives, women who are outspoken, sexually independent, or emotionally assertive may not receive the same level of sympathy. As a result, *Neru* fits into a larger cultural pattern in which femininity is tightly defined and associated with concepts of purity and vulnerability.

Another important feminist concern is how responsibility is distributed in the film. While the crime is clearly condemned, much of the narrative energy is spent on Sara's reaction, behaviour, and emotional endurance rather than on a sustained examination of male violence and entitlement. This choice in the narrative subtly shifts the focus from the perpetrators to the survivor, making her the emotional focus of the film while keeping male violence from being explored to its fullest extent. Feminist film theory assists us in recognizing this shift as a prevalent pattern in film, in which women's suffering is depicted more prominently than the structures that cause it. The cinematic form itself plays a role in shaping this focus. The perpetrators and

the larger culture that enables them remain largely in the background as the camera repeatedly returns to Sara's face, tears, and silences. The idea that women's suffering, not male violence, is the primary subject of representation is bolstered by this visual emphasis. This may humanize the survivor, but it also runs the risk of normalizing violence by making it an afterthought rather than a primary issue to be probed.

Moreover, *Neru* can be situated within a broader tradition of Malayalam cinema that has increasingly turned to courtroom dramas and social issue films. Feminist film theory reminds us that good intentions do not always result in feminist representation, despite the fact that these films frequently assert progressive intentions. In order for representation to truly become empowering, the structures of storytelling, camera work, and narrative authority must also change. In this sense, *Neru* stands at a crossroads: it challenges certain injustices while remaining bound to conventional filmmaking conventions, which limit its feminist potential. As a result, Sara becomes a symbol not only of a single survivor but also of women's place in power structures. She represents how women are made visible yet voiceless, central yet controlled, and emotional yet disciplined. Through her, the film reflects how patriarchal institutions manage female suffering by transforming it into something that can be observed, judged, and contained.

Neru also tries to challenge patriarchal structures by making Sara's pain visible and showing how cruel the legal system is. However, Feminist Film Theory's critiques of visual and narrative conventions continue to limit this confrontation. The film both reveals and reproduces patriarchal patterns, making it a complex and contradictory text. *Neru* becomes an important example of how feminism, justice, and representation are negotiated in

contemporary Malayalam cinema. Not only does it show a woman seeking justice, but it also shows how gendered power relations shape justice itself. Sara's experience reflects a broader cultural reality where women must not only survive violence but also survive the systems meant to protect them.

Yet, despite these limitations, *Neru* also opens important spaces for feminist critique by making visible the cruelty embedded in legal and social responses to rape. The courtroom is not glorified in the film; rather, its coldness, rigidity, and emotional violence are shown. The audience is forced to face the fact that justice is about more than just verdicts; it is also about how those verdicts are reached by Sara's repeated humiliation. In doing so, *Neru* invites viewers to question the fairness and humanity of the systems that claim to protect women. This questioning is essential from a feminist perspective. Not only does feminism demand that women be included in existing systems, but it also demands that those systems be rethought. *Neru*, despite its limitations, demonstrates this need by demonstrating how arduous and flawed the path to justice can be for women. It demonstrates that a legal victory cannot reverse institutional procedures' psychological and symbolic violence.

This feminist reading also highlights the tension between intention and effect in cinematic representation. While *Neru* clearly intends to support the survivor and condemn injustice, it remains bound by conventional cinematic and narrative structures that centre male authority and visual spectacle.

Feminist film theory helps us hold both these truths together: the film is both progressive in its concern for women and limited in its ability to fully escape patriarchal representation. *Neru* becomes a useful and complex feminist analysis resource in this way. It does not simply reproduce oppression, nor does it fully overcome it. Instead, it shows how difficult and

contradictory it is to portray sexual violence in mainstream cinema. The story of Sara becomes a place where feminism, law, film, and culture come together, revealing both the potentials and drawbacks of cinematic justice.

The feminist reading of *Neru* thus moves beyond identifying injustice to questioning the very structures through which justice is represented. It asks whether a system that demands performance, emotional display, and narrative control from a survivor can ever truly serve her interests. In doing so, the movie encourages viewers to consider not only the crime itself but also the cultural and institutional processes that follow it. In the end, applying Feminist Film Theory to *Neru* lets us see that the movie is not just about a woman seeking justice but also about how gendered power relations shape justice itself. The courtroom is shown to be a place where patriarchal norms have a big impact on how people look, speak, judge, and believe. Sara's repeated exposure, dominance, and emotional labour demonstrate that women must survive not only violence but also the systems designed to combat it. Thus, this chapter concludes that *Neru* represents justice as a deeply gendered performance rather than a neutral process. Sara develops into more than just a victim seeking redress; she also transforms into a figure through whom the cinema exposes the agonizing contradictions of a system that claims to protect women while simultaneously putting them at risk for further harm. *Neru* can be understood in terms of feminist film theory as a potent, if imperfect, reflection of how contemporary Malayalam cinema deals with rape, representation, and the fight for women's dignity.

Chapter 3

Unspoken Wounds: Reading Trauma in *Neru*

This chapter explores the film *Neru* through Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory, analysing closely at how trauma plays out in both the story's structure and Sara's raw emotional responses. The courtroom isn't just a neutral hall of justice but it's a haunting stage where Sara, a rape survivor, must relive and reenact her trauma repeatedly. Judith Herman argues that recovery is blocked when survivors are forced to speak before they have a chance to acquire a sense of control over their own story (133-134). Shoshana Felmen also has similar ideas (56). In the film, the system of the law pushes Sara to retell and grapple with her pain, creating a constant oscillation between where the assault gets revisited and reshaped. It is especially through her words, recollections and the gaze of the onlookers. Those courtroom moments crack open her unprocessed trauma in stutters and gestures, laying bare the trauma built between one woman's hurt and the cold grind of legal systems. Sara's nightmare in *Neru* never ties up neatly or fits into a story's frame. The court hauls her into corners of the attack she hasn't fully reckoned with, mirroring Caruth's sense of trauma as a late-blooming, stubborn intruder.

Caruth's first core idea that trauma remains unassimilated and surfaces later comes alive so vividly in the film. Sara's initial rape experience hits her with a force far beyond what she can handle in the moment. As she steps into the courtroom, this unprocessed trauma surges up again not as a straightforward memory, but as a visceral, live re-experiencing that haunts her whole being. Her hesitations, broken phrases, and emotional tremors reveal that the trauma has never truly settled into her conscious world. The cross-examination moments in the film bring this delayed return into sharp focus of

the legal system that needs clear and coherent accounts but trauma naturally defies those demands. Every question about the assault doesn't merely stir recollection but it unleashes an emotional wave that drags Sara's unresolved pain into the immediate present, highlighting trauma's strange dual existence as both a past occurrence and a current reality.

This unassimilated trauma also reveals itself through her body and psyche in powerful ways. Sara's fidgety movements, wavering voice, and tense posture during cross examination scenes say far more than words could ever manage. Caruth points out that trauma often outstrips our ability to narrate it; it's a felt intensity that language can't completely express. In *Neru*, the camera picks up on these delicate physical and emotional signals, drawing the audience into witnessing trauma's belated intrusion. Sara's uneven, unpredictable responses aren't signs of faulty memory but they're the inevitable result of an experience too overwhelming to control. This brings Caruth's key assertion to life: trauma can't be fully represented when it first strikes, but it returns in surprising, fragmented forms. Caruth's second core idea that trauma replays itself through narrative and memory lies right at the center of the films' courtroom scenes. Sara's retelling of the assault emerges fragmented and tentative, capturing the deep truth that trauma is so hard to recount in a coherent way. She speaks in disjointed bursts, often pausing or shifting focus, which perfectly mirrors Caruth's observation that survivors' efforts to put their experiences into words are always partial and incomplete. This echoes Laub's own theory that suggests that trauma "*precludes its own witnessing*" because it was never fully experienced as an event at the time (69). The film's structure itself reinforces this sense of fracture: courtroom testimony weaves together with quick, symbolic flashbacks, haunting sounds, and close-ups of Sara's

raw emotional responses. This filmmaking choice reflects exactly how trauma reemerges in memory nonlinear, intrusive, and charged with feeling, rather than a neat, chronological tale.

Neru also shines a light on the real struggle of turning internal trauma into spoken narrative. Caruth notes that trauma pushes back against full verbal expression because it floods ordinary understanding. The court expects Sara to deliver a polished, comprehensive account of the assault. But her memories come partial, interrupted, and thick with emotion. This clash between what the institution demands and her psychological reality illustrates Caruth's point: external pressures limit how survivors can articulate their trauma, creating a disconnect between what they lived and what the legal system can accept. Sara's fragmented testimony becomes a powerful window for the audience, letting us see the unclaimed, unassimilated essence of trauma up close.

Trauma's reliving through memory takes on another layer in its ties to space and time. The courtroom acts as both a physical place and a symbolic echo of recurrence. Each time Sara recounts the assault, she steps back into the psychic territory of that original event. The setting which is formal and dominated by male authority intensifies the psychological breach. Caruth emphasizes how trauma often rebounds without warning, sparked by sights, sounds, or situations that resemble the original horror. In *Neru*, the legal rituals, probing questions, and watchful eyes of male lawyers serve as those very triggers, turning Sara's testimony into a repeated site of re-experiencing. This highlights trauma's belated, intrusive quality and shows how institutional spaces can unintentionally recreate or heighten it.

Caruth also underscores that trauma is relational; it doesn't happen in isolation but touches both the survivor and those who witness it. In the

courtroom, the on-screen audience and the film's real viewers alike get pulled into Sara's traumatic world. Through skillful camera work, intimate close-ups, and emotional framing, we feel echoes of her anxiety, hesitation, and fear. This shared encounter aligns with Caruth's view that witnessing trauma generates a secondary experience, one that's deeply psychological and emotional. That relational dimension makes *Neru* such a strong platform for feminist critique, inviting viewers to grapple with the enduring, unprocessed reality of sexual violence and its wider social ripples.

A vital part of Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory is the recognition that trauma doesn't belong to the survivor alone; it reaches out to anyone who listens, watches, or tries to make sense of it. It creates what Caruth calls a form of "listening" that's both ethically challenging and emotionally draining, drawing observers right into the traumatic story. *Neru* captures this beautifully in how the courtroom crowd, legal professionals, and even the film's audience get drawn into Sara's suffering. Her testimony doesn't stay locked away in her mind; it spills outward, compelling others to face it, respond to it, and process it on an emotional level.

In the courtroom scenes, the film keeps shifting our gaze from Sara to the people around her. The camera lingers on the judge's, lawyers', and spectators' faces as they react to her words and her silences. These reactions aren't neutral they reveal discomfort, doubt, sympathy, or even cold detachment. This approach wakes the audience up to the fact that trauma isn't just Sara's burden; it's something others are forced to confront too. As Caruth explains, trauma shakes not only the survivor's life but the lives of witnesses as well, questioning their grasp of reality, justice, and human pain. In *Neru*,

the courtroom turns into a shared emotional arena, where Sara's trauma spreads across multiple bodies and perspectives.

Yet this collective witnessing doesn't always lead to empathy or true understanding. Some onlookers respond with real compassion, while others keep a professional distance or harbour skepticism. This mix points to a key truth in trauma theory: truly comprehending someone else's suffering is incredibly difficult. Caruth argues that trauma calls for deep listening, even as it resists being fully understood. In the film, Sara speaks, but the court never fully captures her pain; her words get filtered through legal reasoning, suspicion, and institutional power. That divide between hearing and truly grasping reveals the boundaries of witnessing: trauma can only be shared in part, never completely.

The film pulls viewers into this process too. By presenting Sara's suffering with such emotional intensity, *Neru* makes us confront the unease of watching trauma unfold. We become silent witnesses, carrying the weight of observation without any power to step in. This fits perfectly with Caruth's idea that trauma communicates not through clear explanation but through disruption. We don't just take in facts; we feel the discomfort, the tension, the emotional stir. In this way, *Neru* shifts trauma from a private ordeal to something collective, extending its reach into social and cinematic territory.

Another key thread in Caruth's theory is that trauma often stays invisible, even as it exerts profound influence. Unlike physical injuries, psychological trauma doesn't always leave obvious marks, yet it shapes behavior, emotions, and identity over the long haul. In *Neru*, Sara's trauma doesn't erupt in dramatic breakdowns or bold declarations. It shows up subtly: in her reluctance to speak, her averted eyes, her retreats into silence,

and her unease in public or institutional settings. These moments embody Caruth's point that trauma isn't always directly reachable; it works through symptoms, gestures, and unspoken pauses.

The film returns again and again to Sara's quiet moments of vulnerability, where her pain speaks through her body rather than words. These silent beats carry immense power, revealing trauma's depths beyond what language can touch. Caruth suggests that trauma remains "unknown" even to the survivor herself its full weight not always consciously acknowledged or voiced. Sara lives this out: she doesn't always seem to understand why certain questions shake her or why specific spaces unsettle her, but the effects are impossible to miss. This hidden quality of trauma adds real complexity to her story and pushes back against oversimplified ideas of healing or recovery.

The courtroom setting makes this invisibility even more acute. Legal processes demand tangible evidence and clear verbal accounts, but trauma lives in a space that often evades those forms. Sara's inner turmoil doesn't translate easily into documents, testimonies, or legal boxes. This disconnect exposes a fundamental flaw: institutions built for visible, measurable facts struggle to handle psychological and emotional injuries. Caruth's theory helps explain why Sara's suffering stays partly overlooked, even when justice seems delivered. The law can name the crime, but it falls short of engaging the invisible, enduring aftermath of trauma.

Trauma's invisibility comes with persistence too. It doesn't vanish with a verdict or legal endpoint. Even if Sara gains some form of justice, the psychological echoes continue to mold her sense of self and her life. Caruth stresses that trauma can't just be "resolved" through storytelling or official

recognition. In *Neru*, the trial's end doesn't wipe away the emotional scars she carries. The film quietly implies that her path isn't full healing but ongoing survival. This challenges typical film endings that link justice to emotional tidy-up, instead portraying trauma as a lasting condition that defies simple fixes.

That unseen nature also shapes how society treats survivors. Without immediate signs, psychological wounds get undervalued or misunderstood. In the film, Sara gets legal focus, but there's scant attention to her emotional or psychological needs. This gap reflects a larger cultural habit of valuing visible justice over hidden healing. Caruth's ideas urge us to challenge those priorities and see trauma as demanding ongoing ethical and emotional commitment, not just a procedural checkmark.

Bringing together the third and fourth core ideas of Trauma Theory reveals trauma's dual nature: relational and elusive. It flows between people and social spaces while staying partly concealed and hard to fully grasp. In *Neru*, this comes through clearly in Sara's dealings with the court, the onlookers, and her own inner landscape. The film becomes more than a survivor's quest for justice; it's a vivid picture of how trauma moves through society, questioning systems of meaning, law and representation.

When Caruth's four core ideas converge on *Neru*, the film rises above mere courtroom drama or social-issue story into a profound psychological exploration of how trauma endures, recurs, and transforms both individuals and groups. Sara's path through the legal system stands as a striking example of trauma as belated, fragmented, shared, and mostly invisible yet powerfully shaping. Through her, the film reveals how trauma refuses to stay in the past,

pressing into the present, especially when institutions make survivors relive and retell their pain.

One of Trauma Theory's most compelling gifts to reading *Neru* is its explanation of the courtroom as a space of re-traumatization, not resolution. Caruth's focus on trauma's unassimilated, unexpected returns lets us see Sara's repeated confrontations not as progress toward healing, but as fresh reopenings of deep wounds. The law's call for linear, detailed, consistent narrative clashes head-on with the nonlinear, shattered quality of traumatic memory. Rather than letting Sara move ahead, the courtroom traps her in limbo, forcing her to keep looking back at what can't be fully grasped or woven in.

This tension carries special weight in Malayalam cinema, where courtroom stories have become arenas for moral and social reckoning. Films like *Neru* stage the court as a place where justice gets performed, argued, and won. But Trauma Theory adds nuance to that hopeful view, showing that legal victory doesn't always mean psychological or emotional repair. Even with a verdict, Sara's trauma lingers unresolved, hinting that institutional endings don't ensure personal ones. This upends familiar cinematic tropes and pushes viewers to reconsider what justice looks like for survivors of sexual violence.

The film also captures Caruth's sense that trauma touches not just the survivor but those who witness it. In *Neru*, the courtroom crowd, lawyers, and viewers become secondary bearers of Sara's pain. Her suffering doesn't stay contained in her body or mind; it spreads into the social and cinematic realm, creating a collective emotional load. This shared witnessing matters because it moves trauma from private isolation to a public and ethical issue. By drawing

the audience into Sara's hurt, the film demands we face not only the crime itself but our role as observers of trauma.

At the same time, the film lays bare the shortcomings of that witnessing. Even though Sara is seen and heard, her trauma isn't fully taken in or understood by the system designed to handle it. The court listens but doesn't truly get it; it acknowledges but doesn't mend. This space between recognition and deep understanding echoes Caruth's argument that trauma resists full representation and integration. Even when spoken aloud, it stays partly beyond language and meaning, haunting both the survivor and the wider world.

Trauma Theory adds another layer by emphasizing trauma's invisibility. In *Neru*, much of Sara's pain stays subtle and internal rather than dramatic or overt. Her silences, hesitations, and emotional pullbacks reveal a hurt that words can't always reach. This goes against cinema's habit of showing trauma through big breakdowns or expressive outbursts. Instead, the film suggests violence's deepest impacts often hide, quietly steering identity, behaviour and connections in lasting ways.

That invisibility has real social fallout too. Because Sara's trauma is mostly psychological, it opens the door to doubt, dismissal, and confusion. The legal system's emphasis on visible proof and clear speech doesn't fully make room for her kind of suffering. Trauma Theory clarifies why survivors so often feel adrift or unseen, even in places meant to support them. *Neru* ends up critiquing not just courtroom mechanics but society's larger struggle to connect with forms of pain that don't show on the surface.

Applying Trauma Theory to *Neru* also brings out the clash between narrative and lived experience. Like law, cinema depends on crafting

coherent stories to make events meaningful. Trauma, though, shatters that coherence into fragments, contradictions, and silences. *Neru* tries to fit Sara's story into the classic courtroom drama mold, but the theory shows how her reality overflows those boundaries. The film turns into a battleground between the urge to tell a story and the impossibility of telling trauma completely.

This struggle feels especially relevant in a place like Kerala, where movies play a huge role in forming how people see social problems. Films like *Neru* don't just mirror life they shape thoughts on rape, justice, and survivors. By revealing the emotional and psychological toll of legal battles, *Neru* asks viewers to doubt simple justice narratives and embrace trauma's messier truths. Trauma Theory bolsters that power by offering the words and structure to unpack those layers.

In the end, viewing *Neru* through Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory lets us see it as a reflection on the boundaries of representation, justice, and comprehension when facing sexual violence. Sara's arc isn't about full recovery or neat closure it's one of continued struggle and endurance. Her trauma stays "unclaimed" in Caruth's terms: not wholly possessed by the past, not settled in the present, and tough to fold into stories or laws.

This chapter wraps up by arguing that *Neru* delivers a gripping, if partial, cinematic take on trauma. It uncovers the mental costs of chasing justice and the emotional harm woven into official processes. Through Sara, it shows that trauma isn't only what happens to a woman, it's what keeps happening in how society handles her pain. Trauma Theory peels back those layers, turning a legal drama into a deep probe into how suffering lingers, circles back, and reshapes people and communities alike. Through society's

responses. Trauma Theory unveils these layers, transforming *Neru* from legal drama to profound probe of pain's persistence, return, reshaping of individuals and communities.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore how contemporary Malayalam cinema represents sexual violence not only as a physical act but as a continuing process that extends into institutional, social and narrative spaces. By closely reading *Neru* through Feminist Film Theory and Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory, this project has shown that rape does not end with the act itself. Instead, it continues in new forms through legal language, social judgement, cinematic representation and cultural memory. Sara's story in *Neru* is not simply about a woman seeking justice; it is about how a woman is forced to relive and perform her trauma repeatedly within systems that claim to protect her.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that the courtroom which is supposed to be a space of justice often becomes a space of renewed violence. The verbal questioning, moral suspicion and emotional exposure Sara faces transform the legal process into a form of symbolic and psychological assault. Through Feminist Film Theory, particularly Laura Mulvey's ideas on power, gaze, and representation, the project revealed how women's bodies and stories are often controlled by male authority, even in narratives that appear sympathetic. Sara is not only looked at but also spoken about, interpreted, judged and reshaped by others which deprives her of full narrative control over her own suffering.

Trauma Theory further deepened this understanding by showing that trauma does not belong only to the past but continues to intrude upon the present in fragmented, unexpected and painful ways. Sara's silences, hesitations and emotional instability are not weaknesses but signs of trauma that resists easy narration and closure. The legal system demands coherence,

clarity and stability but trauma exists in disruption, fragmentation and emotional overflow. This mismatch reveals why justice even when achieved legally often fails emotionally and psychologically for survivors.

Together, these two theories allowed this study to go beyond surface-level readings of *Neru* as a courtroom drama and instead approach it as a complex cultural text that exposes how violence against women is not only physical but also narrative, emotional, and institutional. The film becomes a mirror reflecting how society treats women who have been raped not just through the crime itself but through the processes that follow it.

Perhaps one of the most painful and powerful insights of this project is the realization that even when a raped woman is no longer alive, she is still not free from violence. A dead raped woman continues to be verbally raped through stories, rumours, moral judgement and social memory. Her body may no longer exist but her identity is still controlled, spoken over, doubted and reshaped by others. Society often discusses dead women not with compassion but with curiosity, suspicion and moral evaluation. Questions like “Was she really innocent?” or “Why was she there?” or “What kind of woman was she?” continue to circulate, proving that death does not end violence it merely transforms it.

In this sense, verbal rape becomes a haunting presence even after physical life has ended. The woman’s story is taken away from her and rewritten by those who remain. Courts reopen her wounds in records and arguments, media sensationalizes her pain, and public discourse turns her trauma into a spectacle. This continuing violation reflects what both Feminist Film Theory and Trauma Theory attempt to expose: that violence against

Women are not only enacted on the body but also on memory, voice, and representation.

Poetry and literature across cultures have often spoken about how women's suffering does not rest even in death. A raped woman in death becomes a symbol, a warning, a moral lesson, a headline but rarely a person allowed dignity and silence. Her silence is not respected; instead, it is filled by others' voices. In this way society continues to use her body and story long after her life has ended. This project argues that this is also a form of violence silent, normalized, and rarely questioned.

Neru becomes deeply significant in this context because it shows how even a living woman is not allowed silence or rest. Sara is forced to speak, repeat, perform and defend her pain. If this is the fate of a living survivor, one can imagine how much more vulnerable a dead woman's narrative becomes. Without her voice, she is entirely at the mercy of those who tell her story. This study therefore insists that justice must go beyond verdicts; it must include ethical storytelling, respectful remembrance and the protection of women's dignity both in life and in death.

Another important conclusion of this study is that cinema has immense power in shaping how society understands rape and survivors. Films like *Neru* do not merely entertain; they educate, influence, and sometimes even reform social attitudes. When cinema chooses to show the cruelty of legal procedures and the emotional cost of justice, it opens space for empathy and reflection. At the same time, cinema must also be cautious not to turn trauma into spectacle or suffering into emotional consumption. Representation must aim not only to show pain but to challenge the structures that produce and reproduce it.

The use of Feminist Film Theory revealed that even well-intentioned films can remain bound by patriarchal narrative forms. Sara is central to *Neru*, yet much of the narrative control still lies with male figures and institutional power. Trauma Theory, on the other hand, revealed that even when a survivor is allowed to speak, language itself may fail her, and justice may never fully reach the depths of her pain. Together, these theories highlight that true justice is not merely legal but emotional, psychological, and cultural.

This study also suggests that society must rethink how it listens to survivors. Listening must go beyond hearing words; it must include understanding silence, hesitation, emotional breakdown and fragmentation. Survivors should not be required to perform their pain in acceptable ways in order to be believed. Their trauma should not have to fit into neat narratives or moral expectations. Justice must learn to accommodate the broken, the incomplete and the uncertain.

Finally, this project concludes that the question is not only how women are raped, but how they are treated after rape by law, by society, by cinema and by memory. *Neru* shows that a woman's struggle does not end when the violence ends; in many ways, it only begins there. Through the courtroom, through public gaze, through legal language and through cinematic representation the survivor continues to fight for dignity, voice and recognition.

And even when she no longer lives, her struggle continues through the way she is spoken about, remembered and represented. This is why this study insists that silence, dignity and ethical remembrance are forms of justice too. A woman deserves not only to live without violence but also to be remembered without violation.

In conclusion, *Neru*, when read through Feminist Film Theory and Trauma Theory, becomes more than a film; it becomes a powerful critique of how justice, violence, memory and gender intersect in contemporary society. It reminds us that the true measure of a just society is not only how it punishes the guilty, but how it treats the wounded, the silenced and even the dead.

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