

## Speaking Memory: Testimonies to the Possibilities of Peace

Meenakshi Malhotra

### Abstract

In their work on *Teaching Life Writing Texts*, Miriam Fuchs and Craig Howes articulate how life narrative texts can serve as a “conduit to other subjects and debates”. In the classroom context, these texts provide opportunities to promote reflexivity, an understanding of the pain of the other. The pedagogical function of life narratives also extends to, actually and potentially, throwing the spotlight on submerged, invisible lives so as to bring them to the fore. Testimony is one of the forms which emerged from diverse experiences of violence and which offers a witnessing of the lives of others. The pedagogical project of studying life writing could offer some scope to bear witness to experiences of oppression and injustice. Looked at in this way, life narratives can offer a genuine opportunity to represent diversity and talk about difference—social, cultural, sexual and ethnic *inter alia*—in the classroom.

Life writings and their study can serve as sites of collaborative projects on transnational migrations across borders and boundaries. Thus the stories of Malala Yousufzai, Mukhtar Mai and Fawzia Koofi and other women in war torn zones bear witness to the prevalence of war and violence even as they provide a powerful testimony to the possibilities of peace —however fragile—in various parts of the globe.

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Feminist politics and theory has in the last few decades, accommodated and made space for a host of voices. Many women belonging to different nationalities, races, classes, castes and cultural backgrounds have inscribed their experiences of oppression as they responded to the social and political milieu that they grew up in. Their sharing of experiences and voices has led to the creation of a feminist voice and feminine subjectivities, which, though diverse, created a platform for women's mobilization and helped consolidate the woman's movement.

In this paper, I explore some of the ways in which women's writings, and specifically, their life writings, have registered experiences of violence and trauma, even as they have explored diverse possibilities of co-existence and a less unjust social order. Study of these life writings and their exploration could potentially serve as sites of collaborative projects on transnational migrations across borders and boundaries. Many of these writings detail the experiences of women in conflict zones. At the same time, many of the narratives narrate the protagonists' attempts to resist and counter violence and engage with possibilities of peace. Thus the life-stories of Malala Yousafzai, *I am Malala* (2013), Fawzia Koofi's *The Favoured Daughter* (2012) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2003) and other women in war torn zones bear witness to the war and violence even as they provide a powerful testimony to the possibilities of peace—however fragile. Moreover, they demonstrate the role of women in resisting violence and initiating, at however small a scale, peace processes as a response to escalating violence and conflict.

In their work "*Teaching Life Writing Texts*," Miriam Fuchs and Craig Howes (2007) articulate how life narrative texts can serve as a "conduit to other subjects and debates." In the classroom context, these texts provide opportunities to promote reflexivity and empathy, an understanding of the pain of the other. The pedagogical function of life narratives also extends to throwing the spotlight on submerged, invisible lives so as to bring them to the fore. Testimony is one of the forms that emerges from diverse experiences of violence which offers a witnessing of the lives of selves and others. The pedagogical project of studying life writing could offer some scope to bear witness to experiences of oppression and injustice. Looked at in this way, life narratives could offer a genuine opportunity to represent diversity and talk about difference—social, cultural, sexual and ethnic difference inter alia—in the classroom. Encouraging such projects could pave the way to understand cultural difference and create conditions for peace.

Life-narratives and autobiographical writings pose their own challenges, even as the ideas about what constitutes life writing have undergone numerous changes and faced conceptual and theoretical challenges. The last few decades have witnessed a huge upsurge in the volume of life writings, life narratives and autobiographical discourses. At around the same time as marginalized voices and dispossessed communities started mapping their lives, however, came the fracturing of identities by poststructuralists and postmodernists which made the idea of

expressing or articulating the ‘I’ a matter of contentious debate<sup>1</sup>. This demolition derby, as many feminists pointed out, became very vociferous at around the same time that hitherto marginalized, silenced voices were beginning to be articulated. (Anderson 2001) The whole idea of *cogito ergo sum* was sought to be dismantled at about the same time that voices which were hitherto muted or silenced were not only beginning to be heard but had also started questioning the politics of their silencing. The point made by most feminist critics was that women’s autobiographies, along with the autobiographies of other oppressed groups, were not too burdened by *cogito ergo sum*, in the first place. The other salvo fired by the pronouncers of high theory was around the issue of the fractured or partial “I” which, according to Lacan, was not whole or entire but always displaced and dislocated so that the site on which selfhood could be premised was highly contingent, provisional and unstable. The term ‘autobiography’ which etymologically suggested that the self could record the life in writing (auto plus bios plus graph) and was knowable was a questionable assumption. This interrogation resulted in the dismantling of the singular “I” and a preference for the generic term “life narrative” rather than autobiography. The circuitous and self-regarding/solipsistic echo chamber of high theory was challenged on its own ground by numerous critics, among them the formidable Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak who forged and put forward the idea of “strategic essentialism” to counter the anti-historical approach of postmodernism and poststructuralism (Spivak 1987). It is in the mapping of this historical turn that autobiographies and life narratives have been regarded as an important archive since they gave hitherto silent social groups and communities a voice. Further the life narratives of women, especially in tumultuous times of historical upheavals and transitions, have emerged as powerful social and historical documents. These narratives have considerable archival value as they provide micro-histories of the times they were written in. Not only do they provide a world and wealth of detail, they also tell us about history from below. Accounts which represent the everyday practices of women and minorities have gained a unique validity since they offer a different reading of history – or herstory, from a varying perspective. Different perspectives are of considerable value to disciplines like history or sociology that have used the life narratives of women across a wide spectrum of spaces, times and classes in order to chart cartographies of struggle and to gain a more complete idea of societies and their histories.

Women’s life narratives, moreover, have an enhanced historical value, since they are narrated from a perspective of lack of privilege, at least comparatively speaking. According to feminist standpoint theorists, narratives that emerge from a historically disprivileged perspective have greater epistemological validity than knowledge which emerges from a position of power and privilege. Those in a position of power and privilege are not likely to experience sexual, racial, caste or class based discrimination unlike groups which have borne the brunt of multiple discriminations. Rita Felski catalogues the importance of historically structured feminist structures of self-discovery, wherein female self-discovery is perceived as a process of moving outward from a position of interiority into a public realm. In this self-discovery narratives are created from women’s experience, the many social prejudices they encounter and the resultant frustrations. Both feminist literature and feminist politics organize the ‘liberation’ of women as a group, through individualized notions of history and experience (Felski 2003).

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<sup>1</sup> Both postmodernism and post structuralism challenged the idea of a unified “I”, propounded the death of the author questioned the idea of grand narratives, the stability of language and the impossibility of fixed and stable meaning.

While poststructuralists complicate the notion of ‘experience’, the fact remains that this problematization should not dilute actual struggles or feminist politics and activism.

Women’s life narrative trajectories reveal rich ethnographic histories and her-stories of affect. These also point to the fact that women were not only trying to resist past traditions out of the necessity of survival, but also out of the desire to understand their links to their pasts, and shape and mould more progressive futures. Life narratives have therefore become a valid mode to study other cultures. Further, unlike ethnographic accounts which frame the object of study in a neutral, non-partisan, ‘objective’ way, life narratives make possible a much more invested and engaged encounter with lived experience.

Many social science disciplines offer perspectives on lived experience even as they frame these experiences as objects of study. Since many of these disciplines originated and developed in the wake of Enlightenment and Enlightenment rationality, they carry traces of positivism or intellectual imperialism. As an inevitable corollary, the consolidation and crystallization of these disciplines in the period of high imperialism shaped and informed them in specific ways and left their imprint on them. Disciplines like Sociology, Anthropology, History and Philosophy worked on the basis of a substratum of ideas which have incrementally been exposed as sexist, racist, caste-ist and misogynistic. Thus, even as the study of autobiography or life-narratives works on and appropriates the disciplinary frameworks and assumptions of many of the disciplines mentioned above, it does so selectively. It modifies and reshapes certain disciplinary ideas and assumptions in order to meaningfully add to the growing volume of work in this field.

Further, rather than working with set disciplinary boundaries, both life writing and research on life-writing have developed in ways so as to make it a useful instrument for developing relevant pedagogies. The straddling and reconfiguring of disciplinary boundaries have made life narratives a rich pedagogic resource and further, made it epistemologically open-ended, fluid and flexible. From ethical and moral lessons about the good life, to offering a version of “thick description”, to being drivers of consciousness-raising programmes, life writings have served many causes. (Geertz 1973, 6)

Autobiography as an expressive mode is obviously intensely personal, a revelation of the ‘truth’ of the self. This self-revelatory form is close to the religious practice of confession and ostensibly eschews fictionalization and the creation of fictional persona. Foucault’s “Technologies of the Self” locates the processes of self-enumeration in speaking, reading and writing about the self. His discussion of the elaborate methodology of self-cultivation and self-fashioning, echoes with ideas that are similar to the techniques of autobiography (Foucault 1986).

Yet it is precisely in this process of self-fashioning and self-narration that the self subsumes into itself concerns of the collective struggles of a group that one identifies with. This holds particularly true for subordinated groups like women and dalits. Further, many women autobiographers have turned to innovative modes of self-representation. For instance, the self-portraits/paintings of Frida Kahlo, the graphic format of Marjane Satrapi in “*Persepolis*” (2003-4) and “*Embroideries*” (2005). Dalit women’s writings and life writings chart the collective stories of underprivileged communities. These writings pinpoint issues that resonate and chime in with

collective and community concerns. This expansion of the circle of sympathy and enlargement of concerns is a distinctive feature of women's life-writings. It is this reaching out that marks women's life writings, as opposed to a relatively more enclosed, self-referential, autonomous self (see Olney 1980).

In this paper, I look at the accounts of some women from zones affected by war and terror and also living under traditional patriarchies. These memoirs/life narratives have been selected keeping in mind the trajectories of these narratives, from conflict-ridden family contexts into widening circles of community work and expanded roles. The life writings of Malala Yousafzai and Fawzia Koofi are not just triumphalist accounts of women and girls surviving in and prevailing over difficult circumstances but also shows a cultural milieu which is an uneasy mix of tribal culture, local fiefdoms and undemocratic states. A feudal patriarchy and an embedded misogyny together lead to a situation where the oppression of women takes place at several levels.

Fawzia Koofi talks about her mother who, it seems, is a favored wife and yet liable to be chastised and punished severely with slaps and beatings if she falls short of her husband's expectations. Fawzia herself is exposed to the elements and left to die in harsh and bitter conditions. She survives the initial neglect to emerge as a strong and assertive figure. Her memoir charts a pattern of loss, the loss of her father initially, and then her brother. She marries – but also notes her husband's failing health after suffering incarceration and inhuman torture and imprisonment. She manages her home, her work, her political engagements single-handedly, without undue complaint.

Given the harsh conditions of her life, it is surprising and almost ironic that she refers to herself as the "favoured" daughter. Her identity seems to emerge as anything but relational, for one; and there is hardly any indication in her life-writing which marks her out as particularly favored. The only sign of her favored status is that she survives and emerges as remarkably resilient. The second is that she seems to view herself as a woman marked out by destiny for special favors, and characterized by plenty of strength and perseverance.

In the case of Malala Yousafzai, the protagonist narrates her story with a sense of manifest destiny that grows stronger with her survival after the near-fatal bullet attack on her in 2012. When the Taliban took control of the Swat Valley, Malala refused to be silenced and fought for her right to an education and to go to school. Matters culminated in Malala's being shot in the head at point-blank range on her way back from school.

Malala shows signs of early growth and development and is more than supported by her father. Very early on, she becomes an educational campaigner. She was, not unsurprisingly, recruited as a reporter for BBC Urdu for writing about life under the Taliban. Using the *nom de plume* of Gul Makai, she was a voice in championing girls' right to education. The remarkable trajectory of Malala's life story is evident as she narrates her birth in a community where girls are unwelcome, hidden away behind a curtain, to being catapulted to world-wide recognition (Yousafzai 2013, 9). In a culture where women are mostly dependent on men, Malala dreams of roaming "free as a bird". (20)



*I am Malala* also charts the rocky course of Pakistan's history. To try and get people at home to support him, General Zia launched a campaign of Islamization to make Pakistan a proper Muslim country with the army as the defenders of the country's ideological as well as geographical frontiers. Further, under Zia, life for Muslim women became much more restricted. This was because Zia felt that no struggle could ever succeed without the participation of women in it. As Malala records the rapid descent of Pakistan and the Pashtuns into mindless fanaticism and bigotry, she notes with horror the brain-washing carried out by Fazlullah who through his radio broadcasts preaches appropriate religious behavior to the people but especially to women. Malala observes the impact of his preaching and radio broadcasts on Mullah FM, on the people and particularly women as they descend into fanaticism and atavism. The clock is literally turned back as women stop going out, stop vaccinating children, throw television sets out and stop girls from going to school.

A similar trajectory is demonstrated in Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* when the forces of fundamentalism, orthodoxy and forced Islamization take over. Set in the context of Iran in 1979, the Ayatollah Khomeini takes over and deposes the westernized Shah Reza Pahlavi, who is seen as an American stooge. In simple yet broad pen and ink sketches and graphic format, Marjane traces the changes in their everyday lives. From wearing trousers to smoking cigarettes to driving, Marjane had seen her mother live the life of a fairly independent and liberated woman in Teheran. All that changes as women are stopped in their tracks from studying and pursuing careers, coerced to wear the veil and stay inside their houses. As Fawzia narrates her journey under the impact of the Taliban, she says that life under the Taliban had changed her in ways she hadn't really understood and that she was no longer the person she had been previously. She also feels that her confidence had evaporated and the daily fear exhausted her reserves of strength.

A brief enumeration of the broad outlines of some of the texts narrated above serves to specifically remind us about the violence and trauma that beset many people around the world. Here I close in on a more specific question: how does the recounting of traumatic events and experiences, the lived everyday experience of violence shape the life-narratives of these autobiographers?

### **Life narratives and traumatic memory**

In order to further trace the pedagogical significance of life narratives, it is useful to focus on issues of trauma, memory and traumatic memory as they unfold in the narratives of women as victims/survivors; women who have experienced trauma due to social and religious violence. The underlying idea is to explore the ways in which "autobiography has not only provided not just a useful testing ground for feminist theories, but also a productive space for different notions of the female subject to emerge, one which can register the plurality of subjects—and the plurality of reasons for the use of the self as a form of writing" (Anderson 2001, 17). While the time frame of the narratives in question is the last thirty years or so, i.e, a contemporary time frame, it is possible to trace the presence of certain thematic clusters—some issues of trauma and memory—that emerge in many life narratives on the Partition of India (1947).

The Partition was a time of immense historical upheaval, a critical event that not only subdivided the Subcontinent, but also divided families, individuals and psyches. In the documented

histories of abducted women who were later restored to their families, apparently ‘rehabilitated’, scars remained, possibly as a result of the divided existence they were forced to experience, but also as a result of deep psychic wounds and trauma. Seeing the rise of terror spawned by fundamentalist states and societies, through the lens of the Partition helps us understand the nature of violence, particularly the modes of violence and the way it is legitimized by the state and its various arms – both the repressive state apparatus as well as the ideological state apparatus. The practice of terror and violence based on religious and socio-cultural differences is sought to be legitimized by the state and critiqued and interrogated by the autobiographers. An apparent paradox that may seem to arise in this context, between remembering and forgetting can be explored. While remembering and memory are crucial to life-narration, memorializing also seems to lead to a simultaneous remembering and forgetting. For the person who had experienced violence and abuse the ‘victims’, what purpose did, and does, the practice of remembering or memorializing serve? The place of traumatic memory in the context of oral and written life-narratives by Asian women can not only help gauge the impact of psychological trauma but also understand the links between traumatic memories and life-narration.

Understanding this link is important as we live in an age in which memorial practices have multiplied and proliferated in varied and diverse ways. Also, given the absence of written accounts—appropriately called testimonies—how do we salvage life-histories and remove the veil of silence shrouding lost her-stories and retrieve the lives and voices of these women—then and now?

The second strand is to bring in here—to recount and analyze—a story called ‘Lajwanti’ written in the aftermath of the Partition by Rajinder Singh Bedi, which narrates the story of a couple, Sunderlal and Lajwanti. Lajwanti is represented as a strong and devoted wife to Sunderlal, who, while he cares for her, is shown to exert his rights as a husband and patriarch by occasionally beating up his wife. In the story, Lajwanti is abducted in the spate and aftermath of violence that characterized the Partition of India. Sunderlal, who has been a leading member of the committee for “rehabilitation of abducted women,” is at a loss when Lajwanti reappears in their village, one among the many women who have been rehabilitated. The twist in the tale is that Sunderlal, who had earlier treated his wife with scant regard and respect, now starts treating her with kid gloves, figuratively speaking. He starts to deify her, refers to her as “devi”, which leaves her utterly traumatized and unhappy. The narrative covers three clustered moments of trauma—the routinized violence of her domestic existence prior to her abduction, her abduction and her ‘rehabilitation’. The story ironically counterpoints Lajwanti’s apparent acceptance of Sunderlal’s beatings, on the one hand, and her extreme discomfort with his excessive concern and care.

Recounting this story is not a digression from the focus on life narratives but serves to forge vital links in the paper and help make some connections. One issue here is the exploration of the trauma which is metaphorically expressed through the description of the ‘touch-me-not’ plant that curls and withers away. Lajwanti, used to her husband’s routinized violence, seems to initially display a resilience that melts away when he starts deifying her. His respectful behavior towards her paradoxically creates a distance in their marital intimacy. In an obvious irony, the idea of ‘rehabilitation’ actually masks a sense of dislocation and displacement, as Lajwanti has suffered sexual violence at the hands of her captors. The story shows the

processes through which trauma and traumatic memory work, its belatedness, its delay of affect and the temporal gap or disjunction between the event and its emotional impact or affect. Both Freud (Freud 1895) and Carruth (1995) discuss the issue of traumatic memory and delayed affect in their work.

I would thus read this story not just in terms of its comment on the violence perpetrated on women during the partition which was not only physiological and sexual but also on the register of the emotional and psychological. The story unfolds as a series of traumatic displacements and dislocations, each mirroring the other, which serve to silence the gendered subject, who becomes a mute witness to her own silencing. Here, the question that arises is: Can we re-read and reconstellate Lajwanti's story to 'rehabilitate' her, instead of relegating her to perpetual silence, an effect that is perhaps created by comparing her to a plant? Would the story perhaps be different had it been narrated by Lajwanti?

### **Trauma, Memory and Life-writing**

In many 'modern' Asian societies, human rights exist more in the breach than the observance. A predominantly patriarchal culture, Asian societies, by and large, comprise a very heterogeneous mix in the throes of many social transitions. It is riven by many paradoxes and contradictions, including contradictions which are thrown up as traditional attitudes and mindsets grapple with uneven modernities, unleashing violence against women, and escalating rapid and often regressive social change. This sense of regression is evident in both Marjane Sartrape's *Persepolis* and in Malala's autobiographical account, *I am Malala*. Even as processes of urbanization and industrialization accelerate, statistics show a skewed picture of women's status in society in terms of absence of discrimination, presence of safety, security and freedom. The reporting—and possibly the incidence—of gender violence has also escalated to alarming levels. While legal redress is often sought by women from the upper classes, many women from the working class are left with few options and some of them seek shelter in state and Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs)-run shelter homes. Many counselling centers in India and elsewhere offer help through a species of talk therapy with a view to rehabilitating women experiencing domestic abuse. Other forms of therapy include workshops which encourage theatrical and dramatic re-enactments, and diverse forms of "artivism". Different kinds of expressive forms – from slam poetry to skits are performed by the 'victim/survivors' in order to grapple with patriarchies completely oblivious to the oppression practiced and perpetuated by expression itself. Here, it might be relevant to explore an apparent paradox that seems to arise in this context, between remembering and forgetting, between an urge to forget and the ethical and legal imperative to remember.

The imperative of remembering is quickened into urgency in order to resist the tendency to normalize violence, to render it as part of the everyday. Often the response to narrativizing violence in the Asian context may encourage a "normalization" and "routinization" of domestic violence, given its pervasiveness and its apparent acceptance. The other—and perhaps necessary—response is of a willed remembering which is seen not only as vital to the therapeutic process, but which also creates a powerful narrative of 'witnessing'. In this instance, the act of witnessing and its consignment to memory serves to create a sense of a dual self, a self which experiences and a self which re-members the experience and observes, and



which, in turn papers over the gaps and cracks or cognitive dissonances. Therefore, on the one hand, trauma effects a kind of epistemological violence where there is incomprehensibility about the status of the real (Scarry 1987). On the other, over time and through therapy, this memory provides a perspective and vantage point to process the experience and enable rational decision making. People who experience traumatic events initially find themselves in a situation where affect exceeds expression and so like Elaine Scarry's definition of pain always exceeds the articulable. There is a collapse of comprehensibility and the processes of truth-telling and witnessing constantly interrogate the act of recording traumatic events, private or collective, and which in turn radicalizes the way private history or memory and collective histories are seen.

Trauma Studies represent a field which has witnessed a dynamic growth in interest and popularity, particularly since the early 1990s. Trauma and Memory Studies represent complementary and interrelated fields of study, and trauma can usefully be considered in this context as a pathological form of remembering. For the purposes of this paper, then, Trauma Studies will be considered as a subset of the broader field of Memory Studies. Trauma and Memory Studies represent a field which is highly contested and subject to vigorous debate, in part because of the recent explosion of interest in this area which continues unabated. Trauma Studies emerged as a distinct area of interest in the late twentieth century, following the Holocaust, American wars in Vietnam and the official recognition of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by the American Psychiatric Association in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of 1980. This was connected in turn to the aftermath of the Vietnam War, as returning soldiers campaigned for recognition of their traumatic symptomatology. At the same time, there arose a slew of cases and narratives claiming childhood sexual abuse and incest which followed on the heels of a book that became a staple of therapy called *The Courage to Heal*. Many people asserted that therapy had helped them reclaim repressed memories of childhood abuse. Literary scholar Cathy Caruth's volume on *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) is notable for a definition of trauma that makes it applicable across a wide range of events and discourses. Caruth provides an influential structural model of trauma, in which the very immediacy of the experience obscures or diminishes its communicability or truth. Trauma as discussed by Caruth is an experience or event so painful that the mind is unable to cognitively grasp it. Directly accessing this memory is also impossible without causing great distress. While the memory can be triggered, it is rarely done consciously. In Freud's model, the experience is immediately followed by a period of latency, where the victim appears to be of sound mind, because the brain has not yet grasped the extent of the horror. It's only much later that the full effects of the experience begin to set in, and by that time, any manifestations of that trauma don't appear to be contextual or based on reality. And because the trauma is a memory that cannot be directly accessed because it causes such distress, resisting cognitive understanding and thus rational reaction, that to expect that survivors would calmly, rationally and logically relate in a linear fashion the facts or details of what happened, is obviously unrealistic. Nonetheless, it's still something that is asked in the course of therapy, particularly in asking for testimonies of traumatic events. Victims are asked to access, to the best of their ability, memories of or surrounding a traumatic event, in order to construct a history of the event. Michael Bernard-Donals writes in the case of traumatic memories, that "testimony marks the absence of events, since they did not register on, let alone become integrated into the psyche". (Bernard-Donals 2009) Trauma is in a sense a collapse of memory. Further, there is another paradox which besets the issue of traumatic memory. As

Cathy Caruth states in the preface to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995): “the problem of what it means to remember traumatic experience and what it means to know or recognize trauma in others remain complex issues tied to the fact that traumatic recall or re-enactment is defined, by the very way in which it pushes trauma away.”

Added to this is another problematic. Recent theories of poststructuralism and postmodernism have complicated and problematized notions of truth, experience and continuous memory. Similarly, if notions of ‘truth’ have got complicated, so have notions of ‘self’, subject and agency. The displacement of temporality, spatiality and the anti-humanistic displacement of the subject, makes Freud’s notion of belatedness, latency particularly available across a range of discourses which is reconceptualizing the basis of what it means to be human in the 21st century.

Part of this is the process of articulation, which is contingent upon listening and involves a kind of sharing. The sharing of traumatic memory creates a witness of the observer/listener, who becomes the custodian of the traumatic or repressed memory. There is a process of transference taking place which constitutes the inaugural moment of the therapeutic process and/ or therapeutic recovery, as well as of autobiography.

The act and process of constructing a witness is germane or crucial to the process of healing and yet this is a process complicated/made difficult by the dispersed self and unassimilated experience. Giving an account of oneself to the other is perforce, then, an act of translation between everyday experience and traumatic experience, everyday memory and traumatic memory, which enables the development of a sense of self through a process of othering. The basis of this self is a contingent one, premised on an illusion of coherence through an interaction with the ‘other’. In psychoanalytical terms, perhaps the most useful theorization is provided by Jessica Benjamin’s concept of the third emerging out of her understanding of inter-subjectivity (Benjamin 2017).

### **Tackling Traumatic Memory**

Thus, part of the process of peace building which also links up with the project of feminist pedagogy is the process of empathetic listening that can be focused on by looking at and *participating in* the counselling and therapeutic process, with a view to unpacking its function as a memory project or practice.

The ubiquity of the issue of violence against women remains a staple in most histories of conflict and constitutes a violation of human rights. Further while there are studies of the links between women and nation, women’s bodies and national honor by Sylvia Walby and others, there is a lacunae in the literature concerning everyday lives of women and a distinct silence on mental health issues. Existing literature looks at and analyses structural inequalities in South Asian societies, but does not always help in the re-imagining of the self except in literature and film. This is perhaps because of the stranglehold of patriarchy in South Asian and Asian societies in addition to a silence surrounding questions of psychological health.

That the Partition was one such moment when the issue of violence, particularly sexual violence, in tandem with and exacerbated by caste and communal factors, came to the forefront, is well known. What has been less well documented is the psychological impact of the Partition on not only the directly affected but also the offspring of those who experienced it through the memories of parents, through transgenerational and intergenerational transference.

Caruth's later work on unclaimed and unassimilated experience closes in on linkages between individual and group memory. (Caruth 2016) This point is also highlighted in *The Psychological Impact of Partition of India* – a work mentioned above which is edited by two psychiatrists-Sanjeev Jain and Alok Sarin (2018). They raise questions on the silence around issues of mental health in the partition archive. Among the many issues they raise is the trans-generational nature of trauma, where subsequent generations carry the memory and there is observable *ex post facto* escalation of hatred. Some key questions that emerge are broad based ones—how does one come to terms with traumatic memory—where forgetting, recalling and narrating are all options. One of the suggestions is to pit different kinds of memory against each other. The weakening of the what can be described as verbally accessible memory helps therapy because it weakens the internalized voices which might hinder recovery within the patient's mind. This process gradually paves the way to the formation of new representations of the self and the world in long term memory.

Does this drive to narrate, the practice of memory work create conditions for self-narration? Contrary to the perception that the incomprehensibility, doubt and collapse of truth invalidate all forms of witnessing, I would argue that this narrative drive which articulates the attempt to piece together the dismembered self creates enabling conditions for the narrative/narrated self which acts as a witness to the experiencing self which has been hitherto muted in the course of trauma. To quote Shoshana Felman, “As a relation to events, testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be construed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference.”(Felman and Laub 1992, 5) This “sense of bits and pieces” of memory chimes with the scattered subject and the idea of discursive subjectivities, a subject whose voice is enabled by the contingent foundation of intersubjectivity. (Benjamin 2007) From where does she speak in order to help cohere the scattered self, which is essential to women's survival in overly patriarchally dominated, even misogynistic societies which attach a lot of value to women's silence. Women's silence has been read as a symptom of patience and resilience and women's voices have been construed and interpreted as a form of excess. It is time we take stock of voice-enabled agential roles for women like the proverbial Scheherazade of the *Arabian Nights* who delays her doom through the narrative web she spins.

For women then and now, grappling with occasional or everyday violence, memories bring both pain and succor. The recovery of traumatic memory is a slow and painful process and at times repressing and blocking them out seems the only way out of trauma. Yet continuous memory and memory practices are the only method or process whereby we can piece together a sense of a coherent self; to do otherwise is to live with a sense of amnesia or aphasia like the protagonist/victim of Manto's evocative story “Khol Do”. In the story, Sirajuddin is finally able to locate his daughter Sakina in the refugee camp after a great deal of searching. Yet even as the long-awaited meeting takes place, the daughter brutalized by rape and violence, is

unable to recognize him. On seeing him, she starts loosening the pajama strings of her salwar. In this telling moment we are called as mute witness to the brutalized girl and her travails. Yet unlike the Holocaust where the perpetrators and ‘victims’ could perhaps be identified, in the partition situation, there was no clear demarcation between family, former friends, neighbors and enemies on either side. People who had been friend and neighbors turned hostile as there was a polarizing of religious communities.

As in cases of childhood abuse and trauma, fathers and uncles—protectors and guardians—turn predators and perpetrators of the most heinous crime possible, violating the bodily and emotional integrity of helpless victims. We are again beleaguered by the question of what it means, and indeed, what are the limits of the human spirit.

### **Empathy and Pedagogy**

It is in realizing the limits of the human-indomitable courage, resilience, determination and persistence in the face of insurmountable obstacles that we see the triumph of the human spirit against all odds, as it were. The crucial moments and critical events in these life writings evoke empathy. For instance, the attack on Malala, the ubiquity of loss and persecution in the narratives of Fawzia Koofi and Marjane Satrapi. Similarly, reading about critical moments like Malala’s shooting, Fawzia’s loss of father and brother and the forced pushing back of women into cloistered and repressive domesticity which came with fundamentalism widen the horizon of understanding. In narrating, reading and processing these traumatic events, we witness and experience, albeit second-hand, the growth of empathy and a widening of the horizons of experiential understanding. In reading and hearing stories of partition, in reading/hearing narrative accounts of violence, we experience closer at hand, what it means to see and be in a world made strange and unreal through the victim/survivor’s uncertainty of ‘being’. These life writings provide a space where the idea of a feminist pedagogy might grow and develop, through a sense of empathy, a route which has more to do with affect than processes of intellectual cognition. The learning that results from sharing of experiences intersects with processes of therapy and therapeutic listening which might help alter and change the script for both survivor and witness, and therefore the meaning of ‘experience’ itself.

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