

Book Reviews

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Nonica Datta, *Violence, Martyrdom and Partition: A Daughter's Testimony*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2009. 235 pages. Rs. 695.

Violence, Martyrdom and Partition: A Daughter's Testimony is a unique contribution to the emerging discipline of memory as history, to Partition studies, to the understanding of violence and to the psycho-pathological study of fear, to name a few. The story of Subhashini, an unknown woman who was the head of an Arya Samaj institution in rural north India, covers both the colonial and post-colonial periods, explores the silences, ambiguities and contradictions in an individual's memory which shapes, moulds, reflects and in turn gets shaped, moulded and reflected in and by the collective memory.

The book goes beyond the classic divisions that polarise women. The author beautifully and creatively breaks firm binary oppositions to offer a fluid interpretation. Her understanding and depth of knowledge of the community under study presents a rich and fascinating tapestry of images relating to Jat history, Arya Samaj life, *Gurukul* systems and Partition violence. The daughter's testimony, thus, touches upon not only gender but caste, class, community, sexuality, time and space. By interrogating the central positioning of Partition in most narratives of that period in which it is regarded as a rupture, this oral testimony pluralises the experience by providing a critical analysis of the intersections of class, caste and gender divisions in an individual's memory.

Running throughout the body of Datta's work are three central and overarching themes. The first and perhaps most compelling is her vision of a historical project where she presents memory as history. She alternates between being an active author and a passive listener, to craft a story which can be termed as parallel history. Ranajit Guha identifies wisdom as the most essential quality in a truly creative writer whose task is to renew the past creatively

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through language in a manner that is not available to the academic historian. He says 'it is only by confronting historiography with creativity that we can hope to grasp what historicality is about' (p. 87). By talking about Subhashini and presenting her memory as history, Datta does just that. She engages with the concept and language of history writing. With rare sensitivity she unfolds the story in a language which retains its integrity and keeps intact its tonality. She does not present an argument but strives to put forward a human testimony with all its contradictions emphasising too the significance of the insignificant. Datta is constantly struggling with her own language and that of the narrator, to create a new language of history writing.

The second theme is the multiplicity of perspectives that blur the distinction between witness and survivor, victim and victimiser. As a dutiful daughter, Subhashini sublimates her own desires and self for her father, a local Arya Samaj leader, allowing his patriarchal control to structure her identity. Witnessing and participating in communal violence forms a text which is complex and highly disturbing. What is unique to Subhashini's story is that while her subjectivity is constructed around her vulnerability as a woman of a beleaguered Hindu community, her testimony provides enough evidence for us to view her as a witness and cheerleader of partition violence and never truly a victim. This is not to distract from the intensity with which she fears the Muslims. Her fear and the 'othering' of the Muslims in her story echo contemporary Hindu communitarian narratives which portray Hindus as terrorised by Muslims in Haryana in particular and in East Punjab in general. Her fear of 'Mussalman abduction' is an obsession with her, a fear that aligns her with her own Jat and wider Hindu community. It is a fear that is only imagined and ironically remains the most important element in the testimony.

The murder of her father in 1942 at the hands of unknown people, in which Subhashini implicates the local Muslim pastoralists, locally known as Rangars, heightens Hindu hostility towards the other community. Her father's martyrdom was avenged by violence during the Partition riots. In her memory as well as in the collective memory of local Jat peasants, her father's murder

was the reason for Jat attacks on Muslims in 1947. The avenging of her father's death becomes the central theme in her testimony.

Thus, the third theme is the examination of the idea of the Partition in a memory wherein Partition is not the major but a liminal incident. In the nation's collective memory the date of 1947 signifies rupture, but in Subhashini's memory it is not 1947 but 1942, the year of her father's *balidan* (human sacrifice) which marks the rupture. A complex and contradictory narrative, the book reveals how communal questions are linked to everyday life and how the Partition of 1947 is only one of several ruptures separating the past from the present. Multiple 'partitions' are thus recorded in both individual and collective memory. In order to make sense of our histories the dominant narrative of Partition needs to be constantly juxtaposed with local and individual narratives and local and individual memories. Datta thus suggests the need to reinterpret Partition memory by providing a testimony which localises the experience of Partition.

The book is divided into three parts. In the first chapter, 'Introducing Subhashini', the author describes the background and context of the testimony, presenting the story of colonial mediation in a rural society, a story of the conflict between the pastoralists and peasants, and of the development of the Arya Samaj as a religious movement and the story of Bhagat Phool Singh, a local Arya Samaj leader and father of Subhashini. The development of the Arya Samaj had provided the cultural resources for Jat assertion. Datta explores the construction of Subhashini's daughterhood in this milieu.

The second chapter, which is the main text of the book, is the testimony itself, which reveals how Subhashini's existence was embedded in the Jat community, along with the ironies and contradictions of her everyday life. A model member of the Arya Samaj, she resists conventional patriarchal norms of life to follow her father's dreams. Trained and groomed by her father to be his able successor, Subhashini becomes more than just that. She becomes the voice of her father, clinging to his memory and shaping each event and non-event around him. She offers the testimony of a daughter who, although free from the trappings of conventional patriarchy, reveals a far more powerful internalised patriarchy.

This is reflected in her telling self-image as a *rand lugai* (widowed wife). Her education and financial independence help her to survive. Unlike other women who are defined by their marriage, Subhashini's ideas and plans were shaped by her father. She grew up deifying her father and continued to do so all her life. It is no wonder that a large part of her narrative is about her father.

One of the connecting stories in the chapter entitled '*Kanhi-Puthi-wala-Kissa*' brings to the forefront the significant role that Bhagat Phool Singh played in strengthening caste identity, promoting patriarchal tendencies and embedding the individual within a communal context. This *kissa* of a love affair between two Jat women and a Mussalman becomes the testing ground for projecting the patriarchal controls in the local Jat society. The murder of the transgressing women at the behest of Bhagat Phool Singh was seen as 'a moral victory over the evil sexuality of the Jat women'. Bhagatji's subsequent murder led to the further tightening of the noose around the neck of local Mussalmans. The local Jat community along with Subhashini orchestrated a powerful conspiracy to implicate the Rangars as Bhagatji's murderers. Simmering anger against the Rangars fuelled by the *Kanhi-Puthi-wala-Kissa* reach the culmination with the large scale violence against Muslims in 1947. Subhashini's testimony is a contrast to the thousands of testimonies of women caught in the violence of Partition for she was neither displaced nor was she a victim of Muslim wrath. In fact she was a spectator of violence against Muslim women and men by the Jat community.

The last chapter which the author entitles 'Letter to Subhashini' strives to make sense of Subhashini's contradictions and ambivalences by juxtaposing Subhashini's story with the stories of Vash and Amrita Pritam—one an unknown victim of Partition and the other a well-known survivor, alerting the reader to the existence of multiple accounts and understandings of the same event. Subhashini presents a contrast by revealing how daughters can be just like fathers, enacting, recreating and reinforcing patriarchal and religio-communitarian tendencies.

Noteworthy is the nuanced account of violence against Muslim women. The ambiguities, shifts and silences in the testimony of a

cheerleader are significant. Subhashini's narrative contains troubled descriptions of the brutal rape, disfiguring, abduction and murder of local Muslim women by the Jats. While she remains hesitant at times to break this collective Indian silence on the violence by saying '*na suno, na sunao*' (neither hear nor speak), Datta creatively opens a window to break that silence. This remains the biggest strength of the book. The author unites themes creatively and provides the opportunity to intensify Subhashini's voice around issues which are historical. It engages with the process of achieving freedom from the dominant Partition rhetoric and to imagine multiple and alternative forms of history. It is indeed oral history at its best. The cover of the book and the archival photographs of Subhashini and her family along with an elaborate map of the area under study in 1910 from the Punjab District Gazetteer add to the richness and texture of this lucid, insightful and pioneering study. The book should appeal widely across disciplines.

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Sanjam Ahluwalia, *Reproductive Restraints: Birth Control in India 1877–1947*. New Delhi: Permanent Black. 2008. 251 pages. Rs. 595 (hb).

This book is a pioneering attempt to reconstruct the history of birth control in India. Divided into five chapters along with an introduction and conclusion, it traces the various debates and ideas of birth control activists in India and their interrelation to larger transnational birth control movements. This book also attempts to highlight how birth control, seen as liberalising and empowering women in theory, in practice 'became part of an elitist agenda that actually restrained women from exercising control over their own reproductive capacities' (p. 1) and how politics of gender, class, caste, race, sexuality, community, demography and nation shaped the discourse of birth control in colonial India (p. 5).

A rich variety of archival and literary sources have been consulted to understand the debate and varying viewpoints on birth control, including the private papers of western advocates such as Marie Stopes and C.P. Blacker as well as of Indian women leaders such as Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay and Rameshwari Nehru. This has been supplemented with a study of various Indian regional and national medical journals along with vernacular magazines and pamphlets such as *Stri Darpan*, *Sudha*, etc. It is creditable that the author has tried to go beyond elite sources to try and bring forth the views of the subaltern. She has had conversations with the *dais* (midwives) of Jaunpur to understand and highlight their viewpoint on the meaning of 'reproductive freedom' and the gap between elitist and subaltern understandings of birth control and reproductive choices.

Tracing the history of birth control in India, this book questions the assumption that birth control is necessarily empowering for women. It begins by tracing the writings of Indian middle/ upper caste male advocates of birth control. Looking at the writings of Gopaljee Ahluwalia, Narayan Sitaram Phadke, Rughunath Dhondo Karve and others, the author highlights how the writings on contraceptive information were driven as much by science as by nationalism, blending together different discourses on Malthusianism and eugenics, demography and nationalism, sexology and morality (p. 23). Hence, while the Indian male advocates of birth control borrowed eugenicist and Malthusian ideas from the west, they were redrawn and reworked within the context of nationalism in colonial India and tied national well-being to sexual practices. Thus, the advocates of birth control, writing from their own elitist perspectives, 'called for a strict surveillance of reproductive functions, particularly those represented as undesirable national citizens—the working class, lower castes, and, in some instances, Muslims' (p. 35). In their estimation, 'national prosperity and well-being rested on matters attending to the womb' (p. 39). Issues of population control and national demography prevailed over questions of reproductive health and maternal well-being.

While linking the issue of birth control to the project of nation building, the author moves beyond national boundaries to look at the role played by western advocates such as Marie Stopes and

Margaret Sanger in promoting contraceptive usage in colonial India. She emphasises how India was an important site where these Western advocates competed to accumulate cultural and economic capital, prestige and patronage, as well as markets for their newly developed contraceptive technologies (p. 55). She also contends that while speaking of birth control in the context of it giving greater sexual freedom to women, these western advocates remained patronising towards Indian subjects and viewed the west as providing the civilising influence. The differences between Gandhi and these western advocates regarding birth control are also highlighted. While Sanger and Stopes divorced marital sex from procreation and spoke about the use of contraceptives to lead a happy marital life, Gandhi confined sex within marriage to the act of procreation. Idealising femininity and being distrustful of male sexuality, Gandhi opposed birth control as leading to the degradation of women at the hands of men. 'By stripping women of sexual desires, Gandhi reaffirmed motherhood as the natural vocation for women' (p. 78).

The debates on birth control among Indian middle-class feminists such as Rameshwari Nehru, Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy, Lakshmi Menon and others have also been explored to show how patriarchal nationalism as well as the elite class and caste prism of these women leaders shaped their feminist agenda in colonial India. Emphasis was laid by these women leaders on the preservation of family bonds, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay being the only exception who linked the demand for birth control to a woman's control over her body and sexual desires. For example, though a resolution on birth control was passed in the 1932 session of the AIWC, it is important to note that it regarded marital status as an essential qualification for contraceptive information (p. 95). Thus, discussions on birth control had to take place within the ambit of family life. This leads to the question—what about the prostitutes and their perspective and use of contraceptives? Unfortunately, the book is silent on this point.

The colonial state's attitude towards birth control is also explored and according to the author, 'at the most prosaic level, the British colonial state lacked consensus on the issue of birth control

in India' (p. 117). Nonetheless, she argues that while the British followed a stated policy of non-intervention after the revolt of 1857 due to the fear of upsetting indigenous beliefs, there were instances when the colonial state intervened on the question of birth control, the Sarda Act of 1929 being one example that identified birth control as a measure to improve maternal and infant health. However, on the whole, colonial intervention with regard to birth control was not intended to empower women. The author argues that the main reason for introducing birth control was to check the menacing increase of India's population. It is important to note here that while the ambiguity of the colonial response to birth control is explored, the nationalist response is not dealt with, despite the fact that health came under provincial jurisdiction and into the hands of the nationalists after 1919. A discussion in this regard would have enriched this work.

The discussion on western-trained biomedical men and women pinpoints the fear of midwives (*dais*) and is a reflection of their professional insecurities. The response of indigenous practitioners, *vaid*s and *hakims*, is also discussed to bring forth the difference of opinion with the biomedics. 'Unlike the biomedics, the vernacular practitioners seemed to have treated birth control not as a separate issue for women, but one that was part of a series of issues that impacted women's reproductive health—fertility control, and issues of infertility were addressed together, and practitioners offered remedies for both these conditions' (p. 166).

The book ends with the author narrating the viewpoints of midwives (*dais*) and subaltern women in rural Jaunpur, indicating their differences with elite understandings of birth control and contraceptives. As emphasised by her, 'Jaunpur provides a useful reference point from which to challenge the epistemic privilege bestowed upon elite views and as such it allows us to see the partiality that shapes dominant understanding' (p. 182). This attempt to recover the voices of subaltern women is a major strength of the book. 'Reproductive Restraints' hence is a welcome contribution towards reconstructing the history of birth control in India and the inter-related questions of gender, class and sexuality. Its attempt to move beyond geographical boundaries to consider the

debates between Indian and western advocates of birth control in the colonial period is praiseworthy. The book will be appreciated by historians, sociologists and gender experts across social science disciplines.

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Aparna Basu and Malavika Karlekar (eds), *In So Many Words: Women's Life Experiences from Western and Eastern India*. New Delhi: Routledge. 2008. xvii + 129 pages. Rs. 475.

This book is based on the 'life-experiences' of eight women—Kalpana Dutt (Joshi), Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Sailabala Das, Vidyagauri Neelkanth, Anasuya Sarabhai, Li Gotami, Shakuntala Paranjpye and Monica Gupta (Chanda)—during colonial times and as narrated by them in various forms: autobiographical accounts, diaries or letters. A unique aspect of this book, apart from the personal-narrative mode is the editors Basu and Karlekar's justification of the integral role of the visual in 'placing' the written text. This interesting exploration of the genre of women's personal narrative together with photographs is also an experiment on auto-photo-biography. The similarities between these two representational arts are instrumental in making a connection between words and the image. Through such a criss-crossing of genres and the flexibility of narrative agencies as reflected in women's memoirs, photographs, diaries, letters, published articles, 'portraits from memory', essays and interviews, this book that allows 'her voice' to 'take over' works to destabilise the dominant canon of autobiography as a male genre.

As discussed by the editors in the introduction, the intention of this volume has been to touch upon the notions of 'audience, recall and memory' without going into details about autobiographical writing. This largely means that what the narrators choose to remember depends on 'psychological, contextual and relational' factors. The question that one engages in while reading the varied lives of these eight women is whether it is the 'real' or the fictive

self that is being written into existence through so many words? If one assumes that the *self* that is the centre of all autobiographical narrative 'is necessarily a fictive structure' (Eakin 1992: 3) then one could appreciate the self-reflexivity of most of these women in exercising their choice of projecting and simultaneously concealing certain areas of their lives. While 'the self is written into existence', sometimes the act of writing also writes off certain parts of the self through a process of re-remembering memories. It is interesting to note how Sarala Devi Chaudhurani is silent on issues surrounding her marriage, her relationship with Gandhi and the reasons behind her withdrawal from politics. Similarly Anasuya Sarabhai never mentions why her marriage broke down and Sailabala Das' autobiography says very little about her private self.

A very interesting distinction is maintained between what is personal and what is private. Shakuntala Paranjpye reveals a lot of her personality through her writing but not about her private life. Monica Gupta (Chanda) only hints at her emotional distance from her mother, not stating anything personal. Likewise, Li Gotami and Kalpana Dutt write only of travel and political life and consciously leave aside the private. It is indeed a matter worth probing as to why almost all of these women despite being educated (except for Monica and Anasuya, who were not allowed to finish school) and emancipated, consciously chose to keep their private selves out of their writing. The instance of Shakuntala Paranjpye and Anasuya Sarabhai generates a lot more curiosity since both were, in some senses, reformers. Shakuntala was the first woman to ride a bicycle in Poona, advocate family planning, smoke in public and challenge all accepted notions of femininity. Anasuya, on the other hand worked with mill workers after she broke off with her husband and founded the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association on Gandhian lines. Why did these women choose to remain silent on areas of their lives like marriage, family and intimate relationships, crucial sites for the inscription of patriarchal power and authority? Is *writing* in this case, an escape from emotion rather than being an escape to emotion as has been the case with many women searching for 'a space of her own'?

The editors are quite right in stating that 'Whichever form a woman chooses to write about her self, it is emancipatory... So she writes about many selves,...' (p. x). That is why as mentioned earlier, these women in writing about their selves also include issues around the self. Three of these women—Sailabala Das, Li Gotami and Shakuntala Paranjpye—go beyond the realm of the private to emerge as personae in the public sphere. In 'putting together' the life-experiences of these eight women from western and eastern India, the editors have managed to collect narratives from various backgrounds and subject-positions. Two women are Brahmos, one a Prarthana Samajist, a Jain, a Parsi, a Christian and two Hindus of whom one was the daughter of agnostic reformer parents. Again, the social and political milieu from which these women came is also significantly representative. Four of them—Sarala, Vidyagauri, Anasuya and Sailabala—were all born in the 1870s, while Li Gotami, Shakuntala, Kalpana and Monica were born between 1906–1913. But their lived experiences were uniquely different from each other even in cases where they came from the same social background or historical period. Again, all of these eight women belonged to the urban intelligentsia and were widely travelled; some even travelled and studied abroad and all this happened at a time when travelling or crossing geographical boundaries was considered to be blasphemous, particularly by Hindu upper-caste standards. So in both literal and symbolic senses these women crossed boundaries, both social and political. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, who was also the niece of Rabindranath Tagore, was involved in nationalist politics, while Kalpana Dutt was the apocryphal firebrand among them all as she was involved in the revolutionary politics of Bengal. She made bombs, learnt to handle a revolver and dressed as a man. Again, among these eight women, while Sailabala Das was the only one to remain unmarried, three out of those who got married did not stay tied very long to the institution of marriage. In this aspect Li Gotami, is probably the most radical and adventurous, leaving her first husband, going to Shantiniketan and marrying a Buddhist and then converting to Buddhism. A unique narrative of travel and adventure emerges from the excerpts of her journey across the Himalaya to western

Tibet where she stayed with her husband in a cave inside a Buddhist temple, drawing and sketching shrines and writing notes on her experiences.

Basu and Karlekar also raise several provocative questions about authority, agency and authenticity of the text and the narrative form in the Introduction, which problematise the notions of both the *self* and autobiography. The *self* which is not a homogenous construct but 'a melange of many lives and experiences' has been very central to autobiography as a male form of 'life-writing' describing conquest, career, heritage and social standing (Eliott 2005). The editors therefore juxtapose memoir as a more flexible form of writing which accomodates the female 'emotive modes of perception, articulation and acquisition of knowledge' (p. ix) and promotes women's non-fictional writings. Conventional theories of autobiography cannot be applied to personal narratives of women because of the need for 'accomodating subverted strategies of writing which address issues of silences' which the editors describe as 'protective strategy' differing only in its manifestations across class, caste, religion and cultures (p. ix). Silence becomes a medium through which the unrepresentable is appropriated. The role of the editors in transmitting these silences is also very significant. The variation in the construction of silence as a narrative strategy with reference to variations in cultural and geographical locations is well represented. Besides, in the case of Anasuya Sarabhai, the translation of the Gujarati interview into English provides for using translation to convey and transcreate the interior of the text. The editors through the use of translation and photography have succeeded in bringing into being nuances which have remained 'hidden in the pages of a woman's life' (p. x).

The fundamental issues involved here are the ways in which diaries and journals differ from memoirs and the reasons which inspire women to write or keep relatively 'immediate' records (Cooper 1987). In probing into the question as to why women prefer to write diaries instead of autobiographies one is led to the issue of the relationship between the written text and its author. The editors have followed a uniform methodological pattern of first providing a biographical sketch by scholars familiar with the work of these women, followed by their writings. The first two

illustrations of this volume are of Sarala Devi Chaudhurani and Shailabala Das with excerpts from their published autobiographies *Jeevaner Jharapata* (Life's Fallen Leaves) and *A Look Before and After* respectively. Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, who according to Bharati Ray is 'arguably the first woman political leader in the freedom movement' and who 'belonged to the Hindu-Brahmo community' was not only a relative of Rabindranath Tagore but was also a very powerful singer. In fact she had made her debut into politics through music. The photograph on page 1 presents Sarala Devi around the age of 18 in a revolutionised urban middle-class attire, followed by many other photographs, each revealing a significant aspect or moment in her life. Her translated autobiography focuses on her birth, childhood, music, education, employment and politics and marriage which have been divided into sub-headings by the translator. Her autobiography ends with an objective description of how she was literally forced into marriage by her sister. The most amazing part of her narration is the absence of any malice or bitterness at being in a situation where she had to accept a relationship that she was not prepared for. Next, Sachidananda Mohanty's critical account of Sailabala Das as an 'adopted daughter of the Oriya nationalist Madhusudan Das' raises significant conflicting issues around her multiple identities and Indian nationalism vis-à-vis Oriya regionalism. A photograph presents Sailabala as she was in her later life. Her autobiography in English has sub-headings on diverse issues ranging from her experiences of entering into the Jagannath Temple as a Christian woman to her account of being the first woman Honorary Magistrate in India, her meeting with Mahatma Gandhi, journey to London and her insightful observations on the two kinds of Englishmen—those who lived in England and those who had come to India. A significant aspect of the life of this unique woman is that despite her indirect involvement with political activities around Civil Disobedience and her relationship with leaders of the national movement, she never entered active politics. However, ironically she was perhaps the one most exposed to politics among her counterparts.

As in the case of the renderings in English of the writings of Sarala Devi Chaudhurani, Sailabala Das (in parts) and Kalpana Dutt Joshi, Aparna Basu's accounts of Vidyagauri Neelkanth and

Anasuya Sarabhai are translated by her from Gujarati. The translators Basu, Mohanty, Bose, Chakravartty and Sukhendu Ray have done a commendable job by privileging transcreation over mediation as mentioned earlier. In this sense the translators have also truly served the role of *sutradhar*. While Anasuya's is a reproduction of an interview recorded in Gujarati, Vidyagauri's text has been excerpted from autobiographical sketches on her childhood, family, education and marriage. Most interesting are the intimate letters exchanged between her and her husband Ramanbhai. Carefully chosen photographs narrate important historical moments of Vidyagauri's encounter with Sarojini Naidu and Margaret E. Cousins, an associate of Annie Besant.

Equally revealing and provocative is the rendering of the life of Anasuya Sarabhai, whom Basu feels was inspired by the Victorian feminist tradition embodied symbolically in Ibsen's Nora who slammed the door on domesticity. Like Pandita Ramabai, Tarabai Shinde and Rakmabai who could interrogate patriarchal symbolic constructs and institutions in India, young Anasuya also walked out of marriage to live a life on her own terms. The narrative deals with marriage, childhood, career, education and Anasuya's involvement in nationalist politics and the *Majoor Mahajan*, the Ahmedabad textile worker's union of which she was the founder. There is a significant photograph of Anasuya in England, her sartorial style clearly influenced by the West. Her determination to go to London and pursue a career reflects her sense of independence, very rare in women of her times.

Tulsi Vatsal introduces us to two uniquely emancipated women, Li Gotami and Shakuntala Paranjpye, both interesting cases for feminist studies. Li Gotami's life (she was born Ruddy Petit), is an amazing story of a Parsi woman from an affluent family of Bombay. As mentioned earlier she was the most adventurous of all these eight women. Apart from walking out of one marriage and entering another, both times on her own terms, she is also unique in her experiences of travel around the world. The narrative is supported by very rare photographs of Ruddy on the snowy slopes in Switzerland, her competing pose against her own life-size painting of a dancing *apsara* and her wedding snap with her second husband in ceremonial brocade gowns. Her travel writings were published

in *The Illustrated Weekly of India* in 1951. That a woman could redefine and recreate herself, transcending the conventional life of marriage and domesticity among the hills and inside the caves is a revolutionary discovery of her selfhood.

Shakuntala Paranjpye, as mentioned above, apart from being the first woman to ride and smoke in Poona, was a single mother, a mathematician and a pioneer of family planning in India. She propagated the use of scientific methods of birth control in order to protect women's reproductive rights. Exposed to western education and a western lifestyle, she also worked in organisations like the ILO. Her falling in love with a Russian at a ball, her marriage, the birth of a baby girl and then the inevitable divorce all followed in quick succession. Shakuntala's public life of a social reformer ran alongside her private life of single parenthood. Vatsal's account is followed by extracts from Shakuntala's published book *Sense and Nonsense* (1970) which has several sections on issues in family planning along with a humorous section entitled 'International Conference Of Cows' which is a report of the dream Shakuntala had as she fell asleep on her way to Delhi to attend a session of the Rajya Sabha on the issue of cow slaughter.

The last two narratives in the volume are those of Monica Gupta (Chanda), introduced by Malavika Karlekar and of Kalpana Dutt Joshi introduced by Gargi Chakravartty. Karlekar, in her reading of Monica Gupta, attempts to look 'at a specific part of the life-cycle, that of childhood and early adolescence of a young daughter of a member of the elite Indian Civil Service (ICS) between 1911–1927 as reflected upon by her many years later' (p. 99). Such a reading produces not only a very revealing personal narrative of just one woman brought up on the mixed influences of the cultures of the East and West but also succeeds in recasting the colonial encounter as experienced in individual *bhadralok* homes and at the level of individual consciousness. This narrative is based on Monica's own recollections of her childhood and early years as jotted down by her in two exercise books, when she was over 70 years old. Photographs show Monica as a child and with her family in Noakhali. Monica's unpublished reminiscences provide a very vivid account of her life along with the life-world of Noakhali.

Equally interesting and provocative but from a different perspective, is the account of the life of revolutionary Kalpana Dutt. Along with a few rare women who after they had met and interacted with the legendary Surya Sen (known as *Master da*), Kalpana succeeded in overcoming the dogmatic convention that revolutionary politics had no space for women. She soon became a part of the core group and had no inhibition about being in the company of her male comrades. After being released from jail on 1 May 1939, she chose the path of communism. In 1943 she and the vibrant General Secretary of CPI, Puran Chand Joshi decided to marry. But after Joshi's expulsion from the party in 1949, Kalpana was forced to make a choice between her loyalty to her husband and to the party. Therefore Kalpana's life, Chakravartty writes, 'brings out the bitter truth of how wives of Party comrades suffered and were humiliated for no fault of their own' (p. 116). Kalpana's life story brings to light the very disturbing issue of the gender insensitivity of male-centric party structures even in the case of left organisations. Her commitment to ideology and her sacrifice has gone unnoticed and so the publication of her narrative has partly succeeded in giving back such a revolutionary her due. The photographs are telling—and prompt one to read behind the unspoken silence and the apparently peaceful gaze of Kalpana's eyes—even though she was going through turbulent days in her life.

What is most striking about this volume is the fact that women could invent patterns of self-representation through writing, which itself was a transgression in their times. As Helene Cixous says, writing for women living under patriarchal social and political structures was also breaking silences imposed on them. She writes:

It is by writing, from and toward women and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. Woman should break out of the snare of silence. (Cixous 1986)

In so many words is a substantial contribution to the genre of women's personal narratives and autobiography. The volume's

dedication reads 'For our mothers and grandmothers who wrote—and for those women who wanted to but didn't'. Such an enterprise is particularly significant at a time when there is a growing interest in women's personal chronicles, in writing as a source for alternative knowledge and also in the ideologies that inform the reading of such texts.

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