Erasmus Mundus Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies

the cut is an echo: departures from visibility

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Acknowledgement

To Henna and Jethun

who taught me what friendship means.

To Ma,

Every time you raised your voice I found mine.

To Baba,

From whom I learnt parenting should be about

tenderness and freedom, not control and policing.

To my friends and my sister,

who believed in me when I could not and helped me finish this on time.

To everyone condemned to loneliness by this violent world,

may we hear each other, may we meet each other

grieve, love and laugh together,

shamelessly mad.

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Abstract

This thesis critically studies trauma in the context of natal family violence in India and builds a theory of flesh using liminagraphy as a 'life-affirming research practice' (Sheik 14) inviting a departure from visibility and a move towards abolitionary listening. Situated in decolonial studies and critical caste studies, this liminagraphic journey traverses the wounded continuum of the larger and smaller world/s we inhabit to make sense of our beingness and in doing so questions our understanding of home theorised as a cut and an echo. I analyse how interlocked systems of oppression like caste, colonialism, gender operate to uphold each other through institutions like the family that shapes and is simultaneously shaped by nationalist constructions. Grounding these questions in my experience of child sexual abuse within the family alongside using two reports on natal family violence in India, I look at the body as a messy, impossible archive to create echoing images elaborated on by poetic meditations through which I elicit a different understanding of trauma, visibility and listening. By analysing how multiple oppressive regimes converge to impede the centring of victim/survivors' needs, I urge an inquiry into seeing and listening. To facilitate this, I historically situate the construction of gender and family within caste patriarchy where the control of women's bodies and sexuality is essential to maintain it (Ambedkar; Chakravarti). Therefore, I situate the family as a site of violence and study it in the context of the Indian nation-state formed through the collaboration between the colonial administration and dominant caste elites. The dominant Hindu intellectual visions of the nation as 'Bharat Mata' alluding to Hindu familial logics is a territorial nativist imagination that ruptured India through its efforts of forceful homogenisation. The wounds of this historical rupture continue to be exacerbated in the current Hindu-fascist political economy characterised by increased violence. I therefore situate family violence in relation to this larger continuum of violence to point towards the need for alternative ways of listening and being. This research builds on decolonial studies by putting it in conversation with South Asian anti-caste, queer, feminist voices with voices from decolonial, queer feminist and Black studies.

Keywords: liminagraphy, trauma, sexual violence, childhood, listening, family, nation, caste, brahmanical patriarchy

Contents

journey: a departure from visibility

Whoever you are, welcome. We are about to embark on a journey and I thank you for paying attention and reading. I begin by briefly explaining what our journey is about. At the beginning of this project, I tried formulating an academically sound central research question to encompass concepts this thesis deals with—How do we practice listening when it comes to sexual abuse within the natal home where multiple oppressive structures like caste, capitalism and gender converge to uphold each other through institutions like the family and nation? But I realise, my central research question is a borrowed one from a beloved poet, vqueeram, who asks, *'How do we bring politics down to the scale of life and living?'* (India Organising Podcast, par.29)

In my proposal I wrote, once again in strictly academic terms, that I want to look at how material structures get transformed into social, bodily, and psychic forms of being by empirically studying the family and nation. But what I have really attempted here is, using liminagraphy by Zuleika Sheik as my approach, to write a theory of flesh that helps unravel the connections between our larger and smaller worlds. What I have written on paper is what I do every day—try making sense of the world/s I live in and the world/s that live in me. It is therefore in an epiphanic instance of relationality that I share my central question with vqueeram, whose very generous offerings have always provoked me showing how consciousness is always collective, something that I learn from Periyar.

Some of my research sub-questions ask,

-What does the home when read as a site of violence reveal about the historical and structural issues that plague India as a country?

-How does enfleshed theorising based on an understanding of the body as a deteriorating, impossible archive help elicit a different understanding of trauma?

-What can abolitionary listening offer to centre victims/survivors when interlocked oppressive systems converge to impede their needs?

These questions emerge from my experience of child sexual abuse within the family so I use liminagraphy to write a theory of flesh by reading the body as a messy, deteriorating archive in the afterlife of trauma. Additionally, I use insights from two qualitative reports ‘Unkahi: The Unspoken’ by Shakti Shalini and ‘Apnon ka Bahut Lagta Hai’ on centring natal family violence

in queer and trans lives in India' by People's Union for Civil Liberties (henceforth PUCL) and the National Network for LBI Women and Trans Persons (henceforth The Network), on natal family violence by queer feminist organisations in India to build on my own experiences along with that of others who have faced violence within the family. [1] I use these reports not as data to extract from but relational insights to write with not only because they offer narratives of women, queer and trans persons but also because their qualitative approach allows for critical engagement with family, gender and violence in India. They are archives of loss and abandonment that are devastating to read but important because queer feminist collectives are tirelessly working to bring changes at legal and policy levels. I do not engage on the level of law or policy directly but on a smaller, intimate scale of living to slowly unpack the afterlife of trauma in the current political economy to offer a different understanding of listening and

[1] Shakti Shalini is an NGO that has been supporting survivors of sexual and gendered violence since 1987 and has been working on its prevention since 2014 to fight against systemic violence in order to shape a gender-equal world for children and adults across the gender spectrum. The report 'Unkahi-The Unspoken' is a qualitative research report formed as a response to the overwhelming reports of natal family violence received by the organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic in India. The report includes narratives of 20 women aged between 18-27 years largely belonging to working class and lower middle-class backgrounds across caste, class and religious backgrounds (with the majority belonging to minority communities and marginalised caste locations) in the National Capital Region of Delhi who had reached out to the organisation between 2020-21. The study selected participants such that they could include a spectrum of narratives from a diverse range of faith, caste, sexual, vocational, educational and relationship identities, and varied forms of natal family violence. The study was designed as semi-structured, in-depth interviews with them.

The report states that it has tried to,

1. identify the various forms of violence enacted by natal families towards women;
2. understand the pandemic-related experiences and challenges of women who sought help from designated systems and services around domestic violence; and
3. offer recommendations for the feminist-civil society collective and state actors. (Shakti Shalini 11)

The report by PUCL is a crucial intervention in the ongoing Marriage Equality debates in India where petitions are pushing for marriage rights to be extended to queer and trans persons. The state's response to petitions for Marriage Equality has consistently hinged on casteist, transphobic arguments whereby the central government has dismissed petitions on grounds of marriage being a sacrament, holy union and 'sanskar' asserting that heterosexual marriage is the norm historically 'foundational to the existence and continuance of the State' (The Telegraph). The PUCL report is based on a hearing organised by The Network among eight panellists (who are human rights, women's rights lawyers, academics, feminist activists, anti-caste activists) and 31 queer and trans testifiers. I have used testimonials by that cut across caste, class, gender and religious backgrounds to show the pervasiveness of caste and how it undergirds sexual violence in India.

seeing that emerges from attending to traumatised embodiment, a body vastly different from what law sees the human as.

Within heteropatriarchal regime, both gender and violence are understood very visually, a visual reliance that is built on transphobia. Gender, playing out within the binds of caste, relies constantly on proof of being visibly enough and thus becomes a site of policing and control. The control over sexuality to maintain caste paves way for gendered violence within families in India. The visual understanding of gender plays out in how queer and trans folks are subject to violence at birth when the doctor considers parental preferences when assigning gender at birth and non-normative bodies are marked for surgical 'correction' (PUCL 131). Our understanding of violence is also very visual and spectacular, always on the lookout for the perfect crime, criminal and victim that those in power can readily agree with. Only visible brutality goes viral or makes headlines. Violence is so normalised that we do not see it unless it is spectacular. The spectacular understanding of violence invisibilises normalised forms of violence and only when violence takes a blatant form it is acknowledged so that it can be relegated as an anomaly in an otherwise perfect system. How we treat victims and perpetrators in a caste patriarchal, capitalist, neoliberal society is shaped by how we are trained to see bodies. The brahmanical body-politic (Aloysius 1) trains one in, to borrow from Achille Mbembe, a necropolitical visuality that determines who has the claim to dignity and what kind of bodies are ultimately allowed to exist. Therefore, in a brahmanical political economy, upper caste Hindu men are granted impunity resulting in systemic erasure of the brutalisation of marginalised bodies of dalit, adivasi and Muslim persons drastically rising in the current Hindu-fascist regime led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (henceforth BJP) in India (Singh and Butalia 59). Marginalised bodies are also easily seen as the perfect criminal, which in cases of sexual abuse, is relegated to the stranger/outsider whereas 90% abusers are known to victims of child sexual abuse cases (Ravi). The global consumption of the brutal 2012 Delhi gang-rape case of a young veterinarian Jyoti Singh Pandey, an urban middle-class, brahmin woman who was gang-raped by men who belonging to lower socio-economic backgrounds, is a lesson in understanding the anxieties and aspirations that shape how the rapist and victim is imagined mobilised by classist, casteist and colonial ways of seeing (Kaur 7). On one hand the urban middle class blamed the victim for going out at night, being with a boy other than her husband, reeking of caste patriarchal policing of women's sexuality while the caste/class mobilised image of the encroaching young migrant worker was used to relegate sexual violence to a certain section of society. Several politicians including then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh blamed sexual violence on 'footloose migrants' relying on which emerged a caste patriarchal

'paternalistic protectionism attitude' towards women from the savage other (Atluri 370). What also followed this case was a reinforcement of protectionist attitudes that characterises caste patriarchy to control young, middle-class women's sexuality 'in an effort to protect the assumed purity of the idealised upper caste Hindu citizens' (Atluri 365) creating the 'perfect victim' in two ways. Firstly, to gain legitimacy, the 'perfect victim' would have to be upper caste and to be the perfect upper caste victim they should also be regulated in terms of clothes, mobility and therefore, gender. This figuration then automatically erases caste oppressed, working class, trans and queer people as victims and relegates the possibility of sexual violence entirely outside the home/family constructed as a haven even while articulated in a violently controlling rhetoric. It also then entirely negates caste-based sexual violence by assuming a certain section of men capable of raping. Thus, anxieties over gender, sexuality, caste/class emerges around imaginaries of 'unruly sexualised young women' and 'unruly aggressive migrant man,' both of whose 'wildness' is blamed differently as the reasons behind rape and sexual violence. These imaginations reveal a 'deeper set of apprehensions regarding the making of idealised citizens in class, caste and religious terms' (Atluri 365). Because of the widespread recognition and protests, this case eventually brought about important reforms in Indian rape and sexual harassment laws. This, on the other hand, was completely overturned in the Hathras caste-rape case of a dalit woman Manisha Valmiki by upper caste Thakur men which went on to be a horror in how severely and violently it was handled by the state, law, and judiciary to harass the victim and her family who still await justice. Not only did the Yogi Adityanath-led BJP Uttar Pradesh government and police burn the victim's body without consulting the parents, tampered with evidence, threatened the family to retract their case, but the Hathras case also saw public 'protests' by upper caste organisations like the Savarna Parishad to defend the rapists (Saha). This is a noticeable pattern in caste/communal based sexual/violence cases where perpetrators are publicly protected, applauded, garlanded. Men of 'honour' are protected by people, the police, and the judiciary because of their caste networks. The image of the perfect victim on the other hand is thus built on systemically erasing those constructed as 'bad subjects of modernity' (Ramberg 40) like dalit sex workers and trans folx. Such interlocking of caste and patriarchy is a further hindrance in addressing violence within the family because family is intrinsically tied to patrilineal and patriarchal concepts of honour and therefore, there is a constant insistence of visualising the rapist as the stranger/outsider while using patriarchal modes of 'protecting' one's own from sexual violence. So, violence within the family finds no space for articulation as we insist on family as a haven making it more difficult to voice the abuse because it is difficult to accept when it is inflicted by your own. This is how the visual

understanding of gender and violence impedes the understanding of trauma and so, this thesis is a journey to depart from visibility. A departure from how we learn to see and what can be seen. To go beyond what can be seen and therefore listen to what is silenced. In order to do that, we need to let go of the image of the family as a perfect whole and therefore I theorise home as a cut.

Theorising the home as a cut allows for an understanding beyond dominant narratives about the united nation and family; both never meant to be overthrown. Both the nation and family are sites of policing that mirror each other because they are shaped by one another. It is interesting here to note how clearly this was demonstrated in the state's response to the petition of same-sex marriage whereby the state declared that legal recognition of marriage be only granted to heterosexual marriages because the 'holy union' of marriage is a 'sanskar', societal morality; a norm that has been historically 'foundational to both the existence and continuance of the State' (Balaji). Nationalist formations thus follow familial logics while nationalism contributes to changing perceptions of the family itself. Situating natal family violence in a continuum of violent political formations where the upper caste Hindu subject formation relies on the justification of control of non-dominant caste bodies is where one can link 'colonial discourses of childhood as a repository of national anxieties' whereby the justified control of children reinforced racial and class-based purity can similarly point out to how the use of 'young' in this discourse points to a larger national anxiety vis-à-vis caste, class and gender surrounding the construction of the ideal Indian citizen (Atluri 367). The normalised control of the 'young' and that of anyone perceived as non-ideal citizens lies in the same continuum of accepting the family and the nation as unquestioned, absolute authorities. Just because the state/family should protect does not mean it does and rather because the state/family 'protects' the protection itself involves regimenting, control, and surveillance. Seeing the nation-state and the family as a unified whole never meant to be broken is therefore dismissing the wounds it causes. Both are sites of violence; built on and as violence. Home is a cut. And to talk about home as a cut is then life-affirming. The cut can only be looked at when there is an acceptance of hurt required to be able to tend to pain to hear those in pain. A hearing that does not follow carceral logics of relying on a rational modern human subject but rather an abolitionary listening (Arthur et al.). To move from the cuts to hear echoes is a movement that necessitates a politics of un/belonging. Trauma experienced within the family is a displacing event that shakes the survivor up in their body and home. Once displaced, the traumatised cannot but navigate the world liminally. The home thought of as structural safety when shattered by trauma brings with it a mourning, an unbelonging. I look for the offerings that this state of

unbelonging makes possible. Both the body and the home become a threshold and dwelling on a threshold is an exercise in the otherwise because the undoing of home and body forged by trauma makes way for a different understanding of both. In all its pain, unbelonging is a capacious place with possibilities to belong in ways different from oppressive ones that traumatise—a politics of refusal to embody the position of the modern subject because it is as imprisoning as modern nation-states. Hence, I situate the discourse on (sexual) trauma within the larger discourse of the colonial-brahmanical creation of the Indian nation-state. It is in the context of the creation of the Indian nation-state and the history of the endogamous family rooted in caste patriarchy, I theorise the home as a cut. Theorised as a 'cut' its function is a transformative one that seeks to unravel the connections between the nation and the family and how they shape and are shaped by one another. To see this unravelling is to read trauma which is a wound, injury, abandonment, uncovering also as exposure (Cetinic 288). If trauma causes the very self to fracture, its articulation cannot be linear. Thus, to be able to see what the scene of trauma exposes requires a seeing and hearing away from colonial narratives of linearity.

Using the theoretical framework of caste patriarchy[2], I will analyse the construction of gendered violence within the family where the control of women's bodies and sexuality is essential to brahmanical patriarchy (Ambedkar; Chakravarti; Kannabiran) that was reinstituted during the colonial rule. Indian modernity saw several forms of nation-building during the anti-colonial struggle where the dominant elite Hindu intellectual visions (Omvedt 10) invoked images of 'Bharat Mata' coinciding with how the family itself is structured as violent. Fascist regimes are regimes of abuse and one finds patterns common to the family and the state. In a caste-society, caste consciousness is deeply lodged in our very being often in unsaid ways, thus,

> 'In order to know what the rupture of caste consciousness means, it is necessary to engage self consciously in the politics of becoming, regulating notions of the self, deschooling and politicising the self in new ways that push you to belonging elsewhere.' (Kannabiran, *Making the Forked Tongue Speak* 64)

Since what is visibilised is problematic, to articulate a departure from visibility towards abolitionary listening is what this thesis aims to do. Turning away from the visual understanding of gender and violence and what is visibilised of them in order to engage with

[2] I use caste patriarchy while talking about family violence because while brahmanical patriarchy is the larger structure that characterises patriarchal violence in India, it plays out in unequal measures and forms across castes.

the un/seen using other senses is where I use the theoretical framework of abolitionary listening (Arthur, et.al) to theorise home as an echo. This necessitates a reimagination of what we understand by family and home, to push ourselves to think how to organise beyond the isolating logics of caste. This moving away allows us to look inward because the fundamental problem of violence within the family is the reluctance to accept anything that could possibly shatter the image of the family as a unified unquestioned safe space. Using liminagraphy I therefore theorise a politics of un/belonging that enfleshed knowledge can offer. It holds the transformative promise of the nepantla (Anzaldua). A politics of un/belonging initiates a move away from family as haven and a move towards recognising it as a site of violence that is implicated in the larger political economy.

Approach

Liminagraphy by Zuleika Bibi Sheik is a "a life-affirming [and non-violent] approach to research [and life] that offers a pathway to decolonial re-existence and collective liberation through relationality, reciprocity, accountability and coalition" (8). Rather than methodology, it is theorised as a decolonial relational approach as 'one of the pathways to onto-epistemological re-existence, with collective liberation as its horizon (Sheik 8).' I use liminagraphic theorising, 'the theory of flesh' to build my thesis to give my liminality as a survivor a resting place. I also use the idea of 'home' and the 'self' as liminal spaces embedded with knowledge. Reading the natal family as a site of violence I see home as a liminal, relational zone and the self as a liminal subject (Motta 190) embedded with relational knowledge holding transformative possibilities if one surrenders to the connections that 'nepantla' can forge (Anzaldua 180). Thus, the approach to knowledge in this thesis ontologically rejects any individualistic idea of 'self' as in Western autoethnographic methodologies and rather relies on a reflexive approach, epistemologically removed from extractive notions of knowledge production. It also rejects the idea of a whole body and rather, inspired by Julietta Singh's work 'No Archive Will Restore You' understands the 'body as an impossible, deteriorating archive' (27). Understanding the body as an impossible, messy deteriorating archive, I embed the text with images, mostly of my body, and poetic meditations to theorise a departure from visibility using Lola Olufemi's concept of the 'image as an echo' (20). The images accompanied by text are an attempt to use images articulate a different understanding of trauma and embodiment by inviting engagement with the sonic through the narrative voice of the liminal, fragmented subject. Since liminagraphic theorising is about

moving away from colonial logics, I also break away from the academic rigidities of thesis writing and rework it so that the academic text is interspersed with poetry and visual images. This thesis is a departure, it is incomplete—a hand outstretched.

Significance

The relevance of this research being produced within the Dutch colonial, neoliberal context of the Utrecht University, Department of Gender Studies lies in its aim to fracture any singular, homogenous understanding of the colonised. My study of the home in relation to trauma, visibility and listening in the context of natal family violence in India is meant to show the dynamic hierarchical relations internal to the colonised that are exacerbated due to colonisation and its sustained reverberations in a globalised, casteist, capitalist economy. This necessitates contextual reading of the same stemming from the need to critically understand dynamic relations among the colonised that has often been flattened to represent the colonised as a homogenous abject. Since trauma informs the core of this research, it approaches knowledge/theory through liminagraphy which is 'a trans- post- and anti-disciplinary approach to research, held together by the anti-colonial roots that connect Decolonial Feminism, Black Studies, African philosophy and Chicana Studies' (Sheik 3). Being a decolonial, life-affirming approach to knowledge, liminagraphy helps this thesis build a non-extractive, non-Western theoretical formulation that takes fragments seriously and is uninterested in representational wholes because, at its very core, it talks about the ruptures cause by histories of structural oppression and tries to find ways to emerge from/live with them. I write images into the text, largely of my body, to move away from the notion of the body as a whole; using Julietta Singh's provocation of the body as an impossible, messy, and deteriorating archive (27). This enables me to distance from representational traps of visibility to refuse the idea anybody can stand in representation for another, that the body can be represented at all because under racial, casteist, gendered, ableist capitalism not all bodies are treated equally and the lives of some are contingent on the debilitation of others. To also realise that when we are talking about trauma, the idea of representational wholes is an impossibility because of the fracture trauma causes, the experience of which is also unique to the traumatised. Trauma might be shared but never shared particularly. So, what trauma forces us to confront is also a shared limit which makes empathic appropriation impossible (Cetinic 290). What we can then do is simply relate in our singularities, in myriad ways since we embody various identities often in a web of conflict and always already in relation with one another. The inherent conflict characterising our existence

in a racial, casteist, gendered, ableist capitalist world requires reflexive criticality that always interrogates the oppressive regimes as well as how we reproduce them. Therefore, I choose home and body as sites of critical, theoretical engagement to turn the gaze inward and find out unconscious resistances to change in the most intimate spaces and to see how smaller worlds and histories are in a continuum with larger ones. I use Aurora Levins Morales' theoretical provocations in *Medicine Stories*—that individual trauma cannot be understood in isolation and resonates and/or is a resonance of larger collective histories of trauma. I extend her theory to the Indian context and bring it in conversation with anti-colonial and anti-caste scholarship to facilitate an understanding of trauma in a context of brahmanical/caste patriarchy that characterises the country (and South Asia) with a force greater than ever, today in the Hindu-fascist BJP regime. If our bodies hold knowledge as liminagraphy suggests, it is then an invitation to look inwards which is critical practice in envisioning freedom which necessitates a critical understanding of power and authority, the first encounter of which is the family (Marasco 791). The Hindu fascist regime of India hinges on the importance of the Hindu family and that is why it becomes important to critically engage with the idea of the family to reject dominant narratives about the family and the nation as carceral regimes insist on never breaking their unity and are prepared to go any lengths to ensure the same. Hence, I theorise them as sites of violence, as cuts in order to critically situate them and their relation to each other and in our lives to see what echoes emerge from the site of traumatic aftermaths.

I

home—the cut/s

‘i want to go home,
but home is the mouth of a shark
home is the barrel of the gun
and no one would leave home
unless home chased you to the shore’

‘Home’ by Warsan Shire

History is a ravage;

the deepest cut in the flesh.

The wound, a hungry, gaping mouth—eating, festering.

Home is a historical cut,

the violence that built it spills over,

cutting anyone that ever tried holding it.

India – nation – home – 'nationalism without a nation' (Aloysius, *Nationalism*) – India – state – border.

the democracy's insatiable appetite swallow homes whole,

eating away at itself…I am writing from the gash called home.

I was listening to an episode of the India Organising Podcast on Queer-feminist movements, dilemmas & the law with Vikram Aditya Sahai where a question vqueeram asked made me realise how perhaps that is all I have been trying to do in conceptualising and writing this thesis—'how do we bring politics down to the scale of life and living?' (India Organising Podcast)

Their question will be a refrain throughout this text as I/we move through the worlds I/we inhabit. I read home as a cut and begin by historically contextualising the formation of modern India, the larger home. I write about the larger home as a segue into the smaller one. Following no specific chronology, this is a journey of attentive remembering, of tending to wounds. The text is interspersed with images, poetry and poetic meditations that hold our hands through this journey. Lola Olufemi observes that the problem with the visual is that 'it appears to announce its limitations as soon as we glance at it. We become trapped in the fixity of our own position; we assume the story begins and ends within the image's four corners' (20). She provokes, 'What if an image is also an echo that sticks to its context?' (20) All images in this text are echoes, travelling across the cuts of home, echoes haunting the nepantla[3] (264). Haunting is a practice of return and so we return to this haunting refrain echoing throughout this liminagraphy as we reach out to meet each other in the bridge we call home (Anzaldua 244).

'How do we bring politics down to the scale of life and living?'

Are you listening?

[3] 'Nepantla is the Náhuatl word for an in-between state, that uncertain terrain one crosses when moving from one place to another, when changing from one class, race, or sexual position to another, when travelling from the present identity into a new identity. (Anzaldua 180) Nepantla is the bridge we call home; it is the liminal space of dwelling in constant displacement. Nepantla holds transformative potential because it links people and worlds which often threatens us and it is this discomfort Anzaldua is asking us to push up against so that we might meet others and ourselves to heal from the woundedness. It is a theory of porosity, working towards loosening borders rather than strengthening them. (Anzaldua 264)

the nation-state - dissonant continuities, exacerbated wounds

‘Sab yaad rakha jayega, sab kuch yaad rakha jayega.
Aur tumhari laathiyon aur goliyon se jo qatl huwe hain mere yaar sab,
Unki yaad mein dilon ko barbaad rakha jayega,
Sab yaad rakha jayega, sab kuch yaad rakha jayega.
Aur tum syahiyon se jhooth likhoge, humein maloom hai
Ho humare khoon se hi sahi, sach zarur likha jayega…
…Tum zameen pe zulm likh do, asmaan pe inquilab likha jayega
Sab yaad rakha jayega, sab kuch yaad rakha jayega.

(Everything will be remembered; we will not forget.
My friends you killed with your sticks and bullets
In their memory our hearts will be kept broken-down.
We know that you will keep writing lies in ink,
But even if it is with our blood, truth will be written…
…You may write injustice on earth; we will write revolution across skies.
We will not forget; everything will be remembered.)

‘Sab yaad rakha jayega’ by Amir Aziz, 2019[4]

What does it mean to tend to wounds? When wounds are tended to, what is first applied to them is attention. Attention is not a moment but a movement. It is etymologically derived from the Old French *attencion* and Latin *attentionem* which stems from *attendere* comprising ad+*tendere* ‘stretch’ literally meaning ‘to stretch toward’—an offering with resonances of the tender, the fragility that is bound to accompany stretching and extending oneself. So, to be attentive would mean to be willing to stretch and extend oneself. The etymological ‘*ten*’ that means ‘to stretch’ ties together tender, attention and tension. The act of being attentive is then a fragile, tense movement requiring us to extend ourselves, move beyond in order to reach each other. Pain requires attention not simply when a wound is visible because most are not, but

[4] Amir Aziz is a poet, artist and activist from Delhi. He wrote this poem during the Shaheen Bagh protests against the Hindu fascist Citizenship Amendment Act. In a rendition of the poem at the event, ‘India, My Valentine’, he says, "This poem is for Kashmir, AMU, Jamia, UP, JNU, Delhi. This poem is for all those places where under the cover of darkness, the cowards committed atrocities on us." (2) Dear Oppressors, Sab Yaad Rakha Jayega. Sab Kuch Yaad Rakha Jayega | The Quint - YouTube

long after it turns phantom. Tending to wounds is not a one-time affair but something that demands we remember to show up consistently. A movement and not a moment, something ongoing that keeps coming back like a refrain, a repetition, a rhythm, an echo, a haunting frequency, remembering. Remembering all that was dismembered. Trauma is a dismembering experience characterised by forgetting in order to be able to survive and therefore remembering is part of repair. Amidst fascist, casteist, colonial landscapes of horror where histories are (re)written to serve the dictators, resistance takes the shape of remembering truth in order to heal, thrive and fight. I write to remember how the history of my/our home begins with a cut, a wound awaiting attention. An archaeology of the world and the self, I write with liminagraphy using voices I learn from, stitching myself into its deep relational knotting to carve, scrape, scratch to bring forth what lies underneath. I write to learn, to remember and remain.

We begin at the rupture that is India, where I am from. A country hailed as the world's largest democracy but a country that in reality is an ethnonationalist Hindu state (Vijayan 32). The history of the Indian nation-state is the culmination of 200 years of British colonial rule that, like all histories of imperialism, ends in fracture, forcing the violently bordered existence of what we now know as the Indian nation-state. The history of 'independence' is a history of dismembering; of dissonant continuities and exacerbated wounds. The partition of India led to 17.9 million people migrating across the subcontinent and violence of all possibly imaginable forms that forever changed the sociocultural and political landscape of South Asia and continues to haunt the Hindu-fascist regime of India today (Vijayan 20). The history of home is also a history of partition—a cut. Home is a cut because independence is not equal to and must never be confused for freedom; it is rather a colonial wound. India's independence was its partition, creating no decolonial space but a colonial wounding that created the two nation-states of India and Pakistan on the brutalisation of what is known to be the biggest mass migration in human history. While India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru declared the victory of India in his famous speech where the country awakens to life and freedom, India was burning amidst massacres and riots during this grand declaration (Vijayan 21). The partition killed between 180,000 to 1 million people between March and January, 1948 with 3.4 million 'missing' members of targeted minorities according to the 1951 census (Vijayan 23). This rupture, far from being coincidental, was rather systemic because of how the nationalist politics of India in its anti-colonial struggle was being formulated. The modern Indian nation-state was created through the collusion between two kinds of colonialism—the pre-existing brahmanical domination and British colonisation (Aloysius 8). The nation-state

thus produced, was a dissonant continuation of increased strengthening of pre-existing caste and communal hierarchies. Far from being a decolonised nation, it was a caste-Hindu neocolonial tragedy devised by the transfer of power from the British Empire to the Indian National Congress comprising a majority of caste-Hindu elites who envisioned 'Hinduism' as the essence of the Indian nation. The Gandhian nationalist vision of swaraj or self-rule drew upon religious symbols to sway the masses invoking the cartographic imagination of India as a Hindu goddess and the mythology of 'Ram Rajya' as the ideal image of an independent India. While these religious symbols helped attract masses, it organised the Hindu majority while alienating Indian Muslims (Vijayan 20). 'Hinduism' also begs a critical discussion because it is a modern 19th and 20th century construct based on strategic syncretism (Jaffrelot 518) deployed by caste-Hindu reformers appropriating tropes from Abrahamic faiths to reformulate a non-existing idea of Hinduism as a homogenous religion in the context of desperately trying to formulate an 'indigenous' nationalistic ideal ironically rooted in Orientalist readings of the religion. Historian Romila Thapar, in her 1989 essay, 'Imagined Religious Communities', writes how the colonial experience fractured the very framework of how the past would be comprehended creating a disjuncture. Thapar calls upon historians to pay close attention to this disjunction in order to be able to affront times where 'political ideologies appropriate this comprehension and seek justification from the pre-colonial past' (209). She warns us against the simplified Hindu-Muslim binary of Indian history by inviting us to look beyond and listen to what history really shows about the modern formation of a 'Hindu' identity that does not exist. In a similar vein, in *Brahmanical Inscribed in Body Politic*, G. Aloysius critically analyses the gravest and most persisting consequence of the British colonisation in India which is the 'emergence of the new societal configuration with massively lop-sided power-balance in the favour of the already existent and aspiring religio-cultural dominance, and the attendant social imaginary of a unified, organically evolved religious India' as a result of the mutually beneficial partnership between the colonial and brahmanical groups who turned out to be their 'most valued collaborator for the delivery of their colonial objective' (Aloysius 8). The cementing of caste hierarchy is dissonant continuity created because of this partnership that revived the brahmanical view of life otherwise scattered across the subcontinent,

> dominant only in surplus-producing river valleys but resisted, reduced or rejected in hilly areas and shores, at the tutelage of the Colonial-Oriental insistence came to revived, reunified and trained in modern ways of ruling, eventually constituting the

structure and culture of the entire subcontinent through the pseudo-religious discourse of 'Hinduism'' (Aloysius 9).

The caste system is a 3000-year-old oppressive structure of social stratification of the Vedic society. Caste that can mean both jati (birth group) and varna (order/class) refers to the Vedic ritual classification of people into the four-fold varna system or the 'chaturvarna' comprising savarnas (those within the caste fold) divided into occupational classes that also carried connotations of qualitative ideals of Brahmin (priest), Kshatriya (warrior/king), Vaisya (trader) and Shudra (peasants/farmers/labourers). The first scriptural mention of this order was in a hymn of the Purusha Sukta in the Rig Veda (Omvedt). Those who fell outside the caste fold, were dalits[5] (formerly 'untouchables') who were the fifth varna condemned to bonded agricultural labour and sanitation work. The very presence of dalits was perceived as impure and polluting to the savarnas who exploited their labour through this system of spiritually sanctioned exploitation (Soundararajan 100). Because of being a determination by birth, one's caste is unchangeable during one's lifetime and even after because of the carceral dharma-karma cycle of life that characterises Hinduism. The caste system hierarchised people into enclosed groups with hereditary occupation, endogamous sexuality and ascriptive hierarchy of the brahmanic, Vedic community (Aloysius, 'Caste in and Above History' 155). Caste oppression is essentially patriarchal in nature and thus creates a graded hierarchical oppression because it controls all aspects of life including property, labour, and sexuality (Aloysius, 'Caste in and Above History' 155).

The colonial system materialised its collusion with the caste system through various means like giving land ownership rights to non-labouring zamindars, making education accessible only for the upper echelons in order to keep social uprisings in check, curricular emphasis on clerical-literary as opposed to technical-manufactory, discovery and codification of ancient sectarian Sanskrit texts like the Manusmriti to apply them as the law of the land, reviving caste-kutcherries in the name of tradition, ethnographic recording of tribes and castes by the 'learned and knowledgeable' and so on (Aloysius 9). I find these readings and provocations by Thapar and Aloysius to be decolonial because of their anti-brahmanical, anti-caste reading and writing of Indian history which is vital if we are to resist histories of oppression that continue exploiting us and systematically forcing us to forget through myriad fascist methods of erasure. To

[5]The usage of dalit in lower case is to acknowledge many caste groups that fall under this category which is not homogenous and the different groups have their distinct linguistic and regional histories (Kang 65)

understand trauma politically means to tend to colonial wounds (Mignolo) which therefore means to pay attention to these ruptures, cuts, disjuncture because colonial histories are one of fracture and wounding. It is the collusion between brahmanism and colonialism that codified caste patriarchy into the Indian judicial administration which was never radically challenged because of the transfer of power between the British and the upper castes erroneously known as independence. These festering wounds characterise our everyday with phantom pains by producing histories of continued dissonances bringing together interlocked systems of abuse like caste, gender, ableism and colonialism that aid each other in complex ways that could even seem like contradictions. For example, the disingenuous articulation of Hinduism as a singular homogenous religion through strategic syncretism constructed for a desire to formulate an anti-colonial/decolonial, 'indigenous' nationalist vocabulary for India simultaneously relies on the normalisation of caste patriarchal hierarchy, Islamophobia, under the garb of assimilation. In a postcolonial context of contemporary Hindu-fascist India where sectarian violence is at an all-time high, there is a vital need for listening to these dissonances.

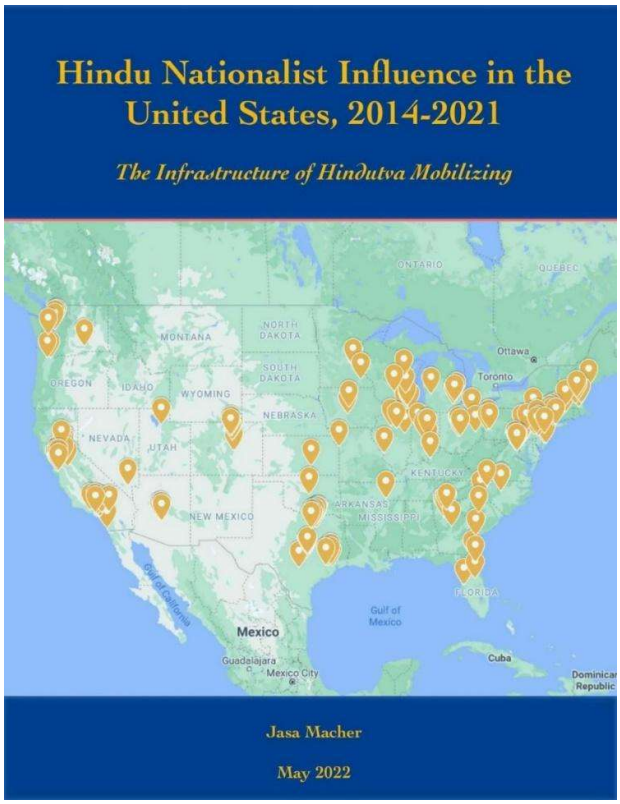
Writing in a post-Babri Masjid demolition India, Aloysius remarks how India has become, 'instead of a nation-state, one powerful state system, comprised of multiple warring communities,' fearing that people are increasingly giving into the madness of Hindu communal nationalism as the nation-state is headed towards its demise (*Nationalism,* 2). Aloysius denotes Hindu nationalism to be doubly communal i.e., against other religious communities as well as against the masses of the caste-oppressed within the Hindu fold and accurately terms it as 'upper caste Brahminic nationalism' (Aloysius, *Nationalism* 2). This perfectly encompasses Thapar's description of communalism in India as deriving its ideological basis from religion to which the religious community's political allegiance is demanded with political action designed to further their interests (Thapar 209), which, in the case of Hindu nationalism, it is the interests of the 'upper' castes. Ideologically, it is ahistorical in the sense that the category of history is used to imagine a glorified past; a theory of place against perceived threats of deterritorialization by global restructuring processes, configuring the nation as a 'historically continuous, spatially bounded, and internally homogenous' imagined elsewhere in a pristine, stagnant point, stagnant amidst a world in flux (Goswami 17). Such a notion of the nation synonymous with the Hinduism formulated was a distinctly brahmanical, masculine ideology based on an imagined religious identity that is more accurately described as not a religion but a vile social order of the arbitrary, birth-based division of labour and labourers on a 'ladder of castes placed one above the other together representing an ascending scale of hatred and a descending scale of contempt' (Ambedkar 105). Prior to this homogenous construction, there

used to be various religious sects across India with their own beliefs that often overlapped or did not with one another. Moreover, brahmanism has historically seen resistance as in Buddhism or the Bhakti movement (Chakravarti 91). By helping consolidate brahmanical dominance by solidifying dominant intellectual visions of the nation insisting on accepting a non-existent, glorified Aryan/Hindu/Vedic past, the colonial rule not only deepened existing social hierarchies in India but codified brahmanism as the law to govern the whole subcontinent with. India's Hindu nationalist construction as 'Bharat Mata' was what Goswami terms a 'double movement' that imposed imagined borders of an 'organic core nation' envisioned through nativist territorialisation of history and collective identity that depended on fictitiously linking this imagined past to the present (Goswami 167). This misleadingly anti-colonial discourse of India as Bharat wanted to will an imagined nation into reality in what could and is increasingly claimed as a decolonising move since it imagines a chronotope preceding colonisation (Subramanian 11). Its basis of cultural purity of the Arya/Hindu as the true Indian was constructed against the othered, foreign Muslim body. Such a territorial nativist understanding of nationhood through a concerted attempt of twisting chronotopes already affected by colonial contradictions contributed to further cementing the relational, contentious hierarchies of categories like Hindu, Muslim and India as Bharat Mata (Goswami 12). Tracing the political historiography of Indian independence and the production of the contemporary Indian nation-state, Perry Anderson in his work *The Indian Ideology* remarks how 'caste is the cage that has held Indian democracy together, and it has yet to escape' (Anderson 171) to highlight the glaring caste privilege demonstrated in contemporary Indian politics whereby producing India as a 'democracy' entails institutionalisation of caste in what then becomes a brahmanical colonial modernity. With the anti-colonial struggle culminating into partition, the newly formed modern Indian nation-state was an already traumatised one. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, had expressed his concern in a BBC interview about the (im)possibilities of democracy in a social fabric as that of India. Babasaheb was concerned that if the caste system persists, true democracy can never be achieved even if India was electorally democratic and thus wanted separate electorates for the oppressed castes which was denied by Gandhi on the account of this move 'disuniting' Hindus (BBC 1:25-2:02). He made it clear that the annihilation of caste is imperative to make India a democracy because Hinduism is inherently undemocratic and thus incompatible with democracy. But this perceived contradiction is what Anderson rather notes to be the very condition of Indian democracy that is the structure inequality of caste consolidated as a 'caste-iron democracy' (Anderson 98). I therefore theorise the nation and consequently the home as a cut to foreground how the creation of the modern

Indian nation-state independent from British colonial rule is underlined by the partition of India, the colonisation of Kashmir and the inheritance of colonial racist ideologies and institutions to further consolidate caste patriarchy (Chandra 228). The 'territorial nativist' notion of India as 'Bharat' based on an imagined Aryan supremacist vision of racial purity derived from the brahmanical caste system that is overtly asserted in Hindu fascist ideals of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (henceforth RSS) and the BJP and under a secular garb by the Indian National Congress. The critical analysis of Gandhian nationalism and Nehruvian secularism Anderson offers, brings to the forefront Nehru's identification of Hinduism as the symbol of nationalism and this is what ties 'secular, liberal' Indian political ideology to its Hindu fascist counterpart because both stem from monopolist caste Hindu visions (Chandra 228). Moreover, the construction of a coherent religious identity of Hinduism by trying to make a singular, homogenous 'Hindu' historiography to organise the various sects through strategic syncretism and mass conversions done in a missionary approach. This points to the deeply entrenched rupture colonisation left in its wake and the need to reorient decolonial praxis in a way that centres the understanding of Indian history as marked by caste which requires an analysis of access to resources and networks and conceptions of purity/pollution and how they operate across the subcontinent. This recognition of plurality is crucial because the insatiable need to build a singular Hindu community is a 19th and 20th century concern that its proponents try justifying using a "colonial discourse" that Lata Mani, in the context of the debate to outlaw *sati* describes as the 'mode of understanding Indian society that emerged alongside colonial rule and over time was shared to a greater or lesser extent by officials, missionaries, and the indigenous elite, although deployed by these various groups to different, often ideologically opposite ends' (122). This colonial discourse was thus a brahmanical colonial discourse because of the collaboration of upper caste elites whose social standing in the pre-colonial caste hierarchy made them trusted native informants of the colonial officials. Thus, the construction of what we now know as 'Hinduism' is what the dominant national consciousness appropriated from an Orientalist approach towards grasping a singular 'Hindu' culture. This resulted in brahmanical appropriation of missionary tropes and frameworks like monotheism, scriptural centrality borrowed from semitic and Abrahamic religions and mass conversions in order to assimilate people across caste for numerical strength (Jaffrelot 5). The entrenched Islamophobia in such a formulation is evident as it banked on portraying a facade of indigeneity in pre-Islamic India as an ancient golden age of tolerant, inclusive Hinduism. And this is the historical disjuncture. The formation of a lie wherein nationalism was a consequence of anti-colonial struggles of the Hindu reformist movement leading to a process

of cultural reform that formulated a violently deceptive return to the 'Vedic golden age' (Jaffrelot 519). Thus, Hindu nationalism is not a theory of religion or community but of territory. It is a cartographic imagination of spaces it wants to colonise. This modern construction of the Hindu drawing from dominant cultures of the west and semitic religious framework legitimised the caste-system and further constructed Muslims as the 'Other' and aggressors (Jaffrelot 519). A reformed, institutionalised construction of a homogenous Hindu identity sprang not from a reflexive positionality of reviewing tradition but a strategic refashioning to make it fit the logics of Western rationality in order to legitimise the religion. The Hindu reformist movements culminated as the dominant nationalist discourse with gendered, sexualised nation as the body of the Hindu woman i.e., *Bharat Mata* at its core. The 20th century led to the formation of cadre-based fundamentalist outfits like the RSS in 1925 that has several factions among which, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (henceforth VHP) works to spread 'Hindu culture' abroad (Jambhulkar & Raheman) in the US, Europe and elsewhere. These colonial disjunctures with their dissonant continuities leads to persisting sectarianism, a psychological indoctrination that runs deep not only within the Indian subcontinent but in the Indian diaspora as Romila Thapar writes how 'communal ideologies may be rooted in the homeland but find sustenance in the diaspora' (231).

('How do we bring politics down to the scale of life and living?')



'Hindu Nationalist Influence in the United States, 2014-2021 The Infrastructure of Hindutva Mobilising' by Jasa Macher, 2022

G. Aloysius (5) notes how the phrase 'lunatic fringe' is often used to describe the caste-communal violence in India. This popular vocabulary of 'fringe elements' is a used by the progressive, often liberal-left factions as a way of relegating all the responsibility of anti-Muslim and casteist sentiments to Hindutva politics and its counterparts framed to be the extreme in an otherwise 'democratic' India. This insistence of shedding responsibility as 'not in my name' (Newslaundry 1:40-1:59) as if Hindutva/Hindu fascism is not enabled by religious and sociocultural institutions that rely on us to be reproduced. The lives of upper caste Hindus are predicated upon the death of dalits, adivasis and Muslims while the lives of Indians are not predicated upon the death of people in occupied territories like Kashmir. As if the hate being peddled today is not being unquestionably consumed by the educated, the liberals, the progressives and as if our upbringing is not underlined by an indoctrination of hate that begins in our families.

familiar cuts

The family is the microcosm where wider social realities of economic inequality, consumerism and imagined futures operate (Patel 37). Hindu-fascism is structured on caste supremacy hinging on the endogamous family. It insists on the ideal Hindu family as its core, invoking familial language in its cartography of the nation as mother when giving calls for 'ghar wapsi'[6] and 'love-jihad[7]' while vilifying and killing Muslim men and calling for the rape and brutalisation of Muslim, dalit and adivasi women or when asking Hindu women to bear more children.

In such a context, the family must be looked at more than ever to critically understand the violence of oppressive regimes that lends it the structure it has in order to facilitate the reproduction of these regimes. In a caste patriarchal society like India, family is the most robust institution to facilitate the reproduction of caste and thus capital. The generational occupation of land, wealth, and cultural capital by upper caste Hindus leads to the persistent reproduction of caste which begins at homes to be repeatedly played out in public as it governs all aspects of life like education, love, friendship, marriage, housing, healthcare and so on (Chakravarti 31). The current Indian political economy under a Hindu-fascist regime hinges on the sanctity of the Hindu family. The state is time and again, invoked as familial and there has been a massive rise in the already existing bleeding fissures of anti-Muslim violence and casteism in India. In her essay 'There is a Fascist in the Family,' Robyn Marasco reads Theodor Adorno's work *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), to emphasise the need to recognise the centrality of authoritarianism within the bourgeois family that poses a fundamental threat to any conception of democracy. Adorno's work, Marasco notes, politicises psychological problems by placing the seemingly isolated family in its social and historical context to stress that it is far from private or individual but collective in how it originates and is played out—

[6] 'Love jihad' is 'an attempt at political and communal mobilisation in the name of women' by the Hindu right-wing in India who have concocted it as a movement where Muslim men forcefully convert vulnerable Hindu women to Islam by tricking them into marriage (Gupta 84-86). The conspiring rhetoric of love jihad has been used for political gain of the BJP and to justify Muslim genocide in India.

[7] Ghar wapsi is derived from a longer historical tradition of 'shuddhi' popularised during Hindu communal mobilisation in the 20th century. It is a used by the Hindu right in India for re-conversion of people in Hinduism that points to 'a synchronised vocabulary of anti-conversion by the BJP and of reconversion by the VHP and Dharm Jagran Samiti, an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh' (Gupta 84).

> ‘What looks like individual disorder reflects and expresses a pervasive social sickness. (794)’

Thus, the authoritarian family forming vis-à-vis capitalism and the state, is the primary site of a person’s first encounters with authority which becomes fundamental to their basic relationship with authority because the family is the site of early psychosocial development and politicisation (Marasco, 2020) where heavily gendered labour relations are formed. The contemporary Hindu-fascist political economy in India with a shrinking welfare state ensures the continuation of the endogamous heterosexist family because close kin are significant for the material support, they can provide each other through social networks in several aspects of life like career, marriage, politics and so on (Patel 30). In a caste-capitalist economy, maintaining kin networks becomes crucial to preserve sociocultural capital that is achieved through strategic marriage alliances that help strengthen economic and symbolic capital of the family (Patel 30) and therefore the ‘traditional family continues to provide the economic resources, care and support to children, the elderly, the disabled and the unemployed’ (PUCL 148). In the modern formulations of the Indian family discourse which has been constructed simultaneously by nationalism and colonialism, it has increasingly viewed the family as private. Through the simultaneous impact of nationalism and colonialism, the nuclear family image came to be one of a liberated haven of love, intimacy and privacy divorced from the outside world thereby promoting the conjugal values ensuring the sustenance of the heteronormative family structure (Patel 35).

So, when I write about trauma grounded in the experience of child sexual abuse within the family, I speak with the intention of politicising trauma and showing its relation to collective trauma as well. To talk about individual oppression, we must talk about collective oppression because the two are in relational continuum. I thus write of these connecting threads, the liminal spaces of home, body and nation. I use liminagraphy as a process of sense-making with the hope that it would resonate differentially with many un/like me because I draw on insights from many un/like me in this attentive relational knotting. I learn from anti-caste queer feminist voices, from writings by dalit women the importance of centring caste when talking about gender. I learn from their accounts the necessity of talking about violence both within and outside homes. The offerings of dalit women and dalit queer writing is a constant reminder of the need to fiercely weave freedom dreams.


PALAM

Caste, even when it tries to make one believe it is on their side,
is inevitably disenfranchising
for women, trans and queer persons.
Its dissuasion to enable us as human subjects is misleading
because
the savarna self is built on the erasure of avarnas.
An ascriptive ‘infection of imitation’
that runs desire dry and still leaves one parched
because it feeds on anxiety.
Caste has no mercy, no ground for unity.
A parasite, it eats our brain until nothing but caste is left in our unconscious.
Like the debilitating love that abusive relations provide,
caste is the (un)caring monster eating at our insides
until we are emptied out.
Because it relies on our contempt, we must look inward to speak up.
As histories of caste have always been histories of resistance.
We must honour and learn from them.
I/we must want release.
From every oppressive structure that lays claim to our bodies like it is theirs to own.
In all its brokenness, our flesh carries knowledge
so, I write from the cuts.

centring caste patriarchy

‘In Hathras, cops barricade a raped woman’s home,
hijack her corpse, set it afire on a murderous night,
deaf to her mother’s howling pain. In a land where
Dalits cannot rule, they cannot rage, or even mourn.
This has happened before, this will happen again.

What does that fire remember? The screams of satis
dragged to their husband’s pyres and brides burnt alive;
the wails of caste-crossed lovers put to death,
the tongue-chopped shrieking of raped women.
This has happened before, this will happen again.

Manu said once, so his regiment repeats today:
all women are harlots, all women are base;
all women seek is sex, all they shall have is rape.
Manu gives men a licence plate, such rape-mandate.
This has happened before, this will happen again.

This has happened before, this will happen again.
Sanatana, the only law of the land that’s in force,
Sanatana, where nothing, nothing ever will change.
Always, always a victim-blaming slut-template,
rapist-shielding police-state, a caste-denying fourth estate.

This has happened before, this will happen again.’

‘Rape Nation’ by Meena Kandasamy (2019)

Caste and patriarchy are interlocked systems of oppression that work with each other in complex, intrinsic ways. Families within a caste society are ideally heteropatriarchal and the family is among the most fundamental institutions that sustains caste since it is here that the principal mechanisms to maintain caste purity i.e., controlling women’s sexuality is exercised through mechanisms like sati, child marriage and ascetic widowhood as observed by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1916). Caste patriarchy, in conferring the family/caste/community’s

honour on the woman, uses patriarchy to control her. Ambedkar also notes how controlling women's sexuality is also a tool for caste mobility. Caste patriarchy has its origins in Hinduism but also extends to other communities since caste hierarchies cut across religion in India [8](Azam and Samos). It is the anti-caste, non-brahmin movements that fought radically for women's rights because the vocabulary of women's empowerment was initially formulated by upper-caste elite Hindu men whose intention was moving towards a different form of control and tradition through reformist stances moving towards a territorial Hindu nationalism where women became grounds for religious and moral contestation (Mani 119). It was the non-brahmin movements that traced the roots of gendered oppression in India to the systemic caste hierarchy. Radical movements against patriarchy rose from non-brahmin movements that attacked the very foundations of patriarchy in India like the Satyashodhak movement by the Phules or the Self-Respect movement by Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy (Omvedt 24). These were movements like the Satyashodhak movement by Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule where they battled odds to open the first school for girls and dalits in India (Omvedt 161). Savitribai Phule, India's first woman teacher, called upon marginalised folks to mobilise using education, to use education and learn English in order break away from the shackles of caste oppression (Omvedt 162). Or anti-caste movements like the Self-Respect movement started by Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy which was a sociocultural revolution against Brahmanism, caste, religion and patriarchy (Geetha 158). Non-brahmin movements moved away from the Gandhian Congress indulgence in nationalist ideological formations of Swaraj (self-rule) vehemently critiqued by Periyar who saw it to establish Brahmin/upper caste supremacy and exploitation of the oppressed castes and communities—

> 'Like the proverb, quote Tamil original ('Biting the hide and biting the bellows, the dog became a hound'), nationalism demands political freedom and on the other hand, it

[8] Scholars Shireen Azam and Sumit Samos write about the 20th century Hindu upper-caste anxieties over the decision of the British census to count 'untouchables' as a separate class because that would mean a numerical decrease which would not bode well for the political representative changes being introduced by the colonial administration. It was then that the 'Muslim upper-castes projected a unified idea of Muslims and argued for untouchables to not be counted as Hindus. Hindu upper-castes, in turn, responded by speaking of reforms, which was a way to stake the inclusion of untouchables in the Hindu fold (Azam and Samos).' This carried forward even post-independence where only dalits identifying as Muslims and Christians do not get the Scheduled Caste status which perpetuates the consolidation of a brahmanical Hindu identity by gradually subsuming diverse sets of traditions and people, and keeps Dalits divided along the lines of religion. Most importantly, it denies equal citizenship rights to Dalit Muslims and Dalit Christians (Azam and Samos).'

> takes steps to attain Swaraj based on Varnashrama dharma. Even in this giddy state, accompanied by a yearning for awakening, meetings are held to demand 'Caste differences are needed. Paraiyar is needed. Manu dharma is needed'...[Kudiarasu, 11-3-1931]' (Kandasamy et.al 157)

Women in the individualistic Gandhian narrative were constructed as 'natural political subjects' duty-bound to the nation as 'ideal satyagrahis' which they were supposed to see as an extension of their familial duties (Geetha 159). In sharp contrast, lower castes, dalits and women for Periyar were 'natural subjects of history' whose emancipation would only be possible with the annihilation of the entire caste order which could only be achieved through collective transformation since consciousness for him, unlike Gandhi was collective and not individual (Geetha 159). His vision of self-respect involved not only renouncing all caste privilege and religious faith enabled casteism but also a radical recreating of a non-hierarchical society which involved a reimagining of 'masculine' and 'feminine' subjectivities that could allow for the desires of self-respect and freedom.

In his critique of patriarchy, he calls to reject notions of masculine and feminine as they operate within the caste order. In my reading, this already has ground for a queer reading of the gender binary that the caste order, which dictates what a man and a woman should be and can do depending, also differentially, depending on their caste positionalities. His imagination of a casteless society gave immense importance to reason and critique but most of all desire and freedom. In *Kudi Arasu*, he writes 'to desire is human' and critiques marriages within caste patriarchy for being loveless and forced. He constantly pushes for dalits and women to let go of the psychological burden of caste inequality and patriarchy that condemns them to a life of unfreedom and refuses them love, joy and desire (Geetha 13). Women Self-Respecters were critical of nationalist women, surprised at the educated, 'upper' caste women's invocation of Sita as their ideal who is known for her subjugation to her husband, despite knowing of their own oppression within caste patriarchy (Geetha 16). Geetha writes about a woman self-respecter Minakshi who wrote in the magazine *Kudi Arasu* urging nationalist women to not simply picket shops selling British liquor and clothing but rather radicalise their non-cooperation and civil disobedience to picket and boycott homes of all those who oppose women's freedom especially those oppressed because of caste—

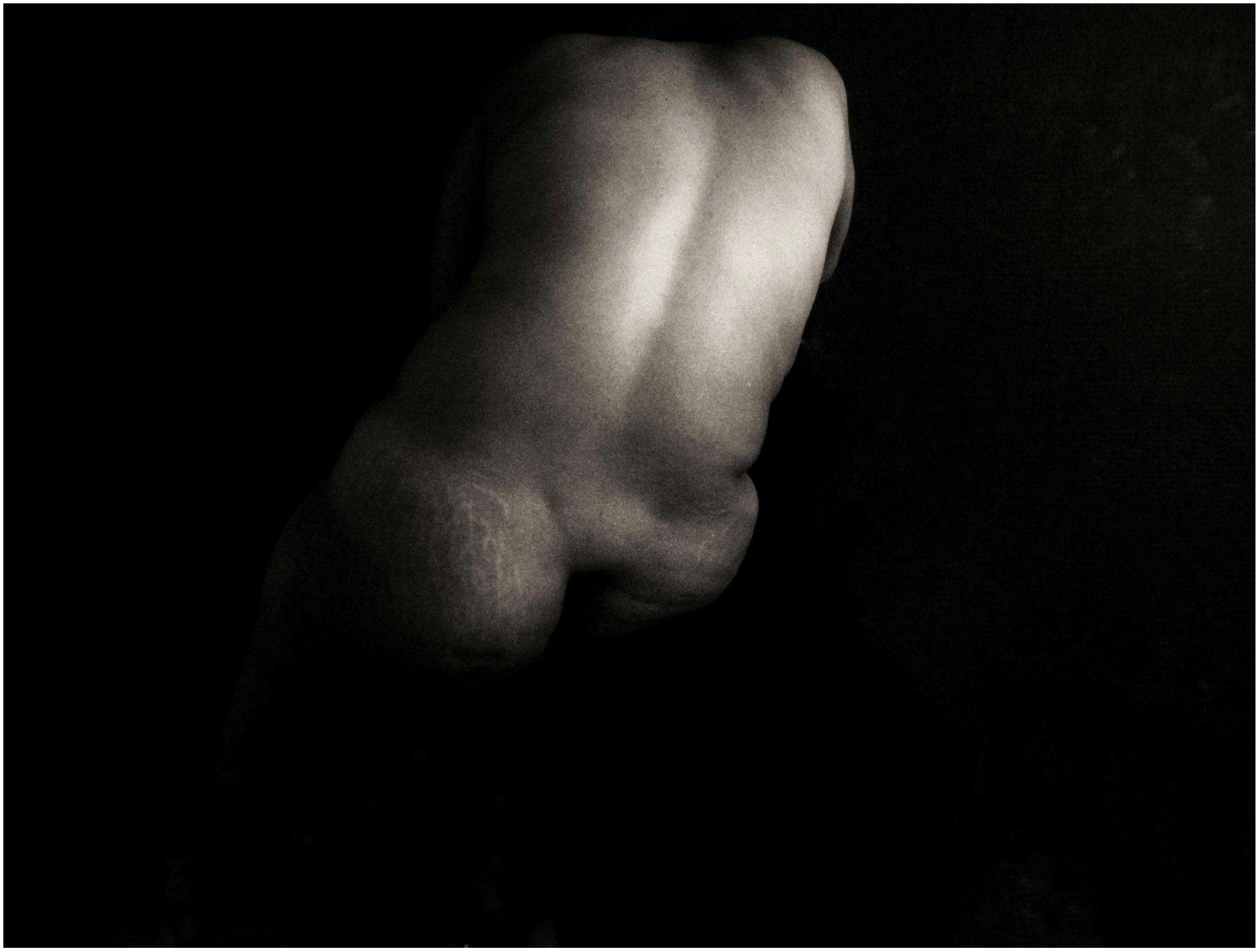
> ‘Offer satyagraha in front of the homes of your sisters who disdain to grant our adi dravida sister’s rights of access to the common well… (*Kudi Arasu*, March 6, 1932)’ (Geetha 160)

Women in the nationalist movement were subsumed into the dominant culture which did not let them question the status quo because they ignored the question of caste whereas the anti-caste movements articulated an anti-colonial, decolonial strategy of complete social revolution through the abolishing of caste slavery. This continues till date where queer and feminist movements fail to mobilise around caste atrocities as easily as they do around gender or queerness but the dalit queer and feminist movements have also visibly strengthened and grown assertive over the years which points to the possibility of rethinking anti-caste solidarities across marginalised groups especially in times of excessive polarisation. Dalit feminist scholarship has further elaborated on the centrality of caste in questions of gender and to highlight the differential experience of dalit women that upper-caste feminist movements fail to consider (Tharu and Niranjana 40). Dalit women have been failed time and again by upper caste feminist narratives as well as those written by men. The need is to thus learn from the dalit feminist standpoint to pay attention because their voices expand feminist theory and praxis by building bridges that address and enable us to critically understand the interlocking of caste and gender (Paik 10). Although my thesis is grounded in my experiences as a victim/survivor, I draw insights from reports, poetry, and artwork. I learn from and write with dalit feminist and dalit queer scholarly works that inform my thesis because, to talk about sexual trauma within the Indian context then, requires more than organising simply around gender. It requires us to organise against caste, listen to and learn from dalit and adivasi knowledge in order to untangle our bodies and being from the brahmanical inscribed in body-politic (Aloysius 5). I therefore theorise using liminagraphy that conceives of knowledge as always already relational, reminding me of Periyar’s notion of consciousness as already collective. I stitch in to fill the cuts; to un/belong. I use liminagraphy alongside anti-caste knowledge to make sense of the violence of caste and modernity/coloniality. Liminagraphy allows me to theorise from the flesh so I read the body as a messy, impossible, deteriorating archive (Singh 27) through images and poetic meditations to make sense of carrying a violated body, a traumatised body, a queer body in a caste patriarchal, capitalist, ableist world. I write to make sense of the world/s I inhabit and to gather courage to encounter other worlds. I try to learn and create with voices that have spoken before me so that we may speak today. To make sense of our collective loneliness, grief, un/belonging so that I/we may work around them.

Homes are relational spaces. Every brick and mortar of the 2BHK flat my parents, grandmother and I inhabit, carries the toil of underpaid labourers. Our everyday life is sustained by the labour of domestic workers, cleaners, plumbers, vendors, and other daily wage workers. Homes are marked by sweat and blood; of those who built it, those who inhabit it and those who sustain it.

How does one pay off ancestral debts owed to those whose extracted labour lives are sustained on? What does reparation look like when the government and its vigilantes bulldoze and burn Muslim and dalit homes? What does reparation look like when 'beautification' means razing slums to dust? In an economy where the wound deepens with every passing day, what does home look like? In a Hindu-fascist regime? Displacement.

What remains of home when it can no longer hold us?
What remains of home when it discards us?
When it is done eating and now regurgitates?
What remains of it and what becomes of us?



The caste Hindu desire for control as sociality,
the colonial desire for control as sociality,
How do I write for a home more haunted than I am?
over crooked backs of grandmothers and mothers
we are grieving,

we have been grieving for so long
amidst the terrible loneliness this casteist racial gendered ableist capitalism has structured—
How do I write for a home more haunted than I am?
How do I write for a home that feeds on my silence
and
demands I be a ghost?

The threshold of our homes become a manifold site of policing, especially of the caste-Hindu family wielding unequal power within a caste patriarchal society underlined by sectarianism and communalism that is especially pronounce against Muslims and dalits in India's current political economy. Caste as a punitive social order held together by brahmanical patriarchy deploys the policing of the bodies of women, oppressed castes, and marginalised genders

(Chakravarti 10). The pioneering theory on caste as a method of patriarchal policing was put forth by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in his 1916 essay, 'Castes in India: Their Mechanisms, Genesis and Development'. In this work, he identifies the problem of the 'surplus man' and 'surplus woman' as he historically traces, the origin of castes in India that is sustained by the mechanism of endogamy, to identify how the problem of the surplus is handled through the means of brahmanical customs of sati, enforced widowhood and child marriage. These customs were observed by other castes in varying degrees of strictness because of what Ambedkar identifies as the 'infection of imitation' done by other caste groups because of the position Brahmins held in a theocratic society as the priestly class. The status of a caste, he observes, depends on the extent of how the three customs are observed and the extent of strictness over following these customs varies depending on how near a caste group is to the brahmins:

> 'Those castes that are nearest to the Brahmins have imitated all the three customs and insist on the strict observance thereof. Those that are less near have imitated enforced widowhood and girl marriage; others, a little further off, have only girl marriage and those furthest off have imitated only the belief in the caste principle.' (Ambedkar 27-28)

In doing so, Babasaheb Ambedkar problematises the conflation of caste understood as a racialised or ethnicised category by European scholars since it has the debilitating impact of naturalising an unnatural institution that has had a history of resistance by the caste-oppressed fighting to get rid of it (Ambedkar 31). Ambedkar's identification of caste as an unnatural system sustained through unnatural means is crucial to the understanding of relationality within the Indian context. He opines that these institutions were 'honoured because they were practised' thereby theorising how cultural behaviour is based on or shaped by material socio-economic behaviour which is a key to understand subjection within a caste society and the caste-Hindu desire for control as sociality. Caste mandates isolation and glorifies it through caste pride. The caste-Hindu psyche is driven by the desire for the sanitised, pure and chaste which plays out in the sexual life of caste rooted in rape culture. Caste cannot survive without raping. Gendered violence in a caste society is built on the dehumanisation of caste-oppressed non-men bodies. Hence, discourses of family as a site of violence, especially sexual abuse is not divorced from the collective violence on dalits, adivasis and Muslims especially in a regime that instrumentalises rape, the normalisation of which begins at home.

‘SOME CLOSED THE DOOR: OTHER FOUND IT CLOSED AGAINST THEM. (Ambedkar 25)’

Caste as a form of systemic subjugation is based on enclosure, doors that are closed on others to maintain caste networks thus systematically making institutions of education, law, healthcare less accessible for the marginalised castes and communities. Since castes are enclosed endogamous groups, the Hindu home like the Hindu state is a violent border and anybody within caste patriarchy that could possibly flout its dictates is regarded as the ‘surplus’ that needs to be dealt with. Trans and queer bodies, disabled bodies, femme bodies are the ‘surplus’ that caste is after. When families are thus formed in a caste patriarchal society, bodies are irreversibly marked with heterosexist norms which foregrounds the possibility of violence within the family. The report by PUCL on natal family violence experienced by trans and queer persons in India also notes how patriarchal notions of family plays a huge role in collaborating with the medical industrial complex in relation to the medicalisation of sex and gender through binary assignment at birth determining the sex of a child which labels ‘abnormal’ bodies outside the binary construction to be ‘corrected’ (PUCL 131). Anomalously in case of doubt, doctors consider chromosomal patterns but also the wishes of the birth family (PUCL 131-132). The family as a site of care therefore is also simultaneously afforded this violence as a form of ‘care’ itself. Because caste is maintained through an endogamous mechanism, it is inherently ableist because it automatically reinforces ideas of abled bodies that can reproduce ‘healthy’ heirs. Caste marks bodies as irrevocably pure and impure by birth. As Gopal Guru notes in ‘Archaeology of Untouchability’ that brahmanism codified ritual impurity into flesh by birth through transforming the ecological into the hierarchical thereby foreclosing any possibility of an ontological realisation of equality (Guru 51). (I will elaborate on this in chapter two thesis where I discuss the body.) Since the purity of bodies caste maintains is at the cost of the brutalisation and policing of those considered impure, caste hierarchy involves the denial of subjectivity to dalits through systemic dehumanisation which is the against which scale all other deviant subjects are penalised. The caste aspiration of respectability politics is not one of freedom but of a desire to chastise oneself by contemptibly abandoning those whom caste marks as not worthy of respect. This concept of honour is necropolitical. It is what lets Bilkis Bano’s genocidal rapists are let off the hook, garlanded for being ‘sanskari brahmins’ (NDTV); upper caste thakur rapists are not convicted despite the Manisha Valmiki’s statement in her ICU bed (The Telegraph); Hindu call for Hindu men to marry Muslim women (Quint; FirstPost); or the Wrestling Federation of India chief Brij Bhushan granted bail after and rape

and murder convict god-man Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh gets parole again or Meiteis parade and abuse Kuki women on the streets of Manipur (The Times of India).

(The family is a site of violence. Home is a cut. How do we bring politics down to the scale of life and living?)

When article 370[9] was abrogated in Kashmir, like most other Indians, an uncle celebrated it as India's victory of something long overdue, over a violent anti-Muslim discussion with a doctor at his chamber. My cousin and I once got into an altercation with him over him applauding BJP's political stance towards Muslims saying how the state government is too biased towards Muslims allowing namaz on loudspeakers. My thesis does not have the scope to delve into West Bengal's political discourse but what I want to draw attention to is the entrenched hate for Muslims that led him to unflinchingly condone pogroms as 'collateral damage' essentially condoning murder in front of his children. These are larger ripples of aggression and entitlement characterising savarna masculinity that play out within the home as disallowing women to work, policing their movement, behaviour, choice of clothes all of which is part of the rape culture that culminates into sexual assault within the family. The caste Hindu man's entitlement then flourishes because of a systemic culture of impunity that binds the endogamous family together without much resistance owing to complex psychosocial and economic reasons. The family therefore becomes the microcosm where larger politics play out, is shaped and in turn shapes the worlds outside. Violence is then fundamental to how domestic and community life is structured (Kannabiran 9). While the home is violent for its own women and children, working class people frequenting the house from outside already perceived as unequal are met with increased violence. The upper caste woman's need to protect her caste honour not only prevents ground for solidarity because caste (mis)leads people to galvanise around status quo and not survival. This lack of solidarity also arises because policing is normalised within the home performing the singular condition of upholding the family/caste honour at the cost of people's humanity. Therefore, it is crucial to critically engage with the 'centrality of the sphere of family, household, kin, and caste in reproducing the social order;

[9] On 5 August 2019 the Indian government officially obliterated Kashmir's autonomous status by revoking Article 370 and Article 35A that constitutionally granted special status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The abrogation of Article 370 was followed by a military siege in Kashmir leading to a complete communication blackout across the valley lasting 175 days, overlapping with the COVID-19 pandemic pushing Kashmir into further precarity (Al Jazeera).

and in an affective sense, to reproducing notions of love, intimacy, conjugality not only these are defined by the caste order' (Dalwai, et.al). Such criticality also pushes us to rethink what we really want to build and what we might need to tear down to materialise a society not entrenched in contemptible exploitation. We need to pay attention to our most intimate spheres where we often find refuge by virtue of being unquestioned.

Organisation in a caste-patriarchy begins with a cut. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar (1979) writes about caste in India as 'an artificial **chopping off** of the population into fixed and definite units, each one prevented from fusing into another through the custom of endogamy' (7). In identifying the mechanism of caste and its violent maintenance through control of sexuality, he makes keen observations about how sociality for caste Hindus is the desire for violence through control, policing and ensuring isolation. The ideal family in a caste-patriarchy is organised around and facilitates this desire for control. If this is the family the Hindu-fascist regime hinges upon, how do we build homes that organise differently?

> Think about caste Hindu desire for control as sociality. Think about the great passions of a mob, its feeling political, its harmony and ways in which the ennui and insufficient agency of everyday life is overcome. An agency also righteous because it obeys an order. What will our call to citizenship and right do when this group becomes the king's third body-infectious and immune?

Writes vqueeram in an Instagram story sharing the news of Muslims being lynched and beaten up by Hindu mobs across India on Eid (Maktoob). Just a day before, Bhim Army (Ambedkarite and dalit rights organisation) chief Chandrashekhar Azad survived an attack by armed gunmen in Uttar Pradesh, a BJP dominated state with severely high rates of atrocity against dalits and Muslims (Sharma). The Hindu-fascist regime in India works on autopilot as the RSS continues to train children with swords and lathis. Secular, left-liberal Hindus who distance themselves from right-wing activities they consider the 'fringe' also distance themselves from protesting them because their psychic attachment to and material benefit from Hinduism within a caste-capitalist economy disallows critical engagement with this so-called religion to the extent that even left-liberals despite their efforts towards social justice, fail because of their reflexive reluctance towards reevaluating their caste positionality subsuming it into class (Aloysius 5). This denial comes in various shapes and forms and in a largely casteless visage in modern, urban spaces (Deshpande). They can appear as anyone with caste privilege and that is why a

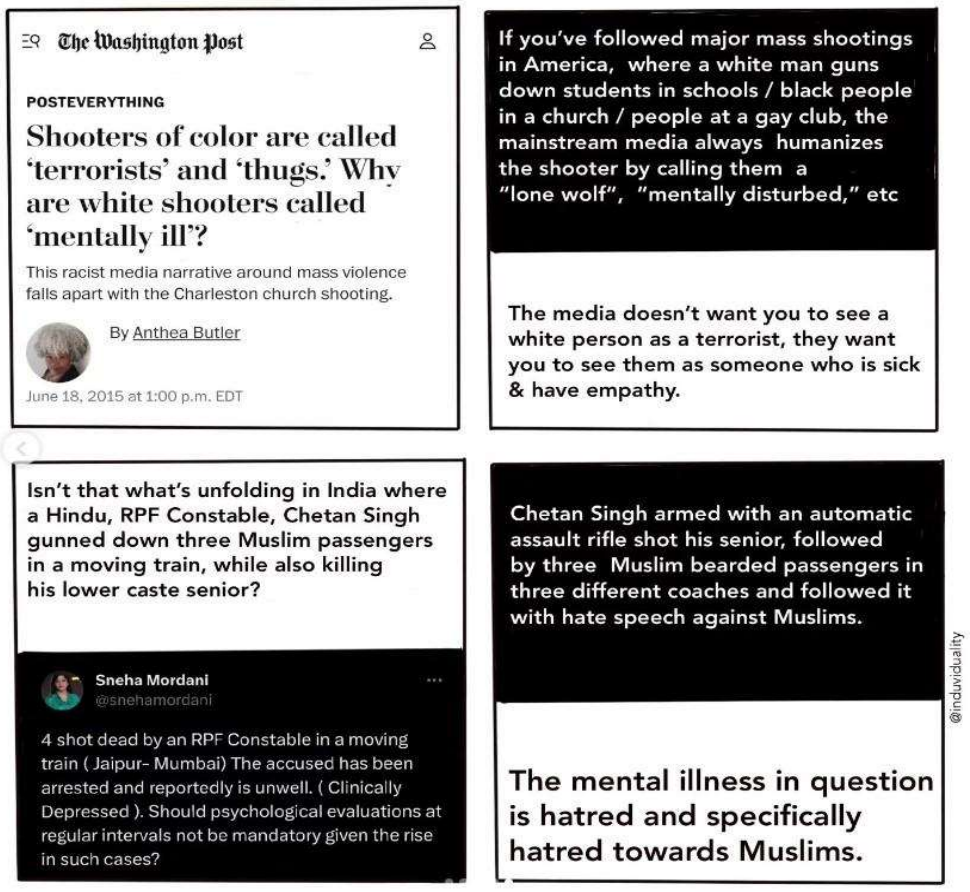
politics of un/belonging is so important to me. It is important because without it a caste-patriarchal, capitalist society trains us in a necropolitical visuality determining who has the claim to dignity and what kind of bodies are ultimately allowed to exist. Caste consciousness embedded in the very depths of the savarna psyche teaches us how to see and how we learn to see is how we come to be which makes visibility a lot closer to death than it is to life. Hence, I want to problematise heteropatriarchal, casteist notions of the visible by locating the multiple oppressive regimes that converge to impede victim/survivors' needs, urging an inquiry into who sees and who/what is seen? The Delhi gangrape case and the articulation of simultaneous control and contempt disguised as concern led to the increased policing of women, making of an outsider figure of the lowly, abrasive rapist and the neglect of caste and communal rapes.

The family and its importance in India beg a critical look into how gender and gendered violence unravels. It unravels through the denial to accept that family is part of the continuum of violence surrounding us. This denial is what leads people to find psychiatric reasons behind rape. After hearing about my thesis, my father asks, very kindly and curiously, 'But you know, I think there must be something wrong with the brains of such people. And what do you think about lust and how that works for them?'

Oddly enough, now that I write about this, his urge to associate my abuser as a mentally sick person sounds strikingly like the justification of an anti-Muslim hate crime by railway police officer Chetan Kumar. Police authorities and mainstream media framed the attack as a culmination of his mental health issues despite video evidence of the caste-communal terror attack followed by him threatening other passengers that if one is to stay in India, they must vote for Yogi and Modi (The Wire). What the misappropriation of mental issues did was firstly dismiss the catastrophic trauma of simply living as Muslims in India but more importantly, it allowed a reiteration of the 'lunatic fringe' that allows for cases as these to be an anomaly in an otherwise 'sane' country, a 'working' democracy. This appropriation while seemingly using the sympathetic language of mental health is a desperately strategic effort to construct the perfect criminal. This apparently sympathetic construction is nothing but a symptom of the denial of violence in our homes. The threat that Chetan Kumar parroted is the rhetoric of hate parroted by the media, all too commonly heard at the dinner tables of Hindu homes. It is what uncles say, some friend's mother says and another friend's father says. The other day my mother told me about her cousin who came to visit. He is blatantly Islamophobic and volunteers for right-wing vigilante organisations in Raipur, Chhattisgarh. Pointing it out to my mother

mostly elicits reactions of annoyance or light-hearted avoidance because nobody likes killjoys ruining their promise of happiness (Ahmed). A few days back I spoke to her over phone because of a fake news circulated on WhatsApp, warning her about fake news online and about her family group where the more blatant supporters of Hindutva often openly peddle hate. The conversation was difficult but it led to her calling me the next day, 'I was admiring the moon and showed him to which he violently responded saying why will I see it, am I a ~~katwa~~[10] or what?'

He refused to see the crescent moon on Eid. The only difference between him and the terrorist officer is the gun. And these people are enabled by everyone who pushes them to the 'lunatic fringe' which is a self-serving argument we use to distance ourselves and sit on the comfortable pedestal of make-believe peace and goodness.



[10] This word is one of the many slurs used against Muslims in India (Ahmed). The use of the strikethrough simultaneously acknowledges its usage in the said incident while protesting against it as a writer. Indian Muslims have come to terms with Hindutva. They are now looking for survival strategies (the print.in)

a panel by artist Indu Lalitha Harikumar on the terror attack by Chetan Kumar that killed Abdul Kaderbhai Bhanpurwala, Sadar Mohammed Hussain, Asghar Abbas Shaikh and ASI Tikaram Meena.

('How do we bring politics down to the scale of life and living?'
Are you listening?)

So, I explain to my father how lust has nothing to do with assault.
How rape has nothing to do with the sexual act but everything to do with power.
That we exercise non-metaphoric rapes everyday
through our actions within the rape culture, we dwell in.
We are subjected to and we thrust ourselves upon others we think we have the power over.
That his innocent quest only allows rape
as does his distancing himself from the rapist even while
and especially because it is part of the home.
'I believe in maintaining peace,' say people trying to offer solidarity.
They would have perhaps raged easily had it been an outsider,
had it been someone they knew they could exert themselves on.
But this was a question of kinship.
My father, mother, grandmother, aunts, cousins, all have a family to maintain.
When caste-patriarchy calls to duty, men are the first to answer and others follow suit.
'Infection of imitation' (Ambedkar 25)
The savarna home is a violent border, incapable of granting refuge.
Homes under caste-capitalist patriarchy are wounds,
and savarna homes are wounds
with an insatiable appetite for purity.
Here caste trumps humanity,
oppressing those within in the name of familial love
and those outside in the name of hate.

In *Medicine Stories*, Aurora Levins Morales writes how there is no difference between individual abuse and collective oppression because they are 'different views of the same creature, varying only in how we accommodate to them' (4). She talks about how child sexual abuse is often explained as an isolated, anomalous psychological issue of the perpetrator, hate crimes are described as a culmination of personal insecurities and frustration. But the truth is that 'abuse is the local eruption of systemic oppression, and oppression the accumulation of millions of small systematic abuses (Morales 5).'

('How do we bring politics down to the scale of life and living?'

Are you listening

and

letting this refrain haunt you?)

The COVID-19 pandemic saw an unprecedented rise in natal family violence when the enforced lockdown meant to keep people safe in their homes under the government slogan 'stay home, stay safe' brought forth the heavily conflicting relationship of safety and the home. A 2023 qualitative report on natal family violence titled 'Unkahi – The Unspoken' by Shakti Shalini (an Indian NGO that supports sexual and gender-based violence survivors) observes how in 2021 when the COVID-19 pandemic was raging in India, the country was faced with the highest rate of domestic violence in 10 years during the lockdown to the point where the surge of domestic violence led to headlines like, 'Is domestic violence the next pandemic in India?' (Shakti Shalini 9)

Violence within the natal home continues to be underreported because those who speak about it are primarily single or queer women who still live with their family as adults, notes a feminist academic in the April, 2023 report 'Apnon ka bahut lagta hai (Our own hurt us the most) Apnon ka Bahut Lagta Hai" (Our Own Hurt Us the Most): Centering Familial Violence in the lives of Queer and Trans Persons in the Marriage Equality Debates' prepared by PUCL and The Network.

Since caste practices prevails across religions in India irrespective of religion irrespective of theological sanction, the normative Indian family is endogamous whereby most marriages occur within similar social groups. In a country with 93% arranged marriages, it is evident that the role of family in love and marriage is significant (BBC). The family is primarily meant for ensuring the reproduction of caste through reproduction strictly within endogamous or at least hypergamous groups thus mandating heterosexuality and forbidding inter-caste (especially hypogamous) and interfaith unions. According to a Pew Survey, a majority of men and women across all religions held the opinion that a person should be stopped from marrying outside their own caste and community (Quint). This shows that to remain in this family then, one must not flout caste patriarchal norms so that the honour of the family is maintained which ensures the maintenance of caste. This question of caste honour articulated in various ways across the country like 'izzat' in Urdu, 'sanskar' in Hindi, 'maan-shomman' in Bangla haunts the both the reports on natal family violence in India by Shakti Shalini and PUCL where the former focuses largely on girls and women and the latter on queer and trans people. Survivor testimonies reveal the extent and varied forms of violence (policing, surveillance, physical and emotional abuse, sexual abuse and so on) that manifests within the family. In her testimony, Sambhavna says,

> Each time I visited home, I was reminded that I better not have any relationship with a man, "you have gone there to study, you are the honour of the family", they would say. Meaning the entire burden of the family's honour is left on the woman. But a man can ruin this honour too! (30)

As a child, I was always taught values of friendship and care while simultaneously being told that while forming romantic relations with marginalised caste people was not ideal but still acceptable, falling in love with a Muslim person is not at all desirable. The social segregation in Indian urban spaces aids in strengthening these social stratifications whereby dalits and Muslims are kept isolated and ghettoised which maintains and exacerbates social stratification because the entrenched contempt leads to the propagation of hateful stereotypes around neighbourhoods they inhabit. Caste consciousness is embedded in our being, shapes our unconscious and acts as police within us. Our ideas of love, respectability, agency, freedom, beauty is shaped by the caste (un)conscious especially because upper castes in India have the privilege to deny caste and practice it in the same breath by declaring themselves 'casteless' (Deshpande 32). Caste is in our bones.

Within caste patriarchy, the woman is reminiscent of not only her family's but her community's honour; and endogamy is mobilised as a method to police women, queer and trans people. Deviance from norm leads to coercion, abandonment, violence and even death. This politics of respectability that characterises the heteropatriarchal family in India is one where the shaping of the self as 'good' relies on the violent othering of communities and castes perceived as 'bad' or 'deviant'. Slut-shaming is therefore a common form of policing in families that project ideas of the 'good' and 'bad' girl. The very construction of the womanhood of the upper caste chaste woman has historically relied on erasure of 'devadasis[11]' and dalit sex workers and dehumanisation of the dalit woman as sexually 'impure' and sexually available. This erasure underlies marriage and family as the foremost institutions for sustaining caste. In their extensive report on natal family violence in queer and trans lives, PUCL therefore notes the importance of the analysis of the 'political economy of the traditional family and why the State and the market continue to shore it up despite such challenges to its structure and relevance' (148). The institution of marriage perpetuates endogamous groupings and those flouting it are faced with punitive measures ranging from being disowned by the community, mental,

[11] 'Devadasis are women and non-women (primarily dalit) who marry temple goddesses in religious rites, mostly practised in parts of South India. A contentious figure in the Indian history, devadasis are often defined through their illicit sexuality and sexual liaison outside heterosexual matrimony' (Kang 68)

physical, sexual violence, and threats to life. A caste patriarchal structure is also one of graded inequality (Patil 215) which leads to differential treatment of victims/survivors depending on their caste, class and community location in the social hierarchy. Therefore, violence is manifold for persons from marginalised castes and communities because dominant castes in India routinely engage in honour killings where the violence unequally impacts the partner from a 'lower' caste background but on a much larger and blatantly violent scale if they are dalit (Kang 66). Hypogamous alliances are the most attacked. The qualitative reports on natal family violence by Shakti Shalini and PUCL demonstrate that women, trans and queer people from working class and marginalised caste backgrounds are doubly vulnerable within and outside their homes and that the differential location of victims/survivors also determines their access to resources which is one of the determining factors in the possibility of being able to escape an abusive situation. Moreover, if they are in an inter-caste relationship with an upper caste person, the partner's family then becomes fatal to the lives of dalit queer and trans folks. Dalit queer critiques on the mobilisation of gay marriage in India addresses this grave lack of caste awareness in the 'marriage equality debate' structured around casteist logics. The ways in which the Marriage Equality Debates in India, galvanising around queerness and gender has culminated, has proved to be inadequate because caste is mutative. It has sustained over at least 3000 years, morphing into modern formations sustained throughout the socioeconomic changes in India because caste is an inherently colonial system of slavery and global racial capitalism only helps exacerbate caste hierarchies just how colonialism continues carrying forward even if it has ceased to formally exist. So, when the caste endogamous family is threatened it can and will accommodate queerness if that is necessary for the caste to live on. And thus, the thriving of upper caste queers within caste society is also built on the death of dalit, adivasi or Muslim queers who bear the disproportionate brunt of inter-caste and inter-community relations. This is where caste, gender and queerness converge where gender and queerness cannot hold in the face of caste oppression within feminist and queer communities alongside gender and caste oppression outside the queer community, something that dalit trans activists like Grace Banu have been saying for years. The critical caste critique by Akhil Kang and Vikramaditya Sahai published in the *Akademi Mag* about how Section 377 in India came to be represented by Menaka Guruswamy and Arundhati Katju as the face of the movement offers a larger history of the structural violence of caste (1). Kang critiques the question of 'marriage equality' as debated by Guruswamy and Katju along lines of kinship and property for being rooted in casteism because kinship in India is structured along caste lines.

> How do you talk of marriage. . . how do you talk of marriage "equality" – and Guruswamy proudly speaks about endogamy and how India is a kinship network state – without talking about how deeply marriages in South Asia are imbricated within realities of class and caste? To proudly declare that the Indian State is a kinship state in a very matter-of-fact, nonchalant(y) way is quite cringe. (Kang and Sahai 13)

Intergenerational wealth and property thrive on endogamy/hypergamy and it is not unheard of for savarna queer people to desire to reproduce caste hierarchies by marrying within their caste. Hence, when marriage 'equality' debates fail in the larger sociocultural reality of marriages being severely unequal in India where heterosexual and LGBT inter-caste and community couples are faced with punitive measures. One of the primary forms of violence archived in the PUCL report is that in case of inter-caste or inter-community marriages, family members threatening to kill their child's partner. 'If she was from the same caste, maybe they would have accepted,' a testifier notes. Caste, therefore, manages to surpass queerness.

This is why I theorise the home as a cut because a major aspect of gendered violence experience within the natal family stems from caste patriarchal logics that punish inter-caste and community alliances especially within the growing polarisation amidst a Hindu-fascist regime that banks on 'love jihad' and 'ghar wapsi' as political strategies to incarcerate marginalised communities. Kang therefore critiques Guruswamy and Katju's advocacy for marriage that uses the rhetoric of inter-caste marriage to articulate their idea of marriage equality based on the same casteist logics that renders inter-caste/faith couples precarious (14). That marriages in India are not equal. The object of queer liberation especially within a caste economy thus cannot be marriage. Therefore, the very notion of family needs to be overturned and we need to find ways of organising other than the logics of caste because the family is a site of violence. The PUCL report team are rightfully working towards legal reforms and petitioning to centre the right to 'chosen family' by giving alternative forms of families that already exist like non-romantic living arrangements, hijra gharanas, live-in relationships, single parent, woman headed or single person households, legal recognition.

Insights from the extensive testimonials in both the reports and their recommendations, especially the report is actively trying to mobilise what M.E. O'Brien calls 'anti-family' reforms and urges the fundamental reimagination of what we mean by family itself which I understand as a family abolitionist move. Since I attempt to work on a smaller, different scale of hearing beyond the legal and the state, this is where I use insights from the M.E. O'Brien's

theorisation of family abolition to see what possible undoings it might offer in a caste society. Theorising from the threshold using liminagraphy, I am trying to mobilise from a certain loneliness that regimes of oppression leave us with. In the documentary, 'Does Your House Have Lions'[12] by vqueeram and Vishal Jugdeo, a house of friends is torn apart by larger forces of history in the context of a huge number of incarcerations following the 2020 Delhi anti-Muslim pogrom following the Shaheen Bagh protests against the ethnofascist Citizenship Amendment Act by the BJP that the pandemic and the state brought to a halt. Their house is one that is made of chosen love and friendship and broken by the state. The promise of friendship is too fragile to affront the sheer force of carcerality and state violence. Thus, while legal reforms are rightfully fought for, chosen communities outside carceral, casteist logics will be disallowed to thrive unless the caste Hindu society also comes to an end. This is not to take a linear approach towards caste abolition followed by family abolition but rather work with this insight provided by the documentary showing how these imaginations and organisations need to happen together. The film refuses to fit into linearity or hierarchies while being very aware of it, navigating simply the relations to make a queer archive that relies not entirely on fact or fiction but an in-between. It is the construction of the memory of an archive, the longings of an archive of belonging focusing on the everyday smaller world/s collapsing into larger ones disallowing the overt importance on the univocal authorial/directorial position and rather showing conversations, gestures, silences, movements to articulate fragmented relationalities. This refusal of a singular voice is made possible because of friendship which is how the film is made too, a collaboration between friends. It is an archive of trying to make loneliness liveable (Thomas and Kuttaiah). An archive of hope that churns the question of what could it mean to organise, build a home that refuses caste Hindu familial logics? It is in the breaking apart of the house by the state and yet the audacity of the house in the first place that I want to situate a politics of un/belonging and undoing embedded in relationality. The hopework of the lions that is friendship in the face of fascism is a work of making loneliness liveable. It is what is necessary when we rethink families including chosen ones that could encounter their own limits because we only have a certain kind of familial reference which makes any family susceptible to becoming subsumed into oppressive logics while trying to survive as marginalised persons within a caste capitalist society that shapes and contorts the freedom

[12] Does Your House Have Lions (2021) is a 48 minute film by Delhi-based poet vqueeram and LA-based artist Vishal Jugdeo. It documents India over January 2019 to September 2020 revolving around a house of friends and lovers. (sharma)

dreams we try articulating. It would not be an anomaly if surviving within the conditions of capitalist, Hindu fascist, casteist society 'they are potential spaces of coercion and violence' because they 'combine dependency and care like the family does' (O'Brien, 183). And even if it does survive, the state constantly finds ways to break it apart. Building on the Nancy Fraser's argument about the neoliberal co-option of anti-state and social movements that was made possible because of the neoliberal assault on social democracy, state programs, and welfare benefits, O'Brien opines that 'true radical democratisation of anti-family reforms will ultimately require overcoming the capitalist state' (O Brien 185). In her study on the Indian family (the legal definition of which largely draws from 'Hindu' law following a caste patriarchal template) in the 21st century, Tulsi Patel finds how it simultaneously deals with the state, private and cooperative enterprises, and ethnic, caste, and class differences at various levels (Patel 30). It is under these concerns of the current political economy that I want to sit with M.E. O'Brien's provocation, 'If chosen family becomes necessary for material survival, survival becomes bound up with status and the opinions of others. What happens to those who are not chosen?' (184)

A politics of un/belonging then is not only to unbelong from structures that oppress us but also to build on an understanding of community where homes and houses need not be built on conditional belonging. The idea of home is insufficient if it leaves anyone behind. Family abolition for O'Brien then is a radical re-imagining not only of family but beyond in order to fundamentally push for a change in how we see ourselves emphasising on the Afro-pessimist move away from the concepts of 'human and humanity' that the slave is a necessary counterpart to (O'Brien 11). My political move is also towards a fundamental re-membering of ourselves in order to be able to relate to each other, be with each other in ways that are beyond carceral logics.

Thenmozhi Soundararajan in her book *The Trauma of Caste* writes,

> You cannot wield that kind of violent power without it showing up in your own family, your own relationships, your own home, your own body. The painful truth we must face is that dominant-caste families are plagued with all sorts of unhealthy and abusive dynamics that also are a legacy of the trauma of caste. (Soundararajan 56)

Soundararajan's provocations are very useful in navigating natal family violence in a caste patriarchal society where patriarchy follows the larger brahmanical pattern but plays out

differently depending on the caste status and thereby the social realities of the communities. The Shakti Shalini report notes how both men and women in the family played the role of perpetrator in cases of natal family violence in equal measure. Women who were perpetrators were also tasked as the police for ensuring gendered and patriarchal norms are maintained. Shakti Shalini noted how mothers, sisters, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law perpetrated violence and engaged in it and policing.

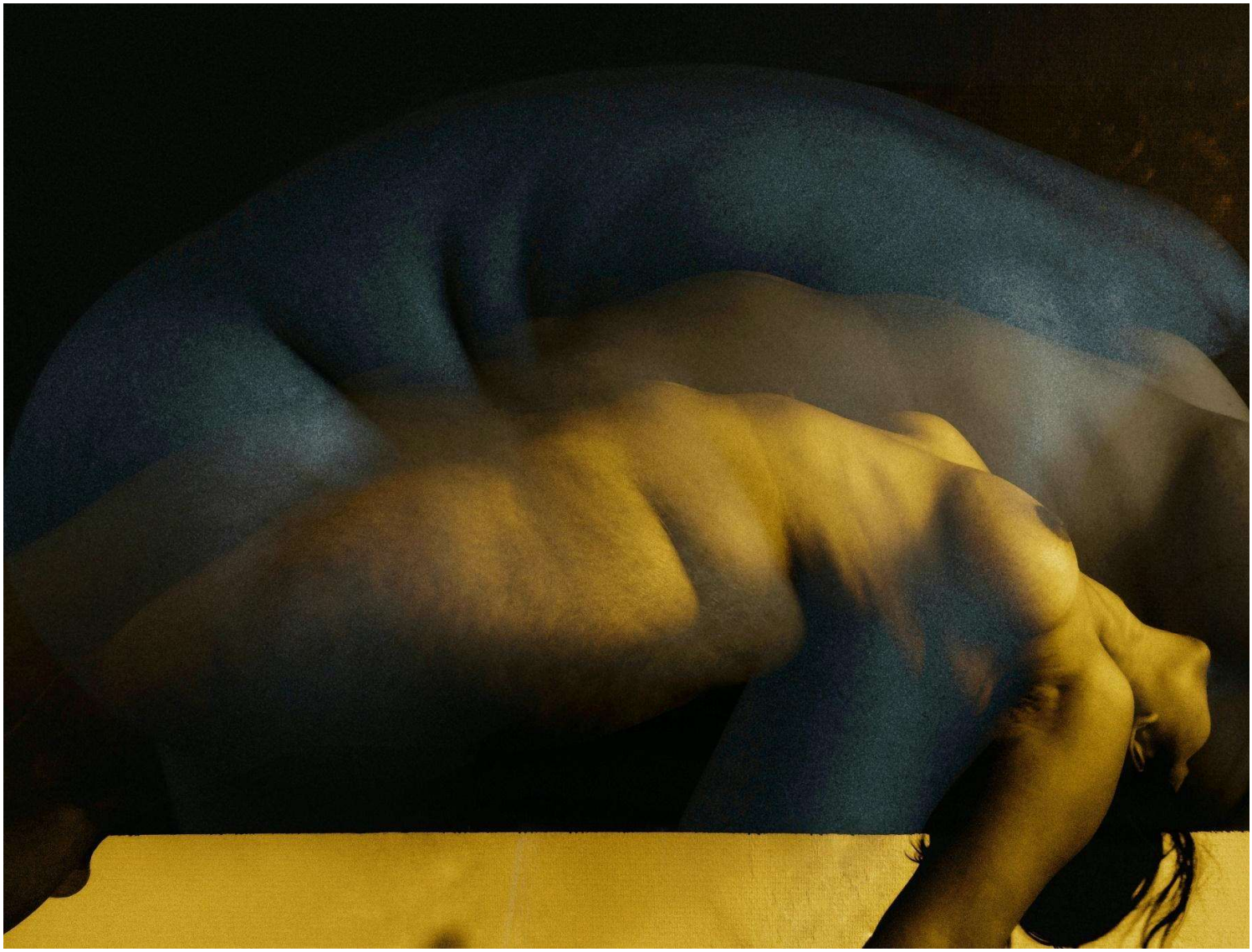
The crippling feeling of abandonment that comes with violence experienced within the home with people either actively enabling it or remaining silent, makes it excruciatingly painful to speak up. So, when in *Complaints!* Sara Ahmed speaks of institutional violence within academia, I think of the violence inherent to family as an institution and the importance of listening to children. I wish children were listened to more generously than the protection generously afforded to abusers because of the fear of the family falling apart. I wish the victim/survivor's humanity was worth more than the facade to maintain the laughable sanctity of family, honour, patriarchy; the laughable sanctity of caste. Children carry the violence of their families in their bones and unless healed, we bleed everywhere we go.

Listen. Listen. Listen back.

II

afterlife: the body as a messy, deteriorating, impossible archive

‘But there are no safe spaces.’ (Anzaldua 246)



a site of abandon–the body, the home
is a threshold, a border existence;
here yet not.
an absent presence,
un/be/longing.
I dissociate.

Trauma is always unfinished. Abuse is a fundamentally displacing event. Abuse within home abandons in more than one way. An occurrence that keeps returning, trauma is a haunting. The traumatic event is an unbearable atrocity that fundamentally shakes a person's whole being. Trauma makes us forget and remember in simultaneity; it exists even when it does not as traces. Feminist psychologist Judith Hermann describes psychological trauma as an 'affliction of the powerless' (24). She writes that the moment of trauma renders the victim helpless by overwhelming force. 'When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning' (24).

Trauma experienced as a child within the family, in one's own home renders a person homeless. Home ceases to be true and it is only possible to live on by dissociation which the trauma body necessitates as a reaction to something the body perceives as life-threatening. In the dissociative experience of trauma, the traumatised body is trapped in a state of abysmal conflict between the 'conscious automatic' and the 'instant feeling' systems that exist outside the body and can surface in memory (Walker 315). This cognitive dissonance created by trauma causes a rupture in the body's narrative of itself. The gap between what Brian Massumi calls the affective and cognitive registering of trauma. The body is then in a non-linear process where it is incessantly trying to catch up to itself through a feedback loop that the haunting memory traces create. Brian Massumi describes it as a body where,

> Brain and skin form a resonating vessel. Stimulation turns inward, is folded into the body, except that there is no inside for it to be in, because the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be perceived, and because the entire vibratory event is unconscious, out of mind. (89)

The body then is held in a state of suspension in a 'temporal sink, a hole in time' (Massumi 25); where its existence has been made precarious by (re)traumatising hauntings of the past. The body is then always a liminal zone; there and yet not, moving and yet not. The body is in waiting. Philosophers and psychoanalysts have theorised this suspended state in various ways. While Derrida calls it a possessed body held by both the effect of trauma on its present body and the fear of something yet to come, Freud calls it 'Nachtraglichkeit' or deferred action trauma caused by two impulses working against each other while according to Laplanche it is latency or afterwardness (Walker 316). The traumatic experience is thus characterised by an anxious waiting for something that is not present but is still yet to come. The body then, is

drowned in conflict with 'the symptom of a history they cannot entirely process' (Caruth 1). Memories that are thus un/able to surface are disconnected because the person's being, that is their time, self and world is fractured in an event that happened too soon fully comprehend and hence is only available to the consciousness in gaps (Walker 318). Because trauma is wounding, healing requires re-membering the past to put it together, to help the haunting ghost make its way back home, light up its pathway and tend to it. Because it is in the unconscious since it is unbearable, working through trauma becomes difficult because it involves having to go through it all over again to uncover what is erased in order to fill the gaps. Narrating the trauma body then is also to talk about something that is not whole or linear, something that cannot fit the logics of the rational, sensible human. So, I do not theorise as a human. I theorise instead as a being, through my body as a messy, deteriorating (Singh 27), (re)traumatised and impossible archive. A body that does not feel like it belongs anywhere other than trying to stay afloat in its un/be/longing.

The afternoon sun filters through the windows of the big bedroom of the house.

The child sits at the window, carving something with great attention.

In goes the brand-new linocut tool.

Its newness makes it sharp enough to dig under the skin, into the flesh.

the child digs and carves their hand.

blood spills perhaps but I am writing whatever my nostalgia allows

and in it, blood does not spill.

nothing spills or flows;

Time stops by the window and I float around like an astronaut in circles,

a no-gravity zone.

I pick my skin like an orange peel,

finding a way to float in the abyss.

I sit at the window and try to be with myself

for as long as I can before it starts hurting again.

Unaware, I sit and write on my skin because it is the only way to write about the buried.

The child could not dig up so they dug into their flesh.

Perhaps unconsciously hoping for someone to figure out the hieroglyphics (Spillers).

Tending to the wounds,

giving herself the attention, she desired.

Because everyone else is silent and has condemned the child to silence.

So, the child holds their sharp tools close,

digging and writing cries into her flesh.

Cutting yourself is not acceptable, so the child knew to keep it hidden.

‘Stop doing this, hurting yourself is bad,’ rebuked a school teacher.

But the child was looking for a way to make the pain stop

and wrote the hurt they could not dare to name.

Silence is never empty; can you listen back?

With no one to take blame, we direct all the rage inward.

Wounds are not the only ones that are visible.

Pain must be tended to, not pathologised.

Visibility is a trap, listen back.

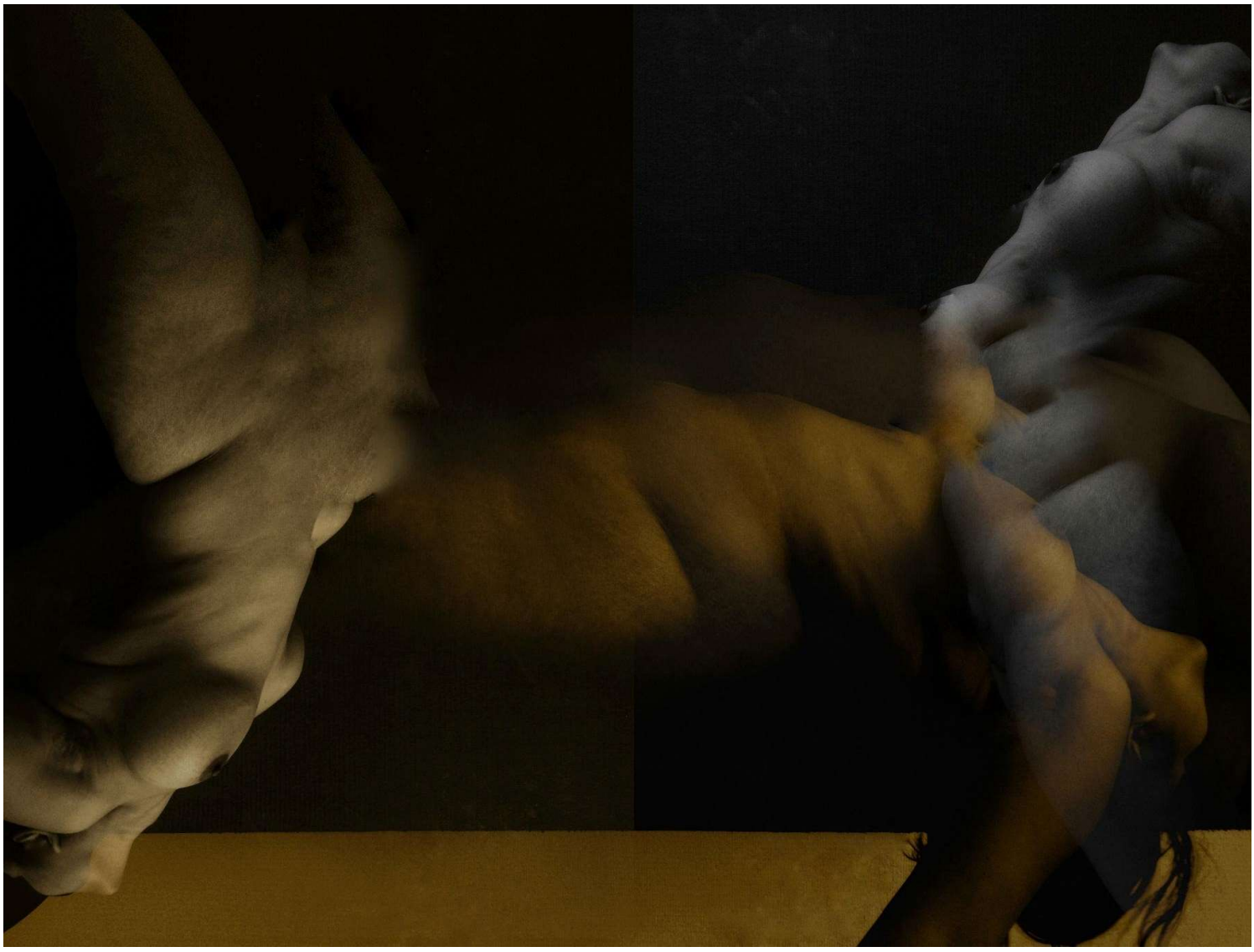
The cut is a life drive,

can you hear the voices on the skin?

In her 1996 study on trauma survivors who cut themselves, Janice McLane notes how unlike popular medical discourses of self-mutilation framed as self-harm, manipulative strategy or suicidal gesture, this act and its meaning is as survivors revealed was strongly private where several people described this behaviour as one that helps refrain from suicide (115). That was my experience too, a method of attention. As a victim of child sexual abuse within the family that shook the very core of core understanding of home informs my liminal existence. The cut as a voice on my skin is a voice that is grieving the structures that bind me, structures I am implicitly tied to. To listen to the voice on the skin is to look beyond the visible because the cut is opaque and provides no insight to my trauma unless one listens back instead of labelling it as self-harm which would not let them see the more deep-seated meanings a cut might have for a victim/survivor. To look for its invisible, unheard offerings is an exercise in listening to images, in listening to what cannot be seen.

Eva Hayward in 'More Lessons from a Starfish' writes of cutting/mutilation as regenerative (72). A cut having regenerative bearings resonated with me as part of a lesson in surviving sexual trauma. The cut not seen as mutilation reminded me of how a mental health practitioner asked me if I have a history of self-harm. After listening to me recount a memory she told me how trauma survivors often cut themselves to focus on oneself, one's own feelings. Cutting as a method of bearing witness. A witness that is unacceptable at the court of law. A witness that cannot be understood because they speak imperfectly if at all. This cut then is not simply a harming but rather a tending toward. Hayward's cut suggests a process of enfolding with the body that makes a subjective embodiment that is never entirely visible (Hayward 73). Hayward's regenerative scar suggests an otherwise that can be inhabited only when we reject the immediately visible to see through its echoes. In the afterlife of trauma, the otherwise is already in making and never through 'coming out of trauma' or understanding/grasping it but through a slow acceptance, re-membering of it. Not to drive out the ghost or become it but pay attention to it, walk towards and with it so that it can break away from horror as the only possibility. To hold.

To begin to see the cut as transformative is the transformative potential of nepantla and of unearthing uncomfortable archaeological remnants of untouchability shaping the unconscious. A politics of un/belonging does not necessitate going elsewhere to find selfhood, it rejects the traumatising idea of a whole human self by rejecting the logics that promise us humanity at the cost of others in order to rearrange oneself. A politics of un/belonging is thus characterised by attention. To stretch toward others and inward to yourself.



Stretch.

Do you feel the tension?

Stretch further.

The unconscious is resistant to change and that is why it must.[13]

The bridge on our backs is long, winding, haunting

[13] In a psychoanalysis tutorial facilitated by professor Eva Hayward that I attended, she had said this one day in a class where we were reading Sigmund Freud's 1920 monograph 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' and it has stayed with me ever since.

And so, we must walk using the affinity of hammers
to chip away,
at fortresses we have made.
Fortresses that might be doors others find closed on them (Ahmed, *Affinity of Hammers* 232).
Chip away and stretch towards.
The cut is transformative.
The cut is meditative.
Not human
but being.
Being.
Stay.
Remain.
Remember.
an affinity of
hammers.
Un/belong.

Our flesh bears knowledge because the body remember even when we forget. The cuts formed therein replace mouths that are forbidden utterance. The traumatised is suspended in dissociation, always one step away from falling apart, re-members in various ways. I see dissociation as a haunting because traumatic memories haunt. According to the Online Etymology Dictionary 'to haunt' means,

> to practice habitually, busy oneself with, take part in," from Old French *hanter* "to frequent, visit regularly; have to do with, be familiar with; indulge in, cultivate" (12c.), of uncertain origin, perhaps from Old Norse *heimta* "bring home," from Proto-Germanic **haimatjanan* "to go or bring home," from **haimaz*- "home" (from PIE root *tkei- "to settle, dwell, be home").

For me, haunting is the closest to what the dissociative state feels like wherein the body is busy with itself dealing in the conflictual push and pull of going on with the everyday life against anticipated catastrophe that comes in waves that sometimes lash onto the surface or just touch the shore and go or are just far away somewhere at the horizon. But it is always flowing, always in motion and the opposing motions hold the body frozen as if it is afloat. But the memories

are waiting to come back home because they have been abandoned. This is why trauma recovery is a difficult process since it pushes one to encounter what is unconsciously repressed. In *Medicine Stories*, Aurora Levins Morales writes,

> What is so dreadful is that to transform the traumatic we must re-enter it fully, and allow the full weight of grief to pass through our hearts. It is not possible to digest atrocity without tasting it first, without assessing on our tongues the full bitterness of it. Ours is a society that does not do grief well or easily, and what is required to face trauma is the ability to mourn, fully and deeply, all that has been taken from us. But mourning is painful and we resist giving way to it, distract ourselves with put-on toughness out of pride (19).

The denial of reality is the cause of the pain and yet accepting it fully seems unbearable which characterises the ambivalence of the victim/survivor in telling the truth (Herman 129). This is because what comes with the wound is an overwhelming array of emotions like guilt, shame, anger, disgust most of which is directed inward thus causing the inability to accept. It is an extremely difficult task when one runs the risk of losing the remaining illusions of control, of losing relationships, homes, beliefs, faith—a fundamental restructuring of life is part of the work of recovery. Letting go of everything causing, enabling, and contributing to the trauma in order to rebuild all over again. Morales writes that the challenge is,

> to assimilate the terrible, the unbearable, transforming it into something that can be integrated; something that can nourish us and leave us with a vision of the world, of ourselves, of humanity, that is bigger than the horror (19).

Even as I write this several years later, my heart thumps out of my chest beating ever so loudly in my ears. The vision Morales speaks of and the acceptance Hermann talks about do not function in isolation but in politically rooted contexts that determine what happens with our trauma. In environments as violent as ours, the first step is to formulate ways in which we can listen to silences and other forms of speaking that do not fall into sensible, linear narratives of sense-making that the state, law and police use to (re)traumatise the victim/survivor. A world characterised by ongoing violence doubly weighs in on the minds of those whose bodies have been violated, raped, wounded. Speaking up is not always conducive in a world that treats trauma as a spectacle. The everyday is characterised by fear so it is important it becomes crucial

that we remember that alongside sharedness, what accompanies the story of every trauma body is its unique narrative, its difference from the other. And this is a place of shared limitation that can be mobilised as something to be paid attention to. Something we do not know of that awaits to be heard and something we have that awaits to be communicated. This is a journey of encountering; we meet each other halfway.

Vigilance

I forget a lot, but my body remembers everything I forget.
I see you watching me sleep.
~~how~~ do the abused rest?
~~how~~ does one rest in isolation?
Trauma is a state of watchful (ar)rest.
The body stops in its tracks;
here and yet never here, a body haunted by itself.

Gender is a wound on the body. And both gender and caste mark the body in unbearable, interlocked ways. Caste privilege protects me and yet disenfranchises as gender plays out within the tight binds of caste. On the otherwise not-so-spectacular event of having a vagina, I am diagnosed female and hence supposed to be the vessel of caste honour—grounds for contestation, tool for mobilisation. Diagnosed because so much of girlhood also simultaneously feels like a disorder. Disorder because my first awareness of breasts as something I am supposed to have as a defining characteristic of my identity, was when I was 10-years-old when an old man pretending to know my father groped and kissed me on the streets. Later that day, my uncle tried abusing me in our home. At 10, I had no decipherable presence of breasts. Where they would grow, the presence was of the hands of my abusers. So, when they did emerge, I would frantically pray them away. My relationship with my body was so fundamentally fractured that the wound never stopped festering. And therefore, I have mostly understood gender as dissociation. I do not know if this is a testament of trauma or queerness because the two seem to confusingly intersect in my case. Or maybe I am too caught in the logics of law/politics/police searching for a univocal truth, an authenticity I cannot afford nor can it ever possibly catch up to the contradictions I hold. In a racial capitalist economy, to accept that I might listen and yet not understand seems absurd because the need to be the neat, sensible *human modernus* is too pervasive and overbearing. The need for recognition of oneself on colonial, casteist terms kills. Constructing perfect crimes, criminals and victims—visibility kills. Unable to accept this impossibility to trace back and find out for certain is also perhaps queer in its very rejection of certainty. In their proposals for an abolitionary listening, Carson Cole Arthur, Petero Kalule, AM Kanngeiser write,

> To listen (with the expectation that you will understand and will be understood) is to calibrate a "consensus" that relies on a shared delimitation of what and who can be heard and how. It is to reproduce, restore and relay the strategic exclusionary closure (and arrest) of law/politics/police. (Arthur et.al)

I do not know and never will because within brahmanical patriarchy, womanhood is a test that most fail. I have known it as reluctance because it has been a burden except on summer holidays when I played with my cousins and we raided ma's almirah for her sarees and I would tie her black dupatta pretending to be a lady with long hair. I have also happily thought of myself as the 'good boy' my grandmother always called me Perhaps she unknowingly built me a queer place. On most other days, the brahmanic burden of maintaining gender constantly asks of me

to be a ‘good’ girl because whatever I do is supposed to reflect on my family. What an immensely narcissistic association, sigh. Lessons in caste honour teach us to police others and in effect ourselves. It asks me to be the violence that erodes me. Telling me that the only way I deserve to live is ‘respectably’ which requires me to not only dehumanise those perceived to be undeserving respect according to the dictates of caste but base my selfhood on it. So, I must not be overtly sexual or feminine. I should not love and befriend people disallowed from my enclave because they are ‘dirty’ ‘impure,’ ‘lower.’ I should ideally never love at all and if I were to, it should be someone from a ‘good’ family and never Muslim. The protection I am allowed to access is by denying others the same. So, while writing about trauma as a child abuse victim within the natal family, I think about children whose lives are doubly threatened within homes and outside because of homes like mine. And writing this then feels like a responsibility. For there are too many of us waiting to be defended and not enough willing to defend us. Our own abandon, dismiss, make us question our reality. The state garlands caste Hindu rapists, provides them protection acting akin to the family that protects the perpetrator instead of the victim at the cost of the victim’s life and the perpetrator’s humanity. The state and the family hinges on the sanctity of caste consistently instrumentalising rape. The caste patriarchal family rapes and kills for ‘honour’. It polices in the name of protection and refuses it within homes because it refuses to accept that someone ‘honourable’ is capable of being a perpetrator which is only another way to say that they have the impunity to do as they please because the consensus of the caste society is to turn away from it, justify it and suppress anybody who tries breaking the illusion of honour. Another way to create the perfect crime, criminal and victim. It is only the most brutal rapes that makes headlines. As the extensive consumption of the brutal Delhi Gangrape case of 2012 revealed, caste and patriarchy played a double-edged role in imagining the victim and the perpetrator. This case was a case of a perfect crime which a large part of the Indian urban middle class, took as the opportunity to shed responsibility by visualising the perfect criminal as young migrants and the victim as a woman who needs to be protected from them to maintain her purity while at the same time blaming her clothes or her going out late at night with someone other than her husband as her faults that invited these aggressors. Then Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh’s first message to the police after their brutal crackdown on protestors was,

> “We have a large number of footloose young men who come to urban areas from rural areas in search of jobs, in search of livelihood strategies and if they do not get well absorbed in the process of development in rural areas, they can become a menace in

> society," Singh told Indian Police Service (IPS) probationers who called on him on Wednesday. (HT Correspondent)

Politician Raj Thackeray too blamed Biharis migrants for sexual violence in the city (Staff Reporter). While this revealed the casteist interlockings of patriarchy, the patriarchal formulations of caste were to be found in the various articulations of victim-blaming that followed. Asha Mirje, a leader of the National Congress Party blamed it partially on the victim saying she could have avoided it by not going to watch a movie with her friend late at night.

> 'Did Nirbhaya really have go to watch a movie at 11 in the night with her friend? Take the Shakti Mills gang rape case. Why did the victim go to such an isolated spot at 6 pm?" Mirje asked at a gathering of the NCP women's wing in Nagpur.' (Kumar)

Five years later, Snehlata Shankhwar, a biology teacher continues blaming the victim saying she could have saved herself by not going out late at night with someone not her husband. This teacher was found harassing her female students giving 'counselling' sessions at school addressing girls and boys together to say things like girls who wear lipstick, jeans are characterless and it is an 'inviting' gesture (India Today). These articulations found their ways into our homes where mothers were at the same time scared and thus increased control and surveillance. My mother would be vehemently against me going to Delhi to study because of her fear. And she was right because Delhi is excessively unsafe for women, queer and trans people but the spectacle of this event led to relegation of rape as an outside event which was easier to bear especially in a country that does not legally recognise marital rape. It was the perfect crime for a caste patriarchy to simultaneously see and unsee rape. In this aftermath, offenders were largely assumed to be strangers—especially suspicious if they are from a working-class background, slums and other ghettoised spaces specifically meant for dalits and Muslims that come to be labelled as 'dangerous' localities. It is at this juncture that we must reevaluate what we understand by rapist and perpetrator? And how detrimental the 'visible' and the 'spectacular' is to the understanding of trauma and abuse which work in the most insidious ways. It is here that one needs to depart from the visual because all men under patriarchy are possible perpetrators but caste guarantees impunity to dominant caste men. It is time and again reflected in how the state, police and law protect them rendering dalit, Muslim, adivasi non-men bodies doubly vulnerable to sexual brutalisation within and outside homes. The need here then is to also reevaluate our understanding of hurt, wound, injury. To not wait

for the most brutal forms of abuse to make headlines because the spectacle enables abuse allowing us to consume trauma and push it aside as an anomaly. It does not allow us to process it or think through it. Violence must escape the visual in order for everything that causes it to be seen. Visible violence is a culmination after repeated testimonies are erased and silence; that go unrecognised wilfully or unwillingly. To understand the family as a site of violence is not an attack on the family or perhaps it is in its refusal to uphold the absolute sanctity of family. All families under caste patriarchy are burdened with the maintenance of this patriarchal honour. What the reports on natal family violence reveals is how the dominant caste families especially in cases of inter-caste and inter-faith relationships resort to honour killing which disproportionately impacts dalits and Muslims. To realise that it does not have to, unlike popular perception, be upheld 'at any cost' is to undo our fundamental understanding of the family as a caste patriarchal institution.

Caste marks bodies irrevocably. The *Purusha Sukta* hymn of the Rig Veda that first classifies the varnas talks about how caste was created by Brahma from the different parts of his body. The body itself is then inherently conceived of as savarna and marked with inherent impurities that also ideologically are projected onto lower castes, dalits and women (Soundararajan 99). Brahmins used the Vedic scripture to construct the social hierarchy of varna that granted them the highest status, purity and power while it relegated others to power based on their social function or occupation structured in a graded form of inequality that increased as one moved down the caste hierarchy. Therefore, dalits being outside the fourfold caste system, came to be not only at the receiving end of the structural oppression of caste but on whom the brutalisation caste is fundamentally built. At the centre of the Vedic creation myth lies the creation of caste, at the centre of 'Hinduism' lies caste.

> When they divided Purusha how many portions did they make? What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet? The Brahman was his mouth, of both his arms was the Rājanya made. His thighs became the Vaiśya, from his feet the Śūdra was produced. The Moon was gendered from his mind, and from his eye the Sun had birth; Indra and Agni from his mouth were born, and Vāyu from his breath. Forth from his navel came mid-air; the sky was fashioned from his head, Earth from his feet, and from his ear the regions. Thus they formed the worlds. (Soundararajan 99)

This Vedic creation myth, alongside creating the caste hierarchy, stratifies the body itself. The body in a caste society is understood to be on a lower level of purity than the mind because according to caste supremacy, the brahmin man engaged in priestly duties and thus had access to knowledge. This constructs the mind/body divide in Hinduism where manual labour is relegated to the lower castes and dalits. When the Hindu Dharmashastras (religious treatise) codified the caste laws, the most important among them was the *Manusmriti* in which Manu reiterates how the varna system must be adhered to because it was 'to protect the universe that the creator assigned separate duties to those who sprang from different parts of his body: mouth, arms, thighs and feed [I:86]' (Chakravarti 48) This creates a hierarchical purity of the body of the creator himself thus attributing parts within the body as unequal. The contempt for manual labour and labourers therefore underpins casteist ideas of bodily impurity that are severely gendered because women are understood to be of lower birth and lower caste women are further dehumanised because the condition of the upper caste woman's 'purity' and therefore their control within relies on scripturally sanctioned sexual availability of the 'impure' the dalit woman. This way women who as a class are seen as degraded by brahmanism are further graded into systemic inequality owing to their caste status that makes dalit women and femme persons bear the gravest brunt of the brutalisation of caste patriarchy.

Gopal Guru in his essay, 'Archaeology of Untouchability' talks about how the brahmanical system makes impossible the imagination of equality of bodies. He talks about the Sankhya school of Indian philosophy which 'Panchamahabhute' which is the five principles earth, water, air, and space is present in every human being which could possibly provide people with an ontological mirror of others being of same value as them. This is rendered impossible because of a politics of self-preservation that disallows the upper castes to step outside brahmanic ideals. In modern, urban India therefore, he notes how untouchability as a discursive practice has more muted, subtle forms because people are forced to hide it in the public spheres. He identifies how a 'structural device' that continues to spread the brahmanical ideals is the ideological conversion of the five principles which are ecological into hierarchical (sociological) which the upper castes have devised for their need to maintain social superiority (Guru 51). The *Manusmriti* considers soiling one's hands in earth or mud ritually polluting for upper castes while water and fire are ritually purifying substances. Guru traces the use of fire in punitive rituals like *sati* that upper-caste women were put through or *agni pariksha* (fire test) that dalits and women have been put through, its use in caste riots to burn dalit homes and its simultaneous assertive use by Ambedkar to burn the *Manusmriti* and the significance of water in the Chavdar water tank struggle of 1927 (52). Guru's brilliant philosophical insight is an

important provocation on savarna selfhood where minutest ecological elements present in everyone's body are ascribed hierarchical cultural values that determine the brahmanical code of existence which produces 'opaque forms of untouchability' (53). Building on Sundar Sarukkai's 'capacious readings of untouchability' extending his arguments on the body and phenomenological analysis of untouchability to build on the argument of how untouchability functions as the structural logic binding the brahmins and dominant castes Sarukkai demarcates as 'deferential' or ideal untouchables and dalits the 'despicable' or real untouchables. Untouchability not only as an effect of brahminhood but rather a structural precondition for it whereby untouchability is not simply outsourced but philosophically supplemented into others (49). Guru notes how the 'Indian mind essentially operates through the subtle act of transferring value from one sphere to another' because of which he points to the domestic sphere that can reveal the existence opaque, mutative forms of caste in modern, urban spaces that allow upper castes to claim castelessness in the public sphere (55). Guru shows how the very formation of upper caste selfhood considered 'sacred' and 'superior' will cease to exist without the presence of the other they despise. The body or our very being then becomes a site of encounter and is seen in constant oppositional anxiety of untouchability which 'sits deep in the anxious self'. Hence a politics of un/belonging is crucial especially for savarnas and everyone impacted by brahmanic ideals in order to be able to initiate an archaeological detection of untouchability within the anxious self. To initiate this is to listen to one's body not simply as a method of meditation or being one with it but as one of undoing. The logic of caste puts an anxious burden of maintaining bodily purity which, for women, trans and queer persons can be an excessive weight of shame and a source of constant policing that they can experience, imbibe and inflict. No traumatised body can possibly heal if it is caught in the dehumanising anxieties of caste supremacy. This dehumanising formation of the human is what Zakiyyah Iman Jackson terms slavery's technology of the 'plasticisation of humanity' (71). Thus, what Guru argues for is essentially repair work, is something I will put in conversation with abolitionary listening and its critique of the *humanus modernus* that addressing trauma in caste societies must be attentive to.

'How do you bring down politics to the scale of life and living?'

Are you listening?

(ar)rested in trauma

How do we see bodies that are violated?

What does visibility do to trauma?

What does it mean to ask the traumatised to narrate their trauma over and over again?

What is the cost of testimonies that demand the making of a legible traumatised subject?

What does it mean to ask the traumatised to overcome trauma

or to ask them to rest?

How does one rest in isolation?

How to rest when one does not know how to ‘take up space’

in a world that marks non-men bodies into a space of permanent exile?

interrogations

Any attempt to engage with and understand psychological trauma will lead one to what Judith Herman calls the most widespread source of trauma, i.e., oppression (20). To talk about trauma is therefore a political engagement in this ongoing economy of racial, casteist, gendered, ableist capitalist oppression. So, when I say that the family is inherently violent, I mean that like all other institutions, the family cannot escape the violence that structures It does not work in isolation. Trauma experienced by a child within their family decapitates the child's formation of a relationship with its body. In the afterlife of trauma, the body is already a debilitated one. And the relationship thus formed with one's body is deteriorating (Singh 27).

I write this to write about the body as deteriorating. The deteriorating body is a benevolent one. It is one that does not buy into the able-bodied myth of production and individual success. The traumatised cannot ignore the deterioration because moving in a body that has experienced trauma means living in continued spite of—flashbacks, panic attacks, dissociation, depersonalisation, disorder, rupture and so on. To be yet not always be with your body because the body sometimes is in excess of you even when the truth is that you are always in excess of your body.

The pop psychology rhetoric of self-love could only float on the surface of the mutilated skin. To tend to the cuts, one cannot but listen to the workings of caste patriarchy that designs a system which must fail the victim to protect the perpetrator. That already divides victims into structural graded inequality that leads to victims acting like police. It leads to dominant caste women leading casteist protests like the anti-Mandal agitation against reservation for marginalised caste groups in educational institutions claiming they do not want 'unemployed husbands' (Tharu & Niranjana 46). This relegation of the undesirable and thus the dangerous to the figure of the stranger outside is debilitating for women, trans and queer people in a rape culture. This insinuation of a certain caste and class or people 'non-meritorious' is the casteist, classist trap of a politics of respectability that claims lives by ensuring certain lives can never have the claim to dignity. It helps caste patriarchy by enabling rape culture in unimaginable ways because the insistence on lower caste as non-meritorious, there is a reification of the consensus on the impunity of 'meritorious,' 'non-quota' men who are desirable as husbands. This narrative is harmful because it implicitly erases violence within the family by weaponising caste privilege, granting impunity to upper caste men. And weaponising privileges can only be a way to build an impenetrable fortress around oneself—untouchability. We need an affinity of hammers (Ahmed, *Affinity of Hammers* 32).

I call my grandmother ma. My first mother, best friend and the only person who heard my complaint a few days after the incident. When I said I would not tell anyone she supported me immediately because that is the only way she has ever known. All anecdotes from her family that loves her a lot have always centred around how she never complained about anything. When women in the family got married her advice to them would always be, 'Purse your lips and bear with it then everything will be alright.' So, when I asked if I should keep it to myself because I did not want to put my aunt in jeopardy, she agreed. She knew the devastatingly broken family her elder daughter inhabits. She appreciated me and I wish she had not. The day it happened, my mother saw me and figured something was wrong. I told her everything was fine but how it meant the world to me that she saw me in ways perhaps only mothers can hear echoes. I wished she was more persistent. When I finally spoke up, twelve years later, about what happened at 12 it only spelled catastrophic chaos thereafter. To listen to resonances, we ought to work to come out of walls that prevent us from resonating or that keeps echoes within chambers. It requires the immensely hard work of rejecting structures that bind us in isolation. Families thrive on the broken backs of overworked grandmothers, mothers, aunts and on the precondition of their silence. Families thrive on the silence of women and children. It thrives on adults silencing children leading to the very material condition of abuse not only not getting recognised but laying the groundwork for making abuse possible. It creates conditions for

(re)traumatisation when the abused raise their voices and it is not different from any other potential site of sexual violence. Trauma becomes an open wound bleeding and overflowing that I/we must swim through every time I/we want to get through to my/our family. Haunting waves of memory traces separate us and everybody is too (un)comfortable to care. Family get-togethers become sites of re-traumatisation in cases of violence within the natal family. My mother's timid yet desperate attempts to make me realise she sees my pain and yet that is all she can really do because that is all the family structurally allows her to do since she must not flout its bind. Since she must not do anything that could possibly throw open the cracks and break the family forever. How do we then even begin to address violence within homes? How do we begin to address the fact that sexual perpetrators lurk in our closest proximity if we rely on sight? We are told to not talk to strangers. Be vigilant of the potentially invasive outsider figure when violence so often is right next to us in the face of someone we are supposed to love. How do we address betrayal and disappointment inevitably written into the promise of 'safe' spaces? The fact that everything close to us, in fact only when something is close to us, can cause hurt.

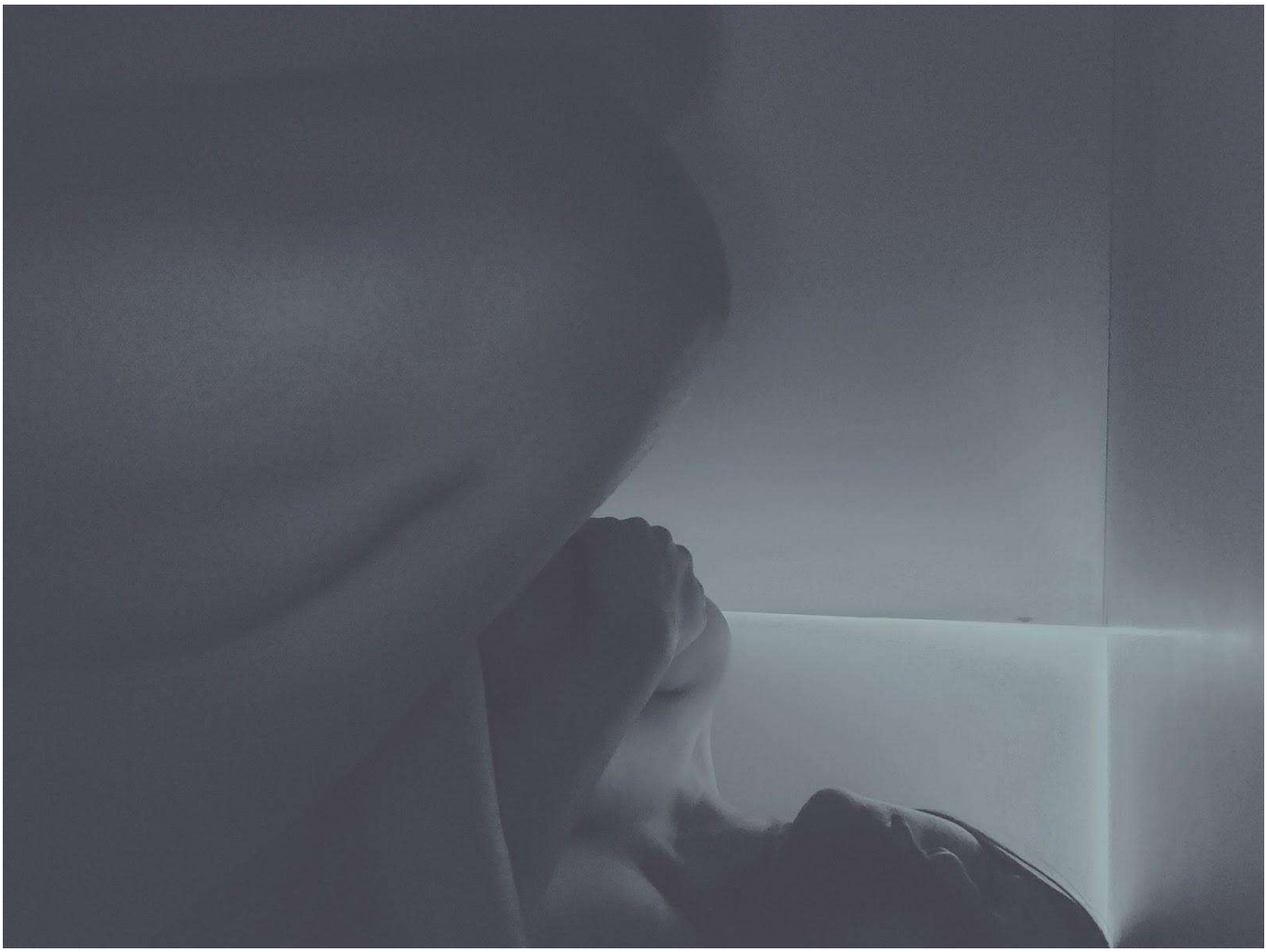
> The history of the family,' Melinda Cooper writes as the opening line of Family Values, "is one of perpetual crisis." Crisis is inherent to the family. As an institution of class society, the family is perpetually destabilised by every period of economic and political transformation. The psychic development of each generation necessarily entails the interweaving of both identification and differentiation against their upbringing. In binding together both care and coercion, the family is necessarily ambivalent, conflicted, and always failing. (O'Brien 151)

III

home—the echoes

‘Still, like water, I remember where I was before I was "straightened out."’

Toni Morrison, ‘The Site of Memory’ (99)



Home has no inherent capacity to ward off harm.
So, I stopped believing in safety the day I realised home is unsafe.
I started feeling lonely at 10 and then at 12.
I often forgot 10 because I was frantically trying to forget 12.
Children carry the violence in their homes within their bones.

We have moved like an echo; we have moved with our cuts.
We have dwelled in our echoes; we have dwelled with our cuts.

To see the home as a cut is therefore an invitation to not abandon but tend to the wound. It is an invitation to haunt. To keep coming back, like a refrain. It is an invitation to remember, an invitation to bridge. To see the cut as transformative is to understand the cut as a different way of embodiment that is different from how we have come to understand bodies as needing to always be visually and naturally whole which are colonial, casteist logics. To not pathologise means to tend to the cut. To allow y/ourself to be stretched toward in the process. The images here are an invitation to critically look into and far beyond them. They do not reveal (in the visual sense) much about the body because the body is a messy, deteriorating, impossible archive. If the body is a cut, perhaps the cut is healing as we lose the body itself. The whole, human, bodily subject has been built on so much violence that the only thing that can remain is being. Something that human subjects do not seem to know how to do. To be, to be with, to be in relation with. If the visual announces its meanings to us the moment we see it because we assume its story because we are 'trapped in the fixity of our own position,' then perhaps we need to depart from visibility in order to understand the image as an echo sticking to its context (Olufemi 20). How does one listen to the image as an echo when how we have learned to see is regimented and that creates regimented affinities as well?

If traumatic memory is a haunting, then its narrative can never be linear. Traumatised bodies continue to refuse temporal linearity or any form of unity in their very existence. Trauma is then a 'rupture of history's straightforward referentiality provides an interpretive methodology, positing that the effects of an event may be dispersed and manifested in forms that are not directly linked with the event, but which bear some trace of their source within their mediations' (Cetinic 78). Trauma therefore necessitates a new mode of seeing and listening to see what the site of trauma can unravel. Trauma's inherent liminality thus finds place in liminagraphy. As part of liminagraphy - the decolonial feminist critique of the modern colonial knowledge system - I have thus engaged in a relational knotting using the 'cut' to theorise the

home as the nation and the body which has taken shape of an attentive journey of haunting, of returning home to tend to the wound. Liminagraphy has therefore functioned as a theoretical bridge between the three parts of my thesis allowing me to move freely.

Our journey has now moved into its final echo, where I invoke the open-ended proposal of abolitionary listening. In their proposal, Carson Cole Arthur, Petero Kalule, AM Kanngeiser ask,

> If listening is a technique or practice of the law, which is to say also of politics/police, what would an abolitionary listening sound like? (Arthur, et.al)

Abolitionary listening is a relational practice that can listen to the voices on the skin. It can listen to the cut because it rejects carceral logics of hearing. To hear the voices on the skin is to listen to the survivor who is trying to speak. We are always speaking. It is one of the many ways of articulation of the survivors' pain and this is crucial to my theorising of listening precisely because it moves away from the definitive, rational, modern human voice. Because there is no 'voiceless' there are always different ways to voice, ways that usually escape us because we try to look for violence when we should perhaps start listening. The messiness and complexity of trauma is something neither law nor society grants survivors. It is an ableist demand of the police state. A demand where only a univocal voice is granted authenticity. The insistence on authentic voice is a contradiction in case of a traumatised existence which is characterised by a fracture of the self. It is characterised by dissociation, depersonalisation, forgetting and other processes that break the possibility of linear, rational articulation. The traumatised voice is messy, fragmented, non-linear. So, the insistence on 'authenticity' only re-traumatises victims/survivors and continues disrupting their voices in a bid to carve out the 'perfect victim' negating the fact that trauma fundamentally tears apart everything one knows to be true. Therefore, the language of engaging, listening to trauma must break away from the colonial understanding of an authentic voice. The authentic voice is a burden on the victim/survivor. The cuts on the skin make space for a voice that articulates survivors' pain because it attends to the fragmentation trauma causes by giving an intimate place for the violent and the contradictory to be expressed (McLane 115). The pathologising language of self-harm fails to take this into account. The moment pain is pathologised, the traumatised is made into an authentic subject, an imposed subjecthood that constantly fails the person. A subjecthood driven by colonial, nationalist and brahmanical logics. A subjecthood that asks of the abused

to be a rational, homogenous voice in order to be understood. A concept of homogeneity that has wounded nations, peoples, and the earth. An imposition that so arrogantly believes it can never misunderstand—it is the voice of the state, the law, the police waiting to listen to the perfect victims and find the perfect criminals to stage the perfect crimes. To go beyond the visual understanding of gender and violence we need to go beyond what can be seen to listen to what is silenced. To do so we must let go of the idea of preconceived safe spaces, like the family as haven. Theorising the home (nation) and the home (family) as cuts defies dominant narratives about the unified nation and family; both never meant to be overthrown. A liminagraphy of the cut as transformative is thus life-affirming. Pain is attended to when those in pain are heard. And so, in trying to use my learnings from these radical traditions, I have attempted to surrender myself to the transformation that nepantla offers using a politics of un/belonging through a liminagraphic movement to make sense of home, trauma and listening. An abolitionary listening that can re-member the darkness that 'holds the key to our emancipatory healing' (Motta 8). An abolitionary hearing committed to the uncapturable, it is a politics of refusal to embody the position of the modern human subject because that is as imprisoning as the modern nation-states and attune towards relation. It is a mode of listening that compels us to move out of human representation toward what Dionne Brand calls 'another place, not here.' This 'not here' is also a 'not hear' as in 'where words don't go' which is 'an open-ended polychronic and polyrhythmic injunction to listen differently' (Arthur, et.al). A departure from visibility.

depart

‘What if an image is also an echo?’ (Olufemi 20)

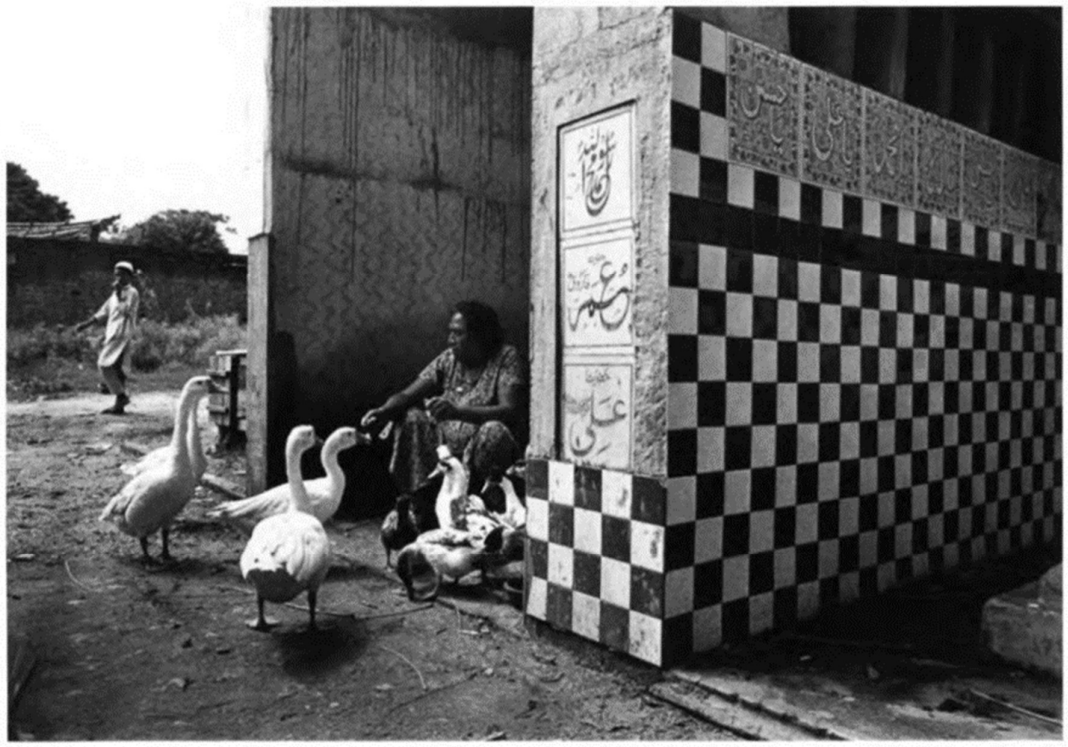
‘My attempt to buy false happiness, pretending that I am happy to Dayanita, so she would not worry about me.’ (Singh and Mona Ahmed 113)

The images that I made are less mine and more of the collective voices that have led them to emerge. They are echoes of histories of loneliness and hope that have held me together. Echoes that are beyond the univocal ones. Images that are often filled with silences ought to be listened to because silence is never empty but ‘a present absence; not merely a category of subjugation but carrying the possibility of an embodied and transgressive active subjectivity’ (Motta 18). These images are thus made using Tina Campt’s proposition of *Listening to Images* and elaborated on using poetic meditations to resound the echoes they carry (Olufemi 40). In their present-absent sonic capacity, these images are a move away from the violence and limitation of visibility that the politics of recognition/representation demand and therefore, liminagraphy holds this departure from visibility into the exploration of trauma through abolitionary listening.

At the centre of all my images lies loneliness. I learn from vqueeram’s reading of *Myself Mona Ahmed* by Dayanita Singh and Mona Ahmed (Sahai) that all hopework begins there and I turn

to José Esteban Muñoz, to theorise a politics of un/belonging that refuses to conform (Muñoz 247). The book starts with Mona writing to the publisher about her life, a life she says is marked with loneliness. From being abandoned by her family because of her life choices to being abandoned by the hijra community because of her choice to refuse the only livelihood offered to hijras which is to dance at births and weddings and the loneliness of her child Ayesha being snatched away from her by her guru. Mona writes to the publisher, 'I want people to respect me as a human being. Is this not my right?' (Singh and Mona Ahmed 5)

It takes me back to childhood when a hijra person who came to our house to take money for my newborn cousin, seeing me visibly afraid, asked, '*Amake bhoy pachho? Amrao toh manush, tai na?'* (Are you afraid of me? We are also humans, are we not?) Way before any intersectional feminist theory, echoes of her voice was the beginnings of my un/doing, un/belonging, and un/becoming. For Munoz, queerness is something there for those who want to see, allowing us to move beyond the prison of the gay hope of belonging and organise around non-belonging. It is this non-belonging Mona organises around. Mona's queerness is something that always escapes because her story starting from her name refuses any binaries where Ahmed is the name she was born with. Being an upper-caste Muslim, caste magnified her 'sense of loss, her desire for legacy' (Sahai, 2020). A mark of her precarity was how she then had to mingle with those not of her status quo and in her abandonment, she made refuge—nepantla. Mona's hopework unfolded in a graveyard where she stayed with and/or gave refuge to animals and people.



Trying to find Ayesha's love in the animals I adopted. 2000

(Singh and Mona Ahmed 100)

Queerness is the affect and utopian performativity as the manifestation of a doing that is on the horizon as seen in Mona's dreams for marriage halls and swimming pools for the poor. She also planned to make 'Ahmed Pickles' to start a pickle factory in the empty pool for employing abandoned Muslim women (Singh 13), wondering if the publishers of this photobook would help the venture. The palace she wanted to build for Ayesha, eventually turned into an idea of mothering hundreds of children by building an orphanage.

I like lovers, so I put the Tajmahal on the walls that I started to build in the graveyard. Then I started to think about a marriage hall with a swimming pool for poor people. 1997

(Singh and Mona Ahmed 93)

Mona's loneliness and hopework gives us an important job of working towards a world she was imagining where life would be easier for poor people, abandoned women, orphans those who are abandoned, left behind, not chosen. So, when I write of a move towards un/belonging it is an affinity of hammers to chip away everything that makes us lonely. vqueeram writes, 'Mona's dreams were animated by this odd intersection of caste and abandonment- refusal that never settled into identity. The task for us is to tether a practice of freedom from her loneliness' (Sahai).

So, at the centre of all my images lies the echoes of loneliness. Mona's loneliness, my grandmother's loneliness who was loved for being silent all her life, my mother's loneliness for bearing the burden of her mother's heirloom silence that she refused and was made to feel like a 'bad mother' for showing rage, all my lonely friends who have been assaulted, abused, raped, wounded by our closest, most trusted and thus forever displaced, all those displaced by

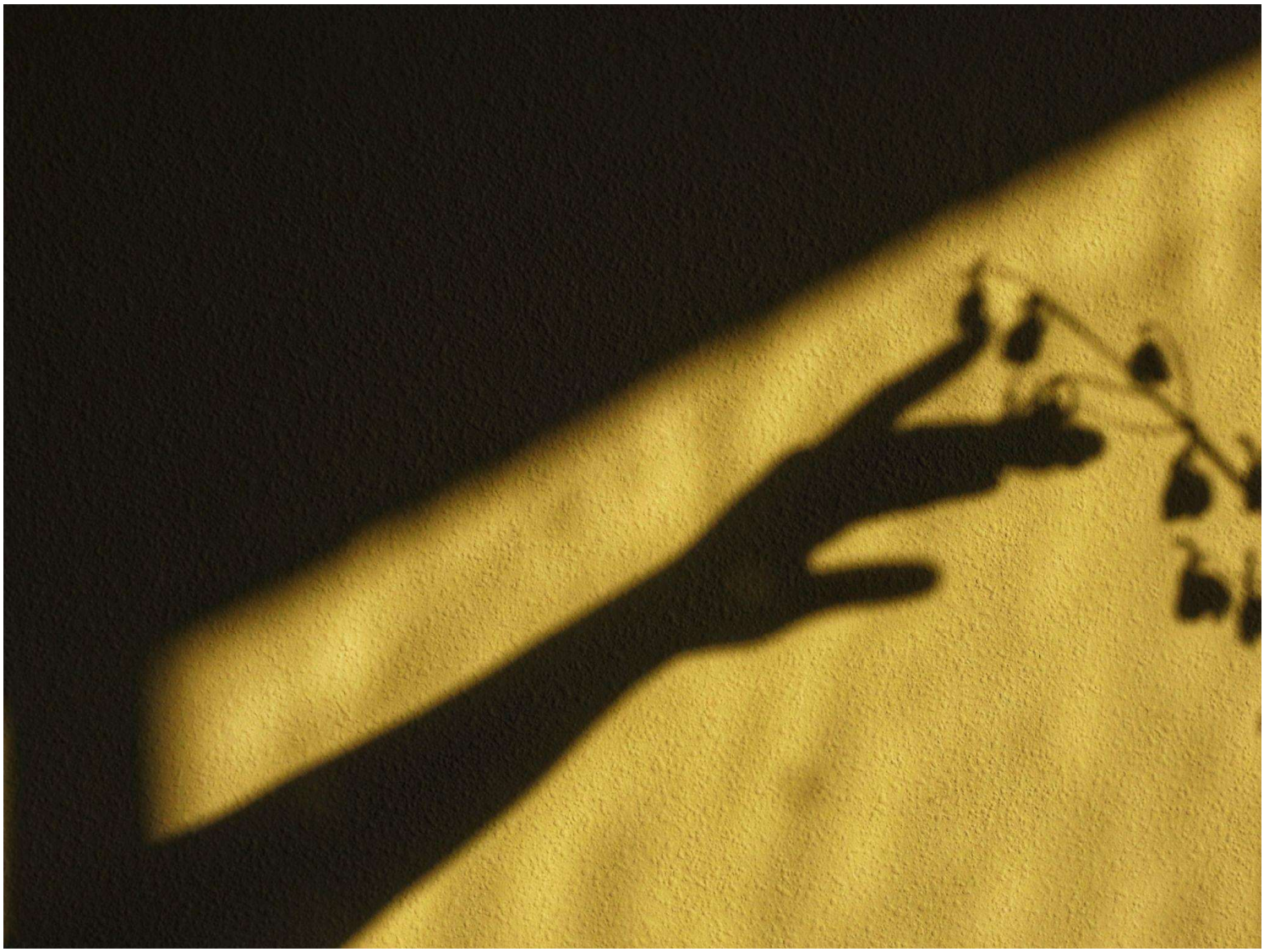
the brahminic fascist regime out to kill us, for our collective loneliness. The voices in this unbearably structured loneliness are the echoes in the images I made based on Olufemi's provocation. Echoes that emerge from tending to cuts. Echoes pushing us to fundamentally reimagine what we understand of home, nation, body.

Echoes bounce off a surface, resounding and fading. An echo reaches out and comes back. Echoes are ripples and I keep throwing pebbles in the pond. Follow the sound of the water and you will find hands outstretched…

A haunting refrain.

'How do we bring down politics to the scale of life and living?'

This is nepantla, we are meeting now.



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Substantiation

Substantiation:*

First Reader: ZB Sheik
It has been beautiful to bear witness to the development of this thesis, from its early stages of concepts and observations, to the blossoming of fully fledged weaving of lived, experience, poetry, photography and theory. This has been done with care and attention, and has resulted in a poetically written thesis, that has theoretical complexity and depth and sharp observations of society and nation. It was an absolute pleasure reading-experiencing-witnessing the final thesis.
This thesis seeks to bring attention to the relationship between trauma, natal family and nationhood. Using a decolonial and critical caste approach the thesis focusses on the ways in which multiple oppressions uphold each other, particularly its implications on being and belonging. The body, through the theory of flesh, is used as the starting point for theoretical arguments, at once critiquing the absence of the body in knowledge production and centering it as the main source of knowing. The reflexive account of the development of the research question demonstrates the journey of unlearning in the research process, questing taken for granted ways of forming questions and pointing to how a research question can be a borrowed one, or as I read it a collective one.
The use of liminagraphy is impressive in the ways in which creative interventions are weaved in with poetry and photography, powerful in the way in which it enfleshes the theory and pulls through the cuts and echos. Importantly the author was able to strike the balance between theorizing from the body, using lived experience whilst also decentering the individual 'I'. This results in theoretical commentary that has depth, is complex yet relatable and societally relevant.

Overall, the thesis makes an important contribution to existing literature which brings into question what counts as knowledge and how can we know from the body. The thesis takes an unconventional form, which works effectively in animating the critique that is being put forward. You have done an excellent job in researching the topic and I commend you in taking on such a deeply personal and difficult topic. You were able to bring to the for the intersection of caste and gender, which is often overlooked. This is the kind of work we need to see more of in academia. Lastly, you demonstrate academic talent (creatively, not in the conventional sense), in terms of your critical being/sensing/thinking and the ability to weave strong and creative yet sound academic arguments.

Need more space? (•) Yes ( ) No

Second Reader: A Abeyasekera
Rupsa Nag's thesis is a sensitive and powerful exploration of trauma experienced within the culturally constructed safe space of natal family and home. Locating herself within Sheik's liminagraphy as 'a life-affirming research practice' and using poetry and photo-images, Nag reflects on how childhood experiences of trauma shapes ways of being and belonging and calls for ways of sense making beyond linear narrative forms. The thesis is theoretically sophisticated and historically located, especially in the way Nag convincingly argues how the Hindu natal family is constructed within the discourses of colonialism, Hindu nationalism, patriarchal caste relations, and gender difference. I was especially impressed with how Nag combines de-colonial theory and contemporary history to make a compelling case for reading the silences within kinship and natal family as a reflection of the Indian state's response to marginal groups in general and rape in particular.

I found the photo-images and poetry a powerful demonstration of how de-colonial approaches to knowledge production work, especially in recovering memory and archiving trauma. The personal experience of trauma that forms the basis of this project can understandably only be gestured to in the main body of the dissertation. The photos and poetry offer a sort of 'backdoor' into truth of experience that may otherwise remain invisible and unnamable. It was deeply moving.

I would encourage the student to be more explicit about their sources of data and how they interpreted and analyzed it, in this case the two qualitative reports on natal family violence by queer feminist organisations in India. While they say they write with 'relational insight' rather than through extracting data, it would still be important to describe the reports' contents and the narratives that are used in their reflections.

Overall, this is an excellent dissertation – it was a pleasure to read, and I have gained many insights from reading it. I would strongly encourage them to pursue a doctoral degree.