

DISPLACED LIVES – PERSONAL NARRATIVES

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‘Journalism is to monitor power and the centres of power.’ - Amira Hass.

If journalism is to monitor the centres of power, then how should journalists and the media deal with those on the margins of power, the disempowered, the marginalised, the vulnerable - the displaced? The media needs to engage with issues of displacement because it has the power and reach to disseminate information to a large audience, who otherwise, often are far removed from issues of displacement. By highlighting concerns, by articulating the issues, and by amplifying the voices of the displaced can the media monitor centres of power in relation to the powerless.

Disrupted lives are not about numbers, facts and figures on a broad-sheet only. These, no matter the magnitude, do not quite have the power to touch the reader and to ignite indignation, outrage, horror - and consequently the demand for justice – in the reader as much as personalised stories too. Humanising the disempowered often resonate with individual readers while facts and figures often tend to overpower and then numb one in to desensitization. In this paper I limit myself to the print media only, which I am familiar with, and which, while reporting on the displaced at times has a certain edge over the electronic, visual media.

Humanising invariably strikes a chord in the reader, who, is invariably able to resonate with what s/he reads. In personal narratives are often found echoes of the narratives of numerous others – both readers and writers.

Personal narratives of the displaced are important for numerous reasons. They first serve to humanise those who otherwise remain mere statistics on paper. Next, through personal narratives numerous impact of displacement on the displaced are revealed, which otherwise could get lost. Further personal narratives sustain community cultures and traditions, which under conditions of prolonged state of displacement are vulnerable to erosion and loss. Displaced communities hence often strive to recreate traditional and religious spaces and environment to preserve their cultural and ethnic identities and personal narratives serves as a powerful tool in this endeavour. Finally, personal narratives are important as evidence in case of justice and restitution, they do not allow histories, uncomfortable for states and communities, to disappear, they keep the issue alive, and hopefully may ultimately result in justice, compensation, restitution, rehabilitation, and in cases, repatriation. Narratives help pin responsibility for a historical injustice.

Personal narratives help in ‘...establishing as complete a picture as possible of the causes, nature and extent of the gross violations of human rights which were committed during the period... including... the perspectives of the victims and the motives and perspectives

of the persons responsible for the commission of the violations...the granting of amnesty to persons who make full disclosure of all the relevant facts relating to acts associated with a political objective...and ...making known the fate or whereabouts of victims and by restoring the human and civil dignity of such victims by granting them an opportunity to relate their own accounts of the violations of which they are the victims..." (No. 34 of 1995: Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, 1995. Available at <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/legal/act9534.htm>.)

Finally, personal narratives empower the narrator, who alongside justice, require in equal measure empathy and acknowledgement of their pain and the injustice done to them.

This paper will highlight personal narratives, through media engagement, of members of two displaced communities that I am most familiar with: the Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza and the Kashmiri Hindu (Pandit) internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Jammu. I choose to use the nomenclature 'Kashmiri Hindu' as the community itself prefers to use this particular terminology and is doing so with increasing frequency.

In spite of the wide gulf between these two communities: spatial, chronological, historical and political, the narratives are often echoes of each other, the commonalities incredible, because the very act of displacement, though experienced in a myriad ways by different individuals, also is fraught with common feelings of danger, longing, nostalgia, pain and rage.

Both displacements were initially met with denial, and shrouded in conspiracy theories. The Palestinian refugee problem occurred first, as a result of the Arab-Israel wars of 1948 and 1967. Palestinians were accused of wilfully leaving territories that comprised undivided Palestine in 1949, and which today constitute Israel. This was the official Israeli narrative till historian Benny Morris articulated that Palestinians had been coerced to flee their native lands by Israeli forces, often at gunpoint. Many fled, understanding that it was just a temporary phase, and once 'the trouble was over' they would return home again. Most did not.

The exodus of most of the Kashmiri Hindus from the valley occurred in 1990, once armed insurgency began in Kashmir from the late 1980s. Their displacement too is shrouded in conspiracy theories - their departure from the valley is alleged to have been engineered by Jagmohan, the then governor of Kashmir. Two decades have passed since then, and the insurgency has been quashed, but the displaced Kashmiris continue to live in IDP camps in Jammu, neither rehabilitated nor repatriated to Kashmir. Any attempt to repatriate them to Kashmir has been met by massacres of Hindus who have remained in the valley, like the massacres in Sangrampora and Wandhama.

While the Kashmiri Hindu IDPs continue to live in camps in Jammu, the Palestinians live in camps where they were initially provided shelter first by the governments of Egypt (Gaza), Jordan (West Bank) and Lebanon, where they took refuge. These camps soon began to be administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) specially constituted and mandated to look after the Palestinians. Offsprings and

descendants of the first generation of displaced Palestinians are all registered as 'refugee' by the UNRWA.

The Kashmiris IDPs, for whom the government of India uses the nomenclature 'migrants' however have not been made accessible to the UNHCR in India, who mandate is only to work with refugees; UNHCR in 2009 articulated that it considers these Kashmir Hindu 'migrants' to be 'IDPs'.

Since, their departure from their native lands, both the tents of the Palestinians and those of the Kashmiris have concretised into semi-permanent structures. They are semi-permanent, because the exigencies of daily life required that fixtures be added and the tents take on a more permanent shape. But it is semi-permanent, because while Palestinians reconciled themselves to the loss of their original homes only after the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, for Kashmiris the hope remains alive that they will one day return to Kashmir. Meanwhile, walls and doors continue to be added, pumps sunk and wires installed. While inhabitants of the camps, both Palestinians and Kashmiris, continue to be looked down upon by the non-displaced communities around them, they construct glorious images and memories of their lost lands, cultures and ways of life.

I juxtapose below narratives of Palestinian refugees living in camps in Gaza, as collected by Israeli journalist Amira Hass and told in her path-breaking novel *Drinking the Sea in Gaza*, with reports and narratives of Kashmiri Hindu IDPs, culled from my reports in the Indian mainstream media – internet and print.

Both demonstrate the commonalities in the experience of displacement, irrespective of gender, age, context, physical and chronological location. The displaced recall their journey to their current residents, the sudden rupture in their daily lives, the initial discomfort and uncertainty of camp life, the slow realization and resignation to their displaced status, the construction of a magical past, a way of life and place now lost to them, the impact of displacement on health, and the steady adaptation to the realities of the present. Both are also demonstrative of how the media can highlight personal narratives, or retell events, impact and effect of displacement on individuals.

Finally, I highlight the narrative of a Kashmiri Pandit woman as told to me, which includes the causes of her shift to Jammu, the conditions that under which she has to live in the camps, and the attitude of the local Jammu people to her and to others displaced like her.

Here, then, are testimonies by the displaced – in Gaza, as narrated to and conveyed by Amira Hass, and in Jammu, as narrated to and conveyed by me - of the act of displacement and why the displaced fled from their homes and lands where they were born, grew up and had lived most of their lives – .

In Palestine:

“Beginning in May 1948, some 200,000 people living in the south of Palestine had found themselves running to keep ahead of the approaching Israeli army, seeking shelter from its gunfire as it took village after village. They were fleeing from the unknown, convinced nevertheless that in two or three months they would be able to return to their wheat fields, their vines, and their storerooms of flour. Reaching Gaza, they joined its 70,000 inhabitants. By March 1996, UNRWA figures showed the number of refugees and their descendants as having reached 700,789 out of a total population of just over one million.”

– Amira Hass, *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*.ⁱ

“Ihyam’s mother told how, once in Gaza, she and her family first went to the Khan Yunis camp. Then, when there was a cease-fire in February 1949, they moved to Jabalia, to the jorn, an open space where the villagers brought their wheat for threshing. It is now covered with refugee shacks. “We were the first family there and they gave us a tent. Some of our goats died and we sold the rest. After that, each family began to look for relatives so that they could all move into the same tents”.

“The small tents, about two yards by two yards, were called parachutes,” Ihyam’s father said. “They were for the small families. Bigger families were given a jaras, about four by four. The largest families lived together in a tent called a kuch, three and a half by seven for three families. It made no difference whether they were related or not.”

“We got two tents,” Ihyam’s mother said, “until we could start to build. The UN gave us flour. We children didn’t understand what was happening. But we heard the adults saying, “Tomorrow, inshallah – God willing – we’ll go back to our village. Tomorrow, inshallah, we’ll go home.”

“And ever since, their lives have been on long wait for something that gets farther and farther away,” Basaam, a son, interjected.’

- *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*

Let us now hear the testimony of Durga Devi, a 72 years old Kashmiri Pandit woman. Durga Devi left Kashmir for a pilgrimage in 1990, never to return home. She now is a resident of Mishriwalla camp, where she has been living for 18 years now.

‘I have seen two partitions. Oh you should have seen what I looked like before, well dressed, well fed, living in a normal house. I saw India being divided, my father was a police man in Lahore, and we fled back to Kashmir. And then again in my old age, destiny heaped this calamity on me.’ The tears keep pouring down her cheeks, she

wipes them away impatiently. ‘What can I tell you, tell me what should I tell you? That I went on a pilgrimage to Haridwar and never returned to Kashmir again? That I left my home thinking I would be back in a few days’ time only never to see it again? Tell me what should I tell you? That I slept for days on a rice sack, in front of scores of strange men? That there was no food, no shelter, we had to beg people, officials to just stay alive? Tell me what should I tell you? That I am ashamed that you should see me like this?’ ‘I don’t know why you have come, but I, we all feel betrayed, betrayed by India. We thought of ourselves as Indians, that is why we were wanted out of our land. The same neighbours we had lived together with for years, turned their backs on us. No one came ahead to help us, I had gone for pilgrimage, with only a small suitcase for a few days. But the news coming from the valley was not good. Hindus were being killed by Muslim terrorists and I was asked to continue to stay in Hardwar where I had relatives, till things became better. But they never did, and instead, my husband and children also came away, leaving behind our house in 1991. And then we made our way here, where we heard the Government was helping us. We had to sleep on sacks the first few days. Then the tents were hoisted here and we were sent, many families in each tent, no space, no privacy. We put up with everything, thinking all this was temporary and soon things will be normal in Kashmir and we will return home.’ But days turned into months and months into years. The tents have now become concrete rooms, I know I will die here.’

- *Erased From Memory – Kashmir’s Forgotten, Cobrapost, 20 June 2007*ⁱⁱ

From Durga Devi’s narrative it is clear that the move to Jammu was under duress, and not to greener pastures as ‘migrants’ usually do. Durga Devi is not an economic migrant, but an internally displaced person. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement define Internally displaced persons (IDPs) as ‘*persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border.*’

Both Ilyam’s mother and Durga Devi entered camp life from scratch, they first lived under the open sky, and then in tents and now live in concrete tenements – the rites of passage in displacement. Both believed that the change in residence was temporary and they would soon return home. Both have now reconciled themselves to the fact that they will never return to the houses they left and the camp was their permanent home now.

Now for a slice of life in a Gaza refugee camp, and of Kashmiri IDP camps in Purkhoo in Jammu and in Battal Balian near Udhampur.

In Gaza:

The morning sounds in the camp, too, seem to invert time and events – the muezzin’s call to prayer is accompanied by an orchestra of village noises: cocks crow, birds twitter in the few trees that someone planted in his homesickness, doves coo, and as daylight starts to lighten the streets, donkeys bray and wheels clatter over the stones. But when one opens one’s door, the sight of the outside world shatters the pastoral illusion. Everywhere is gray: the concrete houses and asbestos huts and crowded tin-roofed shanties, fenced off with whatever junk is at hand. Concrete blocks and other objects are strewn across the tin roofs, sometimes for lack of storage but usually to keep the roofs from blowing away. Narrow alleys seem to buckle beneath the weight of the buildings heaped up on either side; they spill onto the main road, which is clogged with street vendors and old, smoking cars, crowds of pedestrians, ramshackle stands offering inferior fruit and vegetables, peddlers frying falafel for half a shekel, a few grocery stores selling canned goods and cookies.

In many places water flows through the pipes only six hours a day or less – brackish water, in a weak stream and with a strong odor of chlorine. In 1996 only 27 percent of the camps’ houses were connected to sewage systems, compared with 40 percent outside the camp. But everyone pays great attention to keeping the camps clean. It is UNRWA’s job to collect the garbage and the alleyways are swept spotless, as are people’s yards. Little wonder – without some order the camps’ overcrowding would be intolerable: approximately half the refugees in the camps live three or more to a room.”

- *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*

In Purkhoo Camp, Jammu:

Promilla grew up in the camp, she was just seven when her family moved here. She became used to walking more than 500 metres every time she needed to use the toilet. But things began changing once adolescence began. Her body began to change, ‘It became difficult to walk the distance everytime I wanted to use the toilet. Its demeaning to have to carry water with you, with people around. When menstruation begins, its such a discomfort, hide your pads and take them so that no one notices them.’ But worst was when she got

married. There was no privacy, ‘We all live in a single room. You can imagine...,’ she breaks off. And when she fell pregnant, it was yet another ordeal. It was painful walking to the toilet every time. A communal toilet also brought infection to the stitches she had had after her caesarian delivery, just a little over a year ago. She still suffers from excruciating pain in her stomach and from the skin over it and bouts of itching in the long dry Jammu summers. She shudders when she thinks of her pregnancy days. She has one daughter, and when I ask her if she is planning another child, the answer is a vehement ‘No.’ ‘At least not till we are here.’The tenement that is home is bigger than the usual 10x10 feet ones, which form the majority of houses in Purkhu and in other camps. The bigger ones were built after the 1998 massacre of Hindus in Wandhama. The earlier ones were smaller because the logic then was that the displaced would soon return home. These bigger hutments, though a wee bit more comfortable, testify to the dying hopes of returning home. Purkhu is one of the largest camps in Jammu today, housing about six thousand odd Kashmiri Hindus, displaced from the valley. Janak Rani’s home in Baramullah, meanwhile, has been occupied by others. Maharaj discovered this when he returned to his village once in 1997, to look up the house and gauge the situation. He lodged a complaint with the Baramullah District Commissioner but no action was taken, no response forthcoming.

- *Erased From Memory – Kashmir’s Forgotten, Cobrapost, 20 June 2007*ⁱⁱⁱ

In Battal Balian Camp, Udhampur:

The tranquillity and serene beauty of the green-shrouded hills are yet another deception that greet you here. But soon a steady drone takes over. Life begins early in this camp, people like to drink and store clean water. As Gugadevi, 45, shows me, once the factories start churning, a white haze envelopes the camp and thick sediments form on the water. Yet, there is acute shortage of electricity here and some of the hutments that have holes which pass for windows have to keep them open for the little ventilation it offers — even if it means breathing in the dust. What else can one do when the temperature is above forty degrees Centigrade?

And that is how 30 per cent of the inmates here, like Brijnath, now find themselves patients of asthma and bronchitis. Those above 60 years, like Mohan Lal Kaul or Roopavati need nebulizers and oxygen often. But others like Lovely, 14, and Manoj, 10, also suffer from acute asthma. Gugadevi’s younger son Kush has continuous mucous running from his nose, thanks to the industrial zone. Yet, this is not the end of Battal Balian’s woe.

In a medical camp conducted by the Shriya Bhat Centre earlier this year, Dr. Khosa, a leading dermatologist of Jammu, found that almost 50 per cent of the inmates were afflicted with some kind of skin ailment caused by environmental injury to skin. Most of the afflicted, like Dazzy Bhat and Manesh Dhar, whose condition is acute, trace it as a direct fall-out of the industries that encircle the camp.

Further medical tests revealed that 18 per cent of the inmates are suffering from deafness and 15 per cent from eye problems — all due to environmental pollution of noise, dust fumes and toxic waste from the same source.

While people here seemed to be paying the price for their proximity to the camp, Nanaji, a senior camp inmate and volunteer, laments that not a single inmate had benefited by getting a job at any of these factories.

- *Breathless At Batal Ballian, The Hindu Magazine, 19 August 2007^{iv}*

In all the reports above the poor quality of camp life – in both Gaza and Jammu/Udhampur - are demonstrated. The squalor, the congested living, the brackish water, the poor sewage system are all highlighted. Besides, the health problems that displacement for over a long span of time produces, has also been highlighted with regards to the Kashmiri Hindu community. One reason that the latter seems to be beset with health concerns, which seem to be absent in Gaza is that unlike the Palestinian refugees who are taken care of UNRWA, there is no equivalent organisation taking care of the community of displaced Kashmiris.

I now reproduce one of my media reports which highlight the particular health concerns of women populace of the displaced Kashmiris.

In Mishriwalla Camp, Jammu:

Puja, 16, from the Mishriwalla camp did not menstruate for a full year. She was ultimately diagnosed with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS). Dr Indu Kaul, a noted gynaecologist in Jammu, has been working with the displaced women for the last 13 years. According to her, the rate of menstrual disorders among women in the camps is 30 per cent as compared to 15 per cent in the rest of the country.

Other physical discomforts and unhygienic conditions like shared toilets located at some distance from the hutments have also impacted the women negatively. The unclean communal toilets - one

for approximately 75 women - are not only the cause of daily humiliation and irritation, but they have serious consequences as well.

Radhamali, 65, from Mishriwalla camp has been suffering from recurrent UTI or urinary tract infection for over a decade now. Rajni, 33, in Mutthi camp tripped and had a miscarriage during her first pregnancy - she was groping her way in the dark to the toilet situated almost a kilometre away from her tenement. At the same camp, Promilla, 28, had a caesarean delivery, but the unhygienic toilets caused her post-delivery stitches to become septic.

While the problems are many and widespread, medical facilities in the camps are almost non-existent. And even if there are some available, the cost of treatment is often beyond the inhabitants' means.

- *Women In Camps Fight Their Misery, Women's Feature Service, August 2007'*

The above report serves as an example of how issues other than displacement can be used as entry points to highlight effects of displacement and talk about the displaced in the media, which is not always benignly disposed towards the phenomenon of displacement or towards particular communities of displaced. The above report demonstrates that using health as an entry point we can effect media engagement with displaced lives. This methodology can be used in several other instances – issues like domestic violence, education, cultural traditions can all become entry points for engaging the media to articulate concerns of displaced populaces. This also helps disseminate information to a wider readership and through diverse platforms and highlights various aspects of displacement.

Finally I juxtapose media reports by Amira Hass about the Palestinian displaced in Gaza with the narrative of Chandra Dhar, as told to the author. Chandra is a 34 years old displaced Kashmiri Hindu woman, who fled her home in Kupwara district in Kashmir valley in 1990 and has since lived in Mutthi camp on the outskirts of Jammu. She is one of the very first inmates of the camp which came up to accommodate thousands of similarly displaced Kashmiri Hindus. The reports of Amira Hass resonate with those of Chandra Dhar because we find common concerns among those whose flight and loss of homes and lands have been effected by conflict. The humiliation of rejection from the local population among whom the displaced find refuge and set up temporary homes, and the constructions of images and ways of life now in the distant past are common to the homeless – whether in Gaza or in Jammu. And so:

In Gaza:

Ihab al-Ashqar's mother assured me that, no matter how much I wrote, I wouldn't have enough words to describe the refugees' pain. "We always have the sense of having lost something," said H., a twenty-nine-year-old mathematics teacher from Lod, an observant Muslim who was born and raised in al-Boureij. "We lost our self-confidence," she explained, though my impression had been otherwise. But the refugees always compare themselves with the native Gazans, the muwataneen. "They just haven't been through the same losses that we live with all the time," said H.

Abu Majed's home is in Gaza City's Nasser neighbourhood, where refugees and muwataneen live side by side. Four years ago, his daughter reached school age and was about to start at the UNRWA school for refugees. "We'll be able to walk to school together," she told a friend happily. The friend, the daughter of a muwataneen, replied haughtily, "No, we won't. You're a mehajera, a refugee. You have to go to school in the camp." "That was the first time she'd heard the word," Abu Majed said, "and she came to ask me what it meant. She thought the girl was cursing at her. I told her that it's an honour to be called a refugee. IT means that we left, but we have land in Beersheba and her grandfather and parents used to live there. I'd always hoped that I wouldn't have to tell her and now she keeps asking me when I'll take her to Beersheba. Sometimes we feel like the Gypsies in Europe, like people without respect. If one of us wants to marry a Gazan girl, the first thing they say is that he's a refugee. That hurts."

- *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*

In Jammu:

No, I knew nothing about Jammu when I came here. When I came here, what did I feel?... Where Kashmir and where Jammu, you cannot compare the two.

And the attitude of the people here [in Jammu]..... Well, let me tell you. They had no respect for us. They looked down upon us. For eg. initially when we came here, we moved out of the camp and tried to rent out a room, as it was more dignified. But it was difficult for us to pay the rent. SO they harassed us like anything then, used abusive language, it was so humiliating for all of us. Im telling you that if the roles were different, had they come to us, then we would have treated them with much greater concern and care and respect which they never showed us.

I hope I can move out of here some day. Anyone who is able to rent out a room, moves out of the camp; it is shameful to live here.

Chandra Dhar, Resident, Mutthi Camp^{vi}

In Gaza:

Abu Aouni was sixty-three years old. Like all the Burayr refugees I've met since, he was tall. At one point in the conversation, he suddenly jumped up from the mattress on which he'd been sitting cross-legged and, his hand to his chest, declared, "The corn we raised was so high it came up to her, I swear it no kidding." The raindrops beating on the asbestos roof in Shabura reminded Abu Aouni of his rain-drenched land, even now, forty-six years after he'd been cut off from it. His fingers crumbled imaginary clods of earth.

- *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*

In Jammu:

After coming here, what I missed most about Kashmir was of course my home. We are living in a most undignified manner now. Living, eating, cooking, sleeping, studying – all in one room. The food was so horrible. Then we faced the Jammu summer for the first time – who thought that summer could be so hot? We never knew a summer could be so hot. Some older people suffered sunstroke, some young people too. My grandmother and my cousin – a young man – suffered sunstroke in Jammu. This happened in the very first year that they came here.

After fleeing Kashmir for a whole year I was unable to eat properly. The food I was used to was completely different from what we get here. The difference was in the quality. The Kashmiri rice, even if you have it plain, with nothing along with it, it simply melts in your mouth. But here we get the ration rice which is of such coarse quality. Half of it is just waste. The taste itself was so different.

Chandra Dhar, Resident, Mutthi Camp

In Gaza:

Bassam’s mother raised seven children in two rented rooms that were leaky and cold in winter and sweltering in summer. “We invested in the children,” she said proudly. “The children are our house.” Now one of her sons is a doctor, her daughter is a poet, and her youngest son is interested in sociology. S. was the first girl from Rafah to study law in Egypt. Her father insisted on her right to do so, even though everyone around him thought she should just get married.

- *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*

In Jammu:

I had to discontinue my studies after Class VIII, though I wanted to continue. But it was expensive and a drain on our meagre resources. We had no resources at all. I would go all the way from Talab Tilloo to Bakshi Nagar to school walking come back walking. I completed Class XII here and then all families decided that they would not educate us any further, it was better if we took up jobs. Things are so expensive now.

We did save some money, and then a little later I got married to another displaced Kashmiri, who like me left Kashmir to be safe.

- *Chandra Dhar, Resident, Mutthi Camp*

From the above narratives it seems that it is in education that there seems to be a divergence between the narrative from Gaza and that from Jammu. This is dependent on individual context of the two narratives. As mentioned earlier UNRWA renders relief and other services which helps alleviate the quality of life in Gaza. While Kashmiri Hindu ‘migrants’ receive a government dole, there is no agency to take care of their material and physical needs like the UNRWA.

In other areas however, the narratives from Gaza and Mutthi Camp resonate with each other. If Abu Majed’s daughter is denigrated as a *mehajera*, a refugee, by her fellow Gazan and classmate who is not a refugee herself, Chandra Dhar has to suffer the ignominy of being an outsider among local people in Jammu. If Abu Aouni reminisces about the corn that he grew on his native land, now lost to him, for Chandra Dhar there is

nothing in the world quite like the Kashmiri rice and weather that she left behind in Kashmir.

Thus, Abu Aouni in Gaza and Chandra Dhar in Jammu recreate and reconstruct images of things lost to them, even as they negotiate their daily lives in their immediate surroundings. Through personal narratives they keep in their hearts alive a way of life that may forever be lost to them, and perhaps a tiny flame of hope that they may still be able to reclaim back what was rightfully once their own.

To conclude this paper asserts that personal narratives are not only indispensable in keeping alive the hope that justice will be rendered in the suffering communities which undergo the trauma of physical and mental dislocation, displacement, dispossession and deprivation. Personal narratives also serve as orienteers and early warning systems for future conflict management and may help prevent similar traumatic events in human societies. It is widely believed, for instance, that had the Armenian genocide of the early twentieth century not been allowed to fade into history with impunity, it might have prevented the Jewish holocaust later. It is hoped that the personal narratives of those like Ilyam's mother and Chandra Dhar not only result in justice being rendered to them, but that they in turn may be able to save similar traumas from unfolding.

ⁱ Hass, Amira. 1999. *Drinking the Sea at Gaza*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

ⁱⁱ Bhaduri, Aditi. 2007. Erased From Memory – Kashmir's Forgotten, *Cobrapost*, 20 June 2007; www.cobrapost.com

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid

^{iv} Bhaduri Aditi. 2007. Breathless At Batal Ballian, *The Hindu Magazine*, Chennai and New Delhi. 19 August 2007

^v Bhaduri Aditi. 2007. Women In Camps Fight Their Misery, *Women's Feature Service*, New Delhi. August 2007

^{vi} Narrative of Chandra Dhar, as told to author in personal interview, Jammu. November 2008.