

## **Acts of Narrative Resistance: Trauma, Survival and Therapy in Sharon Hendry's *Radhika's Story: Surviving Human Trafficking***

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### **Abstract**

Unwritten power structures and inequalities had had a propensity to be normalized in the name of race, culture, religion, patriarchy, value systems, economy, etc over the span of several centuries. Human Trafficking, one of the most rapidly growing criminal industries of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, takes the form of gender based violence when it targets women and girls for the purpose of sex trade. In addition to being a serious violation of human rights, the physical and psychological trauma associated with sex trafficking is devastating. This paper, titled “Acts of Narrative Resistance: Trauma, Survival and Therapy in Sharon Hendry's *Radhika's Story: Surviving Human Trafficking*”, is a study of the grotesque, habitual and multiple traumas to which Radhika, a young Nepali ‘trafficked girl’ was subjected to. Sharon Hendry, the empathetic biographer bears witness to the testimonial of the survivor and represents the structuralised gender based violence that victimises women and reduces them to just a piece of flesh. As it deliberates on the potential of trauma narratives as an instrument for raising awareness about sex-trafficking, the paper also attempts an exploration of Radhika's story as one of ultimate survival and resistance against oddities. The act of narrating traumatic lived experiences to an empathetic listener has therapeutic effects on

the victim. Radhika's testimony of her life is not simply a testament to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life.

**Keywords:** Sex trafficking, gender based violence, trauma, resistance, survival, therapy.

“Sex trafficking ... should no more be seen as women's issues than slavery was a black issue or the Holocaust was a Jewish issue. These are all humanitarian concerns, transcending any one race, gender, or creed.”: Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn

Ever since the dawn of human civilization, unwritten power structures and inequalities had had a propensity to be normalised in the name of race, culture, religion, patriarchy, value systems, economy and so on. One such power system that engulfed humanity and extended its iron hand upon the victims depriving them of their basic human rights was slavery. The UN Convention defined slavery as “the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised” (1). Kevin Bales, in his book, *Understanding Slavery* defined slavery as an institution in which “the individual is held against his or her will, through violence or threats of violence with little or no pay for the purpose of economic exploitation”(9).

Slavery evolved as an institution in which the slave master's exercise of the rights of ownership destroys the human personality, thwarts the notion of a person as a bearer of basic human rights and reduces him to a slave, a piece of flesh without rights. Ann Jordan in her article “Slavery, Forced Labour, Debt Bondage and Human Trafficking: From Conceptual Confusions to targeted Solutions” argues that slavery is a complete system of ownership. It is a social institution in which the community recognizes slaves as a separate category of beings without rights. The enslavers have complete control over all aspects of the life of the enslaved” (1-2). Being so, there is little in the life of a slave that is not traumatic: the loss of home, culture, kin, sense of self, destruction of families, and physical, psychological and sexual abuse. The worst of it was subjugation as it sought nothing less than the annihilation of what is uniquely human—the Self.

In the course of time, slavery was legally abolished as a result of massive protest and timely humanitarian involvements. But the

report of the United Nations on Human trafficking states that slavery “has evolved and manifested itself in different ways throughout history,” with the contemporary forms compounding “long standing discrimination against the most vulnerable groups in society” (2). Human trafficking is the modern day criminal manifestation of slavery that continues to exert its mounting power at dangerous levels. Human trafficking is widely referred to as the process through which individuals are detained or maintained in an exploitative situation for monetary benefits. The International Protocol of Trafficking defines it as

Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs (9).

Kevin Bales argues that in contemporary slavery, the core attributes of slavery remain the same as they have always been. They are the same attributes that determined the status of enslavement in the past – the state of control exercised over the slave, a control based on the potential or actual use of violence; a lack of any remuneration beyond subsistence; and the appropriation of the labour or other qualities of the slave for economic gain. Slavery shares these attributes while recognizing that there can be occasional exceptions, such as gifts or remuneration beyond subsistence. It is the condition of potentially violent control of one person by another (*Understanding Slavery*, 2).

Human trafficking however forms a continuum of exploitation occurring around the world rather than a historically fixed status as a particular institution as it manifests in a multitude of ways. It resembles a highly institutionalised and structural violence inflicted upon women and girls in the form of sex trafficking.

Sharon Hendry, the BBC journalist bears witness to the trauma of sex trafficking of a 16 year old Nepali girl named Radhika in her work *Radhika's Story : Surviving Human Trafficking*. The biographer articulates the horrifying first-hand account of a survivor of human trafficking in the 21st-century. In the process of listening, the biographer not only empathises with the survivor but also hints on the issue of sex trafficking as a structural gender based violence which deprives the basic human rights of the women and girls and reduces them to not less than slaves.

Radikha Phuyal was an innocent girl born as one of the six children in a humble yet high caste Brahmin farmer family in Kavresthali, a small country province northwest of Kathmandu, Nepal's capital. Though poor, her life with the family was filled with happiness until the untimely demise of her elder brother Radhakrishna whom she adored. Her first experience of a traumatic incident was at the age of seven when she was affected by the accidental death of her elder brother. The event affected her psyche and brought about a void that was a spur for her later downfall. The biographer writes how Radikha described the loss,

After my brother was cremated, I felt like my belief in anything spiritual had died. Of course his death wasn't my fault, but I couldn't help thinking I could have done something to stop him from falling"...before the accident, we were a happy family and there was light and laughter in the house. But then it stopped. My father wasn't interested in life for a very long time (22).

Radhika's life experiences wavered between extreme trauma and her survival/resistance to the oddities. The extreme guilt of not being able to save her brother and the thought of supporting the family prompts her to end her studies. However she exhibits courage to assume the responsibility of the family. The family was already in debt as a result of the dowry they had paid to marry off Radhika's elder sister. Radhika began to sell spinach on the busy Kathmandu roadside at the age of 14 to support her high-caste, but extremely poor family. A good-looking girl all alone in the city, Radhika was the perfect target for human traffickers trained to seek out uneducated and unsuspecting victims. While selling vegetables, she befriends a customer named Sanjay Lama who seemed particularly intent on

establishing a rapport with her. Radhika started developing immense trust in him. Radhika's act of finding a brotherly figure in Sanjay Lama can be read as her inner desire to substitute for her bereaved brother. Radhika recalls, "He told me I should consider him to be family and trust him implicitly" (25). Lama an experienced and well known human trafficker tricks her into trusting him blindly, which later shatters her life. He saw Radikha, his latest conquest in the line of many as little more than a piece of flesh. He promised the girl a job as a housekeeper in a rich family in the city and Radikha out of her innocence, lack of education and lack of knowledge about the ways of the world readily accepts it. The wealthy family for which Radhika was said to be hired too treated her in the best possible way giving the impression for a fourteen year girl that all is going to be well for her life. The narrator comments about Radikha's thoughts, "In a state of euphoria, believing that whatever happened next, whatever life threw at her, it would be worth it, Radhika knew that she was the luckiest girl in the world. Life just get better than this" (30). This sense of security was fissured when she shockingly realises that she was deceived while on a trip with her employers. All she could remember was an innocent sip of cola and when she opened her eyes she was in a hospital bed. The narrator describes the event:

All she could remember was being on the train with her new employers. What had happened to her since then?...For a few seconds, she was literally paralysed by fear. One minute she had been on a train on the journey to the rest of her life, the next she was here-with this strange man- admittedly a friend of her new employers-looming over her (31).

The man with her at the hospital, Murari Pariyar lies to her that she fainted in the train and was rushed to the hospital; he said in the hospital they diagnosed germs in her body but Radikha could tell by his eyes that he was lying. She was very weak and later when she experienced shooting pains in the abdomen understands that she had undergone some operation. Not knowing what had happened to her she had to confine to the hospital bed in Chennai for two months. In spite of the constant pestering the doctors or nurses were not ready to tell what had truly occurred. Later she painfully and helplessly comes to the knowledge that her kidney had been removed and was

donated to the wife of her new employer when their son comes to pay her a reward for it. Radikha recalls dreadfully, “In that moment, I couldn’t feel sad or even angry, I just felt numb” (35). This emotional numbing is a significant traumatic locus in the narrative. The narrator lashes out her indictment on how Radikha was reduced to just a body thus “No one asked her consent -as if her body was not her own”(36). Sanjay Lama and Marari Pariyar were only part of the huge business of human trafficking that deceived and victimised innocent people.

Cathy Caruth in her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* defines trauma as an experience that threatens one’s sense of safety and security and may or may not involve physical harm (12). It is typically experienced as either a single or a repeating event that overwhelms an individual’s coping mechanisms and interferes with one’s ability to integrate and make sense of emotions and thoughts related to the experience. Often two elements are associated with trauma; that it is incomprehensible and that it comes without warning. It occurs to a person when they are least prepared or at a time when they feel secure and undefended. Radhika was traumatised when she was revelling in the security of a new-found life and when she was least prepared for a ‘wound’. What Radhika immediately felt about the incident was that her life was spoiled and she no longer felt secure. This incident called into question her sense of identity and her perception of the world. The biographer comments,

Radhika was not used to deceit. She came from a background and community in which people were honest and simple and pretty much all shared common aims and attitudes towards life. Her current experiences were outside of anything she could have possibly imagined (32).

She was deceived and this was beyond her comprehension. To be in a place far away from her home, with no knowledge about the people, place and the language, Radhika felt very vulnerable. She was reduced to a slave, deprived of autonomy over her life and body. She feared to trust anyone again. Michelle Balaev in “Trends in Trauma”, demonstrates response to trauma as a “person’s emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual’s sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society” (151). Traumatic events are extraordinary incidents which

challenge the normal human adaptations to life. Trauma, thus, destroys the trust that one has on external benevolence and feels completely deceived and deserted and this was very true in the case of the young girl.

Radhika's ordeal did not end with this incident. The organ snatchers kept track of her. They couldn't risk the girl to file a case against them. Besides there was more to be made out of an attractive young girl and the best way by which she could be enslaved would be to sell her for sex. They knew that once a woman is entrapped into the brothels rarely does she find an escape from it. As Judith Herman argues in her book *Trauma and Recovery: Aftermath of Violence*, "women were silenced by fear and shame, and the silence of women gave license to every form of sexual and domestic exploitation" (28) and this proved advantageous to people like Marari Pariyar and Sanjay Lama who traffic young girls for organ removal and later for sex trade.

The sexualisation of women and objectification of women's bodies in many patriarchal societies is a means to keep women in subordinate economic and social position and this fuels the commercial market for sex. All through her journey from the hospital in Chennai to other part of South India Radikha's mind was disturbed and lacked cognition. The thoughts of the well knitted family worried her and how she could let know about her unhappy fate worried her. Yet she hoped that the journey would end in meeting her dear ones and she could repay the debt with the reward she received for her kidney. But Marari Parayiar had greater plans for the girl. She was forced to marry his cousin Rajesh Kumar. Radikha's testimony reveals how it was forced upon her, "it was made clear to me that I had no choice...The rituals of the marriage were forced upon me" (41).

Forced marriage is considered as a gender based violence and a human rights violation across the world. Non consensual marriage deprives the girl of her individuality and reduces her to be mere body where patriarchal pleasure and power is exerted upon. In the case of a trafficked girl, this is yet another form of deception and enslavement that denies her any autonomy. Radhika's right over her body was nullified in the name of marriage and she was reduced to be the property

of her husband. For Radhika this was the shattering of her dreams as she always wished for a marriage in which there was mutual love and trust among partners and which took place with all ceremonies in the presence of the family. Marriage for her “represented yet another event over which she had no control” (43). The money she had with her was taken away in the name of dowry. Thus depriving her right over her life, body and denying her economic independence, the traffickers ensured that Radhika’s life continued to take a tragic course. Radikha who was entrapped into the shabby life with her husband was abused on a constant basis. She had none to vent her sorrows and none to truly rely on. Not knowing the ways of world due to the lack of education and her inherent innocence, the sixteen year girl did not realise the fraudulent nature of her husband when he shifted with her to a province so infamous for exporting young girls to brothels in India.

Even in the face of tragedy Radikha tried to maintain an undefeated mind. She was looking out ways through which she could repress the thoughts that crushed her. She devoted herself to cultivating essential crops and trying to sustain her life. Whenever a person experiences abuse, trauma, oppression or violence they resist their experiences in some way .Power and resistance can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. Wade A. in his article “Small Acts of Living: Everyday Resistance to Violence and Other Forms of Oppression” argues that resistance is:

any mental or behavioural act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with, or oppose any form of violence or oppression, or the conditions that make such acts possible. . . . any attempt to imagine or establish a life based on respect and equality, on behalf of one’s self or others, including any effort to redress the harm caused by violence or other forms of oppression (25).

Radhika’s resistance manifested itself in subtle acts of survival to more courageous deeds when her life began to roll in unexpected ways. Radhika soon finds that she is pregnant and that gives her a ray of hope towards living a meaningful life, but for her husband it becomes a catalyst for the terrible onset of calculated abuse. Days of emotional and physical abuse continued and Radhika recalls how miraculous it



was that her baby survived. One day Rajesh fled home after a severe argument with her and initially she was overcome with intense relief. The biographer comments: “No more beatings. No more putting up with a man who abused her, both physically and mentally. No more worrying about the safety of her baby. Then reality sunk in. She was destitute: her husband had made off with all her money” (46).

Soon the thought of being a destitute gave way to the desire to fight for the baby. Radhika gave birth to a boy and her life started revolving around the little one she named as Rohan. Parvathi who had been in search of her younger sister for years finally finds her in the most destitute state. When she found her, Radhika was very pale with nothing, either for her or for her baby, to sustain their life with. She was so weak and malnourished that she could not even breastfeed her six-month old child. Parvathi’s visit added vigour to her and the narrator comments on this situation: Parvathi’s visit breathed new life into Radikha. Invigorated, she tried to make the best of her meagre surroundings with the money her sister had given her. “For the sake of her baby son, who was her world, she would make things right” (52). Radhika’s hope of making best out of the circumstance can be seen as her immense will to survive.

Radhika’s life often revolved around intense trauma and her subtle acts to survive in spite of the odds. Meeting her elder sister was like sprouting from the rotten roots. However this was soon withered when she was deceived again by two men who claimed to be her husband’s cousins. Radhika who was overwhelmed by their promise to take her to Parvathi’s house soon found herself being deceived and taken to India, a country where sex trafficking is prevalent. Rohan was her only reason to live. In the brothel, to Radhika’s surprise, she was not asked to entertain customers for the first three months and was allowed to stay with Rohan in a separate room. They fed her so well that she gained all the vigour and beauty she had lost in the past two years. All the while, Radhika’s only concern was the protection of Rohan and to offer him a good life. However ‘the traffickers wanted her to be worthy of making money and all the care was but to prepare her body for sale. Rohan was separated from her which drained her spirit. They never disclosed the whereabouts of the kid and used him as a leverage to silence the victim and to place her in fear and

submission. She resisted with all her will to have her child and so she was allowed to see the baby once in a week but gradually that too stopped.

Radikha's ordeal as a sex slave was about to begin when the *madame* of the brothel mercilessly asks her to sell her body. She recalls the event, "I asked what kind of business she was talking about and she [the madam of the brothel] told me crossly to shut up. She began painting my face. . . . She told me it was time to get ready to stand outside the building" (64). Radikha's body was no longer hers. She was forced to have sex with almost twenty men a day. She was threatened, beaten, forced and separated from her child. She was a woman trafficked and was denied every right as a human and treated as a commodity to be used and sold for male pleasure.

Radikha had no option to die or run away. She alone was not trafficked but her son too. She says, "The traffickers had kidnapped my son and knew I wouldn't leave without him. What better way of enslaving a mother?" (68). Enduring sex with unknown men was too horrible and traumatic. She describes the painful event with the first customer:

He was fat, dark and scary and he forced himself on me within seconds, throwing me down on the mattress...I managed to run out of the room screaming and shaking. I was met by the brothel owner Rupa Tamang. She grabbed me by hair and said:"You have been sold and you are worthless to everyone except me. . . . There is no choice if you want to see your son again." She forced me back again . . . that was my first client. He abused me in every way imaginable, forcing me to perform oral sex and endure anal sex. All the while, the smell of alcohol and sweat seeped out of his pores. It's all about the customer's satisfaction in the slum brothels. As a person, you cease to exist (69).

Radhika though tormented by her fate did not feel wise to be violent with the enslavers as it would endanger her son. In order to achieve the abstraction from reality, Radhika deploys a prosthetic or complementary memory that energizes her soul to move on. She says: "I began to perfect the art of detaching my mind from my body" (69). She often gazed to a particular point in the wall and tried to transform herself to someone else while having sex with customers. This was

her way of escaping from the reality of her loss of a decent life and identity. The number of customers she had to entertain increased up to thirty and she had to endure almost life threatening experiences, all for the sake of her son. Physically the work was taking its toll on Radikha and the kidney scar was causing her a lot of pain. That scar always acted as a repetition compulsion which would take her to the sites of traumatic memory - of how all this had begun and the ordeal she had been enduring over the years. In the course of six years she had to travel to many brothels across India. She was separated from her son when she was forced to sell her body.

Rohan's life bears testimony to the fact that it is not just the trafficked woman who experiences trauma. It is equally traumatic for their children. Rohan who was in his formative years was always separated from his mother and was in the company of strangers. His sense of identity and security was distorted by the events that had happened in his mother's life. He was the victim of cruel physical and psychological abuses. This is very evident from the fact that the child who started uttering words stopped talking because of the torture he had to suffer. Speechlessness is one of the significant impacts of trauma - the price that young children have to pay together with the loss of their childhood and innocence. His tongue was injured with a burning cigarette when he cried; he had to live in filthy day-cares, undernourished and sick. The worst of it all was that he did not realise Radhika as his mother, which was beyond all endurance for her.

Radhika's first attempt to escape from sexual enslavement though futile shows her intense wish to survive the trauma inflicted by the traffickers. Though she managed to escape with Jigmi, a young man who visited her in the brothel, her life again fluctuated between momentary rays of hope and suffering. She was found out and dragged back. After all she was a slave, more undignified than the traditional; one who was kept in constant watch by the traffickers. In the brothel she had her full reward for escape. She was brutally slapped that it drew blood from her ear. They hit her mercilessly with a lead pipe on her head that she fell unconscious. She was placed in a 'dungeon'-a dirty room where girls who made attempts to escape from the brothel were kept. This kind of torture inflicted upon girls like Radikha has a

specific purpose. As N. Patel argues in his article “Rape as Torture”, torture is often inflicted

to create psychological and physical debility and dependency; annihilate without death; maximise helplessness, powerlessness and unpredictability; heighten a sense of vulnerability; keep in a constant state of fear; disorient, create confusion and uncertainty as well as to dehumanise and degrade identity (14).

Radikha rises like a phoenix from the torture that almost took her life as the thought that her son would be an orphan without her plagues her consciousness. The biographer comments: “Even though Radhika felt broken in mind and body, once again she managed to summon up the strength from somewhere to survive. Who would look after Rohan otherwise? . . . Rohan was her only reason for staying alive. He was her life. Without him she was nothing” (87).

Suspecting that Radhika might make another attempt to escape, she was shifted to another brothel in Pune. This time however hard the enslavers tried to separate Rohan from her, she did not yield. This was probably the most significant resistance she exhibited all through her life in captivity. She had three young girls as her roommates in the brothel. They took care of the child while Radikha engaged the clients. But when they too had clients, Radikha had to keep the baby in the room. She hid the baby beneath the bed and the child had to witness unpleasant scenarios. Radikha’s mental agony was beyond explanation. The biographer describes this rather painfully:

As Radhika tried to calm her mind and surrender to sleep each night, she would question whether her decision to bring back Rohan into the brothel had been the right one. While it was true that at least here she could protect him from physical harm, how could she tell what untold damage the experience was doing to him emotionally? She worried about this night after night, aware that her son was already so traumatized by his experiences. The image of the boy playing in the sewers embedded in her mind (98).

Radhika finally makes up her mind to make an attempt to escape from the enslavement she had been suffering for many years. The three inmates of her room too had been planning for an escape and one early morning Radikha together with the three girls and Rohan escape from the place. Radikha finally parted ways with them to

return to her homeland. Though it was a physical escape she bore the weight of her dead past and the trauma that had been inflicted upon her and the child. She is at the homeland, the family not knowing her past finds her inter-caste marriage unacceptable because it was not part of Nepali tradition. From habitual many-layered traumas, miscarriages, physical ailments and psychological scars Radhika finally escapes to rebuild her life at an asylum 'Maiti Nepal', a home set up to rehabilitate sex trafficked survivors. There she masters the art of sustaining her life in the face of adversities. She accrues the courage to speak against the traffickers and bring them before the law.

Radhika is the representative of millions of girls who have been sold into modern slavery. But very few escape the situation or dare to escape. The psychological fear of the oppressors and the social stigma they have to face even if they make it home forces them to accept their plight as prostitutes. Most often, ostracized, their post traumatic life will lack normal human emotions, burdened with profound feelings of anger and disjointed thoughts. Society labels them as prostitutes and neglect who they truly were. The basic human rights such as the right to live, right to freedom, right to happiness, right to integrity and right to health are denied in this abusive system. Since the victims suffered grotesque, habitual and dehumanising trauma, they are stripped off their natural personalities and sense of identity. Often many survivors suffer from posttraumatic symptoms and only few exhibit growth and resilience. Resilience for them needs collective efforts and speaking out the trauma is a prime form of therapy.

Most often, survivors expresses their will to live only because they feel the need to tell their stories. On closer examination, the contrary too proves to be right; they need to tell their story in order to survive. In both cases it has a therapeutic value. Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuner have long way back established the importance of 'talking cure' as a crucial part of psychotherapy. The existence of a listener who is prepared to hear and recognize the truth of the survivor's story is fundamental to her empowerment. The politics of trauma then lies in the rapport between the acts of telling and listening.

As Dori Laub argues in her essay "Bearing Witness", in order to undo the entrapment of the traumatic reality and its re-enactment,

one must engage “in a process of constructing a narrative, reconstructing a history and essentially, of re-externalizing the event” (69). The act of narrating one’s story, through both ocular and narrative representation, is an important part of the process. The will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud in the survivors is often conflicting. People who have survived abuse and violence often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility. By breaking through the silence, Radhika tries to construct an oppositional narrative that defies the taboo against talking about trauma and torture, and in the process re-creates herself, reclaims her body, identity and rights. Speaking out is a political as well as a therapeutic act for her, and thus becomes a claim to power. ‘Writing/Speaking wounds’ involves risk as well as promise. While there are perils involved in speaking out, there are also dangers in remaining mute. Silence stifles the soul, affects the quality of relationship with others, and accepts an unjust and abusive system of power that renders the victim powerless. In the process of breaking silence with her testimony Radhika is not only finding her own voice, but also collectively creating new narratives that challenge the individual and collective denial of abuse and the reproduction of violence. In dialogue with others who can bear witness, Radhika is redefining the experiences that once rendered her powerless.

Judith Herman, in her book *Trauma and Recovery*, states that remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims (1). The ‘talking cure’ thus is a necessity to survivors like Radhika which enables them to articulate the traumatic experience to a listener or witness to reassert the veracity of the past and to build anew its linkage to, and assimilation into, present-day life. The testimonial process in the presence of a listener who accompanies the survivors on their journey into the past not only takes them back to the pain, horror, and sadness that is associated with that past but also engages them in claiming a story of their own which holds together the fragments of their memory. The testimonial process thus functions as a dialogue, not only between the listener and the survivor, but also within the survivor, herself, and therefore Radhika’s testimony is a

step in the restoration of one's own identity and in the rebuilding of mutuality and of trust.

Radhika's breaking the silence about her trauma thus represents the lives of hundreds of thousands of girls who are caught in the supply chain of traffickers — kidnapped, seduced, tricked, purchased and recruited to meet the huge demand for underpaid labour and exploitative sex. Radhika's imperative to tell and to be heard can become an all-consuming life task for the survivor as well as for the bearer of her testimony. Her rendering of her story to the biographer can be read as an act of claiming autonomy over her body as well as her life. Thus speaking out has a reconstructive as well as a social purpose as it helps alleviate the misconceptions about a 'trafficked woman' — the way she is perceived and heard. Though no amount of *telling* seems ever to do justice to the intense psychic trauma of a sex trafficked girl, her memory of trauma, her revolt and resistance, the therapeutic disclosure of the trauma lived experiences to the biographer proved crucial for her recovery and ultimate survival.

As Susan Rose observes, recovering from trauma is not just an individual act but a collective process, in which the struggle of survivors towards naming and claiming the experience of abuse and survival as their own story requires a reciprocal willingness on the part of the others to listen, bear witness and to share the burden of pain (*Challenging Global Gender Violence*<sup>72</sup>). Radika's courage to articulate the trauma to a listener and the empathetic listener's resolve to represent it in biographical form can be regarded as an act of narrative resistance — to break the silence that envelops a traumatic event: a silence that is socially as well as psychologically determined, by defence mechanisms and survival strategies deployed by survivors, witnesses, and abusers themselves to minimize or deny the pain of abuse and the violence that caused it. Thus in the process of remembering, she confronts her lived reality once again and in turn uses it to repair her fractured identity. Radhika's testimony of her life is not simply a testament to a private life, but a point of conflation between text and life, a textual testimony which can infiltrate us like an actual life. Though trauma is often defined as an overwhelming experience that is unclaimable, the biographer has tried to give an

authentic representation of the physical and psychological trauma and the indomitable courage Radhika assumed in the midst of adversities.

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