

## CRITIQUING THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY OF THE COMFORT WOMEN AS REPRESENTED IN WILLIAM ANDREWS' *DAUGHTERS OF THE DRAGON: A COMFORT WOMAN'S STORY*

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### ABSTRACT

Human rights violations in war zones have produced sex slavery, stampeding the dignity and identity of women. The deeply entrenched patriarchal assumptions have contributed to this utter neglect of women, denying them the inalienable right to live with dignity. But the opening up of the world in liberal lines, in the post-world war era has unearthed the barbaric facet of this female existence. Comfort women narrative is a platform where the survivors of this experience have shared the traumatic experiences with the post millennial world.. Fictional and non-fictional narratives have emerged in this genre. This paper aims to study on the traumatic experiences of the comfort women and how their rights are violated, as represented in the fictional account of William Andrews' on the comfort women of Korea in *Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story*(2014). The paper proceeds to describe the traumatic experiences, its literary representation and the questions of human rights involved in this practice for critiquing the collective memory of the comfort women.

**KEYWORDS:** Human Rights, Sex Slavery, Patriarchy, Comfort Women, Post Millennium, Collective Memory

### INTRODUCTION

Women and children account for the highest number of casualties in every conflict. Women are often displayed as spoils of war to highlight the defeat and humiliation of the male-led military of the enemy. The deaths of women are considered collateral damage and their bodies are frequently used as battle grounds and as commodities that can be traded. Several narratives about the atrocities of war have been documented by women and men in both fiction and non-fiction. This paper focuses on a fictional account of a war narrative by William Andrews on the comfort women of Korea titled *Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story*. The paper aims to highlight the traumatic condition of the trapped women, by situating them in the frame of human rights, to have a nuanced perception of the double or triple oppression of women. The Japanese Government, on the guidance of its military officers, set up a system of military brothels, euphemistically called "comfort stations", in the early 1900's, staffed with young girls and women who were deceived, coerced, and kidnapped, to provide sexual pleasure to Japanese soldiers. These unfortunate girls and women were called "comfort girls" or "comfort women" *Jugun Ianfu* or *Ianfu* in Japanese, with the solitary reason for existence being to provide sexual pleasure to the Japanese Imperial Army.

Made to live in unhygienic, constricted conditions with no avenue for escape, these women, many of them minors, were repeatedly raped, for periods ranging from three weeks to eight years. At the end of the war, most of them were deserted, in active combat regions to their fate, while their Japanese abductors escaped during the onslaught of the Allied forces. Comfort houses or stations were either constructed by the Japanese Army or consisted of houses and structures seized by the Army. Comfort stations had been established throughout the Asia-Pacific Region. The Dutch, Korean,

Chinese, Taiwanese, Filipino, Indonesian, Malaysian and Burmese women were persecuted. Comfort stations were also set up near the battlefields and consisted of tents or makeshift wooden houses. Comfort women allocated to combat troops had to follow the troops wherever they went. The food and clothing of the comfort women at the front or near camps was provided by the Army. In other comfort houses in the rear, food and clothing was the responsibility of the manager, who was a private person. The inhuman stories of comfort women were hidden for a long time till fictional and non-fictional narratives were published in the post millennial era. Comfort woman narrative reveal in detail, the brutalization to which Chinese and Korean women were subjected to and its long term influence on their lives. This paper aims to study on the traumatic experiences of the comfort women and how their rights are violated. It includes physical, mental and social atrocities which affected comfort girls.

*Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story* is set during World War II, when the Japanese enforced some 2,00,000 young Korean women to be sex slaves (i.e. "comfort women") for their soldiers, and centers around Ja-hee and her sister who are taken from their family for such a function. Their suffering is dreadful and when Ja-hee finally escapes, leaving her dying sister behind, it's only to find that the past plagues her. Violence seems to follow her as she finds and loses love in North Korea, flees to South Korea, and keeps secret her trials as a former comfort woman, only to find that the truth surfaces time and again and intimidates to destroy her. *Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story* are not easy read as a light leisure story of survival and tenacity. Ja-hee's world is gritty, dark, and filled with struggle; and so readers are swept along into her confrontations with Japanese brutality and wartime events, with Ja-hee's only hope lying in a mysterious comb, that is the sole remnant of her birth mother and which holds its own story of hope and survival, passed down through generations. Korean women would be taken and forced to submit to sexual slavery in those stations. What distinguished the situation of the women taken for the sexual fulfillment of the Japanese military from those men and women who were forcibly enlisted or mobilized to work in war industries was the inability of the women to fit into Korean society upon their return.

The shame and humiliation brought upon them ensured that they would live lives of isolation and would consider themselves to be misfits within their own society. The story of comfort women has all but been forgotten and buried by the Japanese government is a disgrace. But the fact that it is resurrected here in *Daughters of the Dragon: A Comfort Woman's Story* and woven into a fictional story of survival to make it accessible to a much wider audience than non-fiction could have achieved is an even more commendable choice. Victims and survivors of rape are at very high risk of psychosocial problems and comfort women narratives give voice to unheard stories of brutality. The short-term psychological wounds to the Comfort women include feelings of fear, helplessness, melancholy, disorientation, isolation, defenselessness, and desperation. If left untreated, the psychological effects of sexual on slaughter and rape can be readful and deadly. Causes of death as the result of sexual violence include suicide and murder. Here Jae – hee become complete for a long time. She thought of her grandmother who earlier was so proud, now looks completely humiliated. She doesn't know what to say. She had never met anyone who was been raped before she never even got close to it. Sometimes she get nervous when she was lonely on the street at night or when there was a sketchy – looking guy in a hallway. But now she never knew how devastating rape could be.

The trauma is piercing in the depiction of this experience. Women kidnapped by soldiers and kept at army garrisons for raping and the thousands of women compelled into service as "comfort women" during World War II further proves that rape functions not only to achieve blatant political ends but also to satisfy the sexual appetites of the attacker.

Rape should not be considered an exclusively sexual act, it should be deemed exclusively as a political tool divorced from the crime's sexual traits. Wartime rape committed by a state or an armed guerrilla constitutes a mishandling of power and a breach of international humanitarian law. The fact that rape functions, in most instances, as forms of agony or cruel and inhuman treatment makes it all the more striking that it has not been prosecuted like any other abuse. The differential treatment of rape accentuates the fact that the problem—for the most part—lies not in the absence of adequate legal prohibitions, but in the international community's readiness to endure the subordination of women. Soldiers are driven to rape precisely because rape serves the strategic interests delineated above. But the fact that it is predominantly men raping women reveals that rape in war, like all rape, reflects a gender-based motivation, namely, the proclamation by men of their power over women. It becomes a gendered act. Men's domination of women is often deeply imbedded in societal attitudes, so much so that its role as a motivating factor is not easily discernible in every individual incident of rape. It is therefore difficult to differentiate the gender components of a rapist's motivation from the specific political function aided by the rape. When the war ended, the survived victims had to endure with their lives the incurable physical and psychological injuries, as well as the social stigma. She found that after the war, the survivors were cut-off from their hometowns and their families.

Comfort women had difficulty in making close relationships with friends and family and had poor living conditions. They couldn't live an ordinary life as a woman and had confusion in their identity. The factors that made them remain in silence for such a long time were their poor living conditions, broken family ties, and cultural factors that valued chastity. Post-traumatic stress disorder can be seen in almost all comfort women. There are mainly two reasons for their psychological trauma. The first reason for such high prevalence rate of post-traumatic stress disorder in the former comfort women would be because they were victims of massive sexual violence. Rape is a trauma associated with one of the highest risks of developing post-traumatic stress disorder and related psychiatric disorders. Women with histories of sexual assault are found to have post-traumatic stress disorder at three times the rate of women without such histories. Women exposed to sexual violence during World War II reported greater severity of post-traumatic stress disorder-related avoidance and hyper arousal symptoms, as well as anxiety, compared to female with non-sexual World War II trauma. Further, the effect of sexual misuse is cumulative, thus severity of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms increases with more incidents of abuse and increased severity of abuse. Many documents report that comfort women were forced to have sex with as many as thirty to forty soldiers per day.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the prevalence rate of post-traumatic stress disorder in former comfort women is higher than other victims of war trauma or even the Holocaust survivors. Jae - hee and Soo - hee came to Comfort station at the age of Fourteen and twelve. They became victims of child abuse and sexual slavery. Early-life trauma is recounted to be more impactful, resulting in more lasting and pernicious effects over the life course. Victims of child sexual abuse tend to use disengagement methods of coping such as denial, avoidance, wishful thinking, and self-criticism, which negatively affects psychological recovery from a traumatic experience. Somatic symptom disorder was also found prevalent in the participants. At the time of the torture, the comfort women would have experienced a profound loss of dignity and power, feeling humiliation and shame. The stigma of being a former comfort woman can be seen as fear of being judged and shamed by others, but it could also be explained as externalized projections of one's own self-condemnation and hatred. Survivors showed cognition and behaviors of learned helplessness. Participants endured long-lasting trauma where perpetrators were so powerful and the situation was impossible for them to escape or avoid the

atrocities. They witnessed others being brutally tortured or killed after attempting to escape. Through this experience, participants would have acquired, learned helplessness, losing trust in the world and others, perceiving life as unpredictable and uncontrollable. Many of the participants met spouses that were abusive, including married men who treated them badly. However, probably due to their learned helplessness and low self-esteem, they did not seek to escape from such situation and accepted the maltreatment. Survivors like Jae- hee showed difficulties in emotional regulation and impulse control. Children and relatives of the Jae- hee and Soo- hee recalled memories of them being angry and irritated most of the times, not knowing when they would explode and start yelling at others.

This unstable emotion and impulsivity seemed to have worsened when one was reminded of the trauma by an external stimulus or an intrusive thought. They become extremely sad and they don't know how to cope with that worst situation psychologically. The military comfort women have thus become the site for several different battles over the future. Their sad stories have galvanized and shaped an array of contemporary and competing visions of citizenship, race, gender and human rights throughout the world. For them, it must be a bitter irony. Once considered so unimportant that they could be sold off and enslaved without fear of consequence, today their memories cast huge shadows, both reaching back into history and forward into the future. This fictional account of the sufferings of the Korean woman was successful in articulating the deplorable condition of the comfort women, who were created by a military establishment with the consent of a social system.

The legitimization process done by the patriarchy has enabled the Japanese imperialism to carry this forward, amidst opposition. The voicing of their experiences had profound impact like the 2007 declaration, in which the Japanese administration had to own the responsibility. But issues related to reparation are far from reality. Though some amount of money was exchanged between governments, in the guise of undertaking developmental work, the real victims still remain outside the network of compensation. The resolve of governments to address the issue through mutual negotiations and through government financing will never bring justice to the victims of the practice. The personal trauma experienced by them has to be seen as a product of the politics of patriarchy; hence, a solution addressing the human rights of the women at personal realm should emerge. The inter-governmental negotiation is a sheer attempt to cover up the militarism, which is a product of patriarchy. Comfort women narrative being a critique of this has looked upon this personal as political. The Japanese government should face the past — because only by doing so can they contribute to making a better future for their country, the region and the world. Human rights became not a means of ensuring the rights of individuals or collective subjects but rather a claim of good governance by states showing that the juridical power could become governmentalized and move outside the plane of sovereignty. The “comfort women” narratives are similar to other personal narratives in that they may be fragmented, and that they may also have factual errors, omissions, and contradictions. Another motive behind the practice is the dominant presence of male logoi. The legitimization and justification of this has facilitated the imperialist Japan. As the narrative brings forth a counter narrative, scuttling the male logoi, comfort women narrative is an anti-establishment voice, which unraveled the double and triple oppression of women. Comfort women were ostracized from the main stream of the society due to the stigma attached to their being by the society. The outspoken nature of the fictional account paved the way for the articulation of the voices of the oppressed.

At the same time, their narratives are surprisingly detailed, including the names of ships that transported them from place to place, the names of their companions, and the names of the small towns by which they passed – their memories particularly vivid, persistent, and somatic, as has often been observed with trauma narratives. So comfort women

narratives are powerful enough to question the foundations of patriarchy and its offshoots like militarism. The fictional account of the lived experiences should unearth the multiple layers of oppression hidden in the bowels of history. The complete access to rights by women/girls can happen only when historical wrongs are questioned. Comfort women narrative is a right step in this direction. This would pave the way for equal pay and land ownership rights, sexual rights, freedom from violence, and access to education, and maternal health rights. Only when women have taken leadership and peacemaking roles and have an equal political voice will economies and countries be transformed. And only then will all women and girls have the self-determination they are entitled to. For women and girls, the right to control their own bodies and their sexuality without any form of discrimination, coercion, or violence is critical for their empowerment. Without sexual rights, they cannot realize their rights to self-determination and autonomy, nor can they control other aspects of their lives. Indeed, it is the attempts to control women's and girls' sexuality that result in many of the human rights abuses they face on a daily basis, including gender-based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation, and limitations on their mobility, dress, education, employment, and participation in public life. The same holds true for lesbians, gay men, bisexual, transgender people, sex workers, and others who transgress sexual and gender norms and who face greater risk of violence, stigma, and discrimination as a result. Sexual rights underpin the enjoyment of all other human rights and are a prerequisite for equality and justice. The articulation of the rights of comfort women have opened up the traumatic collective memory of a generation. The critique of this painful experience would pave the way for reparations as well as consolation for the victims of this brutal experience.

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