

Foreword

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The past is often perceived as an intertwined set of events that have already unfolded; a memorial of people, emotions and movements. But are they really motionless records? An occurrence ends, but the experience remains. And experience breathes life into the past through its various imaging faculties.

It is not imperative for you or I to have been physically present when that book was written, song was sung, revolution occurred or when some people were pushed to the margins. These impressions are carried forward through the rituals we conduct, the songs we learn, the dance that moves us, the poetry we recite, the stories that we are told again and again. The past also lives in our body. The scars and celebrations manifest in the way we stand, sit, smile, speak or in our inability to do any of the above. Experience is not a 'thing'; it is inherently an abstract imprint that allows individuals and communities to draw from it repeatedly at different times for different reasons. But, even in its abstraction, a foundational definitive core is retained. That base material feeds into everything else that is interpreted. When people die, this blueprint is passed on to the next generation. This also includes that which has been erased or forgotten. We

perceive memory as remembrance, but what about its loss? Forgetting is also a register; a ghost impression.

Who are the owners of all these impressions? We definitely do not own them; we live with, believe and create an entire way of life that emanates from carrying them forward. Since we have imbued our life with those etchings, we begin to believe that they define us. Through this belief, each generation passes on its sense of identity to the next. But, without doubt, there are always sets of people who curate that which gives us past-confirmation or denial. It is also distinctly possible that ownership changed hands causing turns and twists to what we determine as our past-continuous present. The thread that we hold on to has never been singular, with a constant texture or colour. The only overarching reality is that the thread that we consume as the authentic version is always printed by those who are powerful.

But even the powerful are not successful in destroying the forgotten. The ghost impression never really goes away. I am not using “ghost” as a term that suggests fear or danger. In fact, it is a truth that we seek to eliminate; it is the erased I refer to. Forgetting is also a *kavacha* (protective vest), a self-preservation technique. But somewhere, in someone, the forgotten remains hidden or subdued, waiting for the right moment to emerge. At times, while the socially powerful suppress communities overtly; a subversive lullaby is quietly whispered into the ears of a child. The unheard and the unseen continue to flourish within silenced cultures, kept away from what we have come to define as the mainstream. At the same time some of those who are kept away from collective memory respond with such vigor and vitality that their voice is heard far beyond their forced confines. Within the mainstream itself, alternatives are jotted down on the edges of the pages, in the books written by the mighty. The

brave ones scratch out phrases from the established dictum in crimson ink.

At every point in the past, there were people living in their present, asking questions of their memory. They looked further back into the past to understand all that they felt and did, refusing to parrot what memory prescribed. They were unsure of even the first typesetting. But much time has flowed between them and us, and we need to have the same courage to be able to rummage through our layers of conditioning and see and listen in abandon. This is not just another passage for remembrance. It is the opposite; it is, in fact, an act of agency, a reimagination. The acquired past is stopped in its seemingly unstoppable tracks, looked at from as many angles as possible, and buried and unheard voices resounding in their presence. From this moment new ideas, understandings, tunes, rhythms and dances emerge; each one distinct, contesting with the other in a matrix of equity and equality. Like a river at a delta, nothing remains static. But each stream holds its own and refuses to merge into that one swallowing sea.

This collection of essays, reflections and reviews are a coming together of ideational streams that look at the past and present with complexity and criticality. Every author has used a mirror to examine his/her own life experience while suggesting imaginative possibilities. The pieces complement and complicate each other and that makes for an enriching reading.