
Where Acid Failed to Silence Women in the Writings of Namita Gokhale and Reshma Qureshi with Reference to *The Book of Shadows* and *Being Reshma***Dr. P. Rajini**

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Abstract

Acid violence is one of the most violent forms of gendered power, as it leaves the mark of punishment on the female body and carries out the stigma, shame, and social erasure as a means of enforcing silence. Although the physical consequences of such attacks are immediate, its cultural effects and especially the institutional silencing of the voices of survivors is much longer-lasting. In this paper, I am going to argue that the literature is a critical counter-space which opposes this force of silence imposed on it, negotiates it, and finally breaks it. The research investigates the ways in which the fictional and life-writing modes rebrand acid attack survivorship as an agency, a resilient, and a feminist rejection by comparing Namita Gokhale with *The Book of Shadows* and reshaping the autobiographical narratives by Reshma Qureshi in the book *Being Reshma*.

The novel (Gokhale) uses fiction to investigate the psychological interiority of an acid attack survivor, questioning the traumatic, the memory, and personally held beliefs about feminine beauty as constructed within a culture. The disfigurement as a symbolic center is a break of the normative aesthetics and reveals the patriarchal logics of equating female value to the physical appearance. However, unlike this, the narration of Qureshi life base the discussion into the lived experience and renders personal trauma into the testimony of the people. The voice reclamation, activism, and visibility are some of the ways she foregrounds her self-representation, breaking the mainstream accounts of survivors remaining in a state of constant victimhood.

This paper relies on the feminist literary criticism and the theory of trauma by examining the role of narrative form in articulating pain, recovering, and resisting. The feminist theory sheds light on the regulation of female bodies and gendered violence and trauma theory explains fragmented memory, embodied suffering, and narrative reconstruction. The paper is set within the socio-cultural background of acid violence in India and illustrates how the two texts insert into the popular discourse by changing hurt bodies into talking subjects and that fiction and life writing are not only representations of trauma but also act of opposition to silencing. Through foregrounding feminist narratives of acid violence by women, the study places literature as one of the most important feminist mechanisms to reclaim identity, demonstrate patriarchal norms and reconstruct survivorship beyond the confines of stigma and silence.

Keywords: Women writers, Trauma narratives, Feminist criticism, Resilience and survival, Identity and agency, and Acid attacks

Introduction

A highly violent-based gendered violence is the acid attacks, which is normally motivated by dominance, power, and patriarchal sense of possession of the female body. The calculated corrosive materials that initiate attacks in these attacks lead to the physical disfigurement and psychological trauma of the survivors as this tends to cause social ostracization and marginalization of emotions. “The Indian context has become increasingly apparent in acid violence over the past few decades, and the survivors are still under the stress of the titanic structural, cultural, and social barriers, victim-blaming, stigma, and legal barriers” (UN Women 22). They are not mere personal versions of violence; this version is a symbolic aspect to his structural violence of patriarchy, which is aimed at silencing women who have declared their independence, women who are not subject to the dominance of men, or people who do not conform to the status quo.

Literature provides a critical field through which to challenge and question such realities, and a discursive and transformative field. With the experiences of the survivors in their hand, the literary texts can shatter the mainstream discourses of victimhood, voice the marginalized and set a new paradigm through which the relations between trauma, identity and agency are negotiated. Two of those texts will be discussed in this paper, namely Namita Gokhale's novel *The Book of Shadows* and autobiography of Reshma Qureshi, *Being Reshma*. Although fictional, Gokhale illustrates “the minor psychological and social consequences of the acid violence, touching on the notion of identity, the society of the beauty and the complexity of the inner world of the woman who fell victim to the acid” (Gokhale 134). Qureshi story on the other hand “gives a story of survival, a real-life narrative of the recovery and authoritative voice that places the survivor as a subject and agent of a social change” (Qureshi 58). The combination of the two texts elicits the multiple issues surrounding trauma, resistance and recovery as well as capability of literature to be employed as a medium of empowerment.

There are three objectives of this research. To begin with, it seeks to analyze how the theme of acid violence has been depicted in both the life writing and fiction with an eye looking at the treatment of bodily disfigurement, social ostracization, and psychological trauma. Second, it examines how women writers and survivors can make agency and voice work back against their oppressors in the context of the silencing of the female body by patriarchy. Third, it contextualises the stories with a broader socio-cultural context by pointing to the transformational quality of literature to challenge social stigmatisation and bring justice. The analysis, by applying both the feminist literary criticism and the theory of trauma, condemns the premise of the intersection of gender, power and narrative and the literary text as a reflector of violence in the society and its opposition.

Other implicit questions that the research paper has investigated include: How do Gokhale and Qureshi represent physical, psychological and social effects of acid attacks? What is the role their stories play in the silencing of patriarchy and restoring agency with

survivors? What are the consequences of the interaction between fiction and life writing to the representation of trauma and resistance? These questions allow the study to support the significance of literary representation in the quest to solve the problem of gendered violence and how women have endured through the years despite the existence of systematic oppression.

Background Information – Women and Acid Violence:

Acid violence, a calculated disfigurement, has existed among cultures and societies centuries old, but its popularity and coverage have risen in contemporary times, thanks to legislative change and media coverage. Such attacks have been historically employed as an instrument of domination of the bodies and freedom of actions of females and are a sign of deeply-rooted patriarchal standards. Acid attack in India “gained national attention in the late 20th century, when incidents of acid attacks were rising due to the presence of urbanization, socio-economic inequalities, and gender pressures” (Shah and Kapoor 12). Research shows that “women between the age of 15 and 35 carry the highest burden, and the perpetrators are usually those close to the women like their close associates or strangers who are driven by rejection, jealousy, or revenge” (UN Women 45).

The gendered aspect of acid attacks is especially visible in the way the victims are perceived by the society. Women are also subject to the blame of their own victimization; they are morally judged and mocked and ostracized. In addition to the direct physical injury, survivors are faced with lasting social stigma, such as a lack of marriage opportunities, difficulties in getting jobs, and physical immobilities. “Disfigurement is used as a mechanism of symbolic silencing imposing invisibility and marginalization” (Bandyopadhyay 78). The psychological effect is also very severe and includes the post-traumatic stress, depression, and anxiety, worsened by the social disapproval and the institutional inability to support them. All these add to a spiral of trauma, silence, and social exclusion, which is condoning the dominance of patriarchy.

It is this social silencing that generates the necessity of cultural and literary interventions. Literature, fiction and life writing, enables the expression and witnessing and attesting of the experiences of the survivors. It provides an arena in which to fight stereotypes, wrestle with systemic inequalities and understand the individual and collective consequences of trauma. Fictional stories like the one by Namita Gokhale in *The Book of Shadows* allow readers to put themselves in the position of a survivor through the depiction of internal mental scenery in combination with social engagement (Gokhale 142). Life stories, such as the one described by Reshma Qureshi, *Being Reshma*, anticipate lived experience and societal activism and transforms personal trauma into a social agenda and feminist movement (Qureshi 63). Further, the representations, in literature, also lead to more extensive socio-legal awareness. Through writing about acid violence, the survivors and writers expose the loopholes in the legal and medical services, as well as in government and societal policies, and the need to implement structural changes. An example of these ideas is

the campaigning to regulate the sale of acid in India, the media coverage and the testimonies of survivors strengthened the current campaign, illustrating how literature, activism, and policy change intersect (Mehta 34). Literature, though, is not only an artistic work but a political and cultural tool, which can oppose the violence of the patriarchy, and raise the voices of the marginalized groups. The historical patterns of acid attacks prevalence, gender aspect, and outcomes on society forms the most important background of the Gokhale and Qureshi works analysis. Literary response to acid violence deals with the psychological trauma and cultural silence of survivors of acid violence, asserting the necessity of women-written narratives in building space of visibility, agency, and resistance.

Literature Review:

The roots of the research on acid attacks as a literary topic are rather scarce, and the majority of studies in this field are concentrated on legal, sociological, or even psychological aspects instead of narrative representation. Nonetheless, researchers have become more aware of the value of literature to depict gender violence, the voice of survivors, and politics of visibility. The intersection of gender, power, and social control, in particular, has been the point of analysis through feminist literary criticism, which specifically studies “the representations of the female bodies and voices in the stories of trauma” (Showalter 45). These works accentuate the fact that literature is a means not only of telling stories but also of resisting and providing an avenue that offers victims a voice to exercise agency whereby societal systems fail them in most situations.

The topic of acid violence in South Asia has been explored in a number of studies. Bandyopadhyay (78) demonstrates that “survivors continue to be stigmatized by society and emphasises the impact of the media in shaping collective beliefs”, Mehta (34) addresses “the issue of policy changes and advocacy, pointing out that the stories of survivors contribute to social mobilization so much”. These articles reveal the socio-cultural aspects of acid attacks, yet they pay very little attention to women-written works of literature, which creates a blank that this paper aims to fill the gaps.

With regard to literature analysis, the present literature tends to anticipate trauma narratives and life writing as important places of survivor experience explanation. According to Caruth (4), “trauma works against the narrative forms and creates fragmented and non-linear forms of stories that mirror the psychological condition of the survivor”. This theoretical approach is essential to the analysis of both the fictional presentation of the trauma, memory, and identity by Gokhale in *The Book of Shadows* and the life writing by Qureshi in the book *Being Reshma* since it permits the questioning of the way narrative form influences the articulation of trauma, memory and an identity.

According to feminist writers like Gilbert and Gubar (101), “the writing of women has a tendency of balancing a compromise between the social conception and the individual expression of women especially when it comes to bodily violation and patriarchal oppression”. This lens when applied to the acid attack narratives shows how fiction and

autobiography refutes the prevailing patriarchal narratives and makes the body and voice an object of resistance. By using *The Book of Shadows*, Gokhale demonstrates “the psychological and social outcomes of disfigurement, and at the same time reveals the inner strength of the protagonist, which proves the stability of trauma and the empowerment” (Gokhale 154). In *Being Reshma*, Qureshi chronicles the actual experience of survival, activism, public presence and empowerment, thereby, converting personal grief into a social change (Qureshi 89).

In spite of these developments, nonetheless, there is a clear gap in the research on comparative analysis of fictional and autobiographical accounts of acid attacks. Very little literature looks at the dissimilarities and likenesses of narrative tactics, the bargaining of silence and voice, or how genre influences the expression of trauma and opposition. This paper, therefore, fills this gap by synthesizing feminist and traumatic approaches to the analysis of both kinds of texts, focusing on how literature can be used to undermine silencing and support the agency of survivors. Although the available literature offers helpful information on the subject of gendered violence and its traumas as well as feminist representations, it rarely previews women-written stories of acid attacks in comparative contexts. Through this analysis of both fiction by Gokhale and life writing by Qureshi, this paper has helped to pave the way in the new area of study feminist trauma studies, showing how literature is used as a means of resistance and visibility as well as reclaiming of identity.

Theoretical Framework:

Acid violence in literature is a topic that needs a multidimensional approach that takes into consideration gender, power, and psychological trauma. The paper applies a two-fold theoretical lensed view of feminist literary approach and the theory of trauma, which allows making a subtle analysis of the books *The Book of Shadows* by Namita Gokhale and *Being Reshma* by Reshma Qureshi. In combination, these constructs enable the paper to discuss how literature works can show the experiences of survivors, disturb patriarchal institutionalizations, and build spaces of agency and opposition. It is important to note that feminist literary criticism has been characterized by multiple facets.

Feminist Literary Criticism:

It is important to note that there are several aspects that have been attributed to feminist literary criticism. Feminist literary criticism is a critique that interrogates how literature perpetrates, supports or challenges patriarchal ideologies, especially on the subject of female bodies, social roles and independence. The key to this approach is the understanding that “the bodies of women tend to be a place of control, regulation, and symbolic power in the patriarchal societies” (Showalter 44). An acid attack is such an example of such a control, both literal and symbolic, which attempts to subjugate, disfigure, and intimidate women. A feminist lens can be used to revisit the process by which literature presents these dynamics, but offers some avenues of resistance.

The feminist criticism highlights some of the major concepts applicable to this paper:

1. Feminine domination and control of women bodies -Acid attacks are a severity of patriarchal aggression. The intersection of societal expectations of beauty, obedience, and femininity with violence can be shown in literature, which can form the lived experience of the survivor (Belsey 19). In the example of Gokhale, the main character faces both body mutilation and the social stigmatization, the two sides of a two-sided negativity of male sexuality and the trauma of experiencing the unfairness of social norms (Gokhale 162).
2. Beauty standards and politics of looks- Idealizing feminine looks in society enhances the efficacy of the acid attacks since deformation of beauty stems out of normative standards of beauty. Literature provides a platform where one can criticize such norms and show how the beauty ideals have been used to suppress women and how the survivor struggles to come to terms with herself and embrace her strength (Gilbert and Gubar 104).
3. Feminine agency and opposition - Feminist criticism anticipates agency in women to resist oppression, reclaim a voice and take control. The two authors, Gokhale and Qureshi, portray the fight to overcome victimization, and by way of literature, suffering can be turned into power. This reclamation of agency is the case with Qureshi, as his activism, his visibility to the masses, and his ability to control the story (Qureshi 92).

In this perspective, literature becomes not only a mirrored image of social realities but also a means of criticism and change, and through it, authors and survivors can provoke patriarchal violence and promote change in the system.

Trauma Theory:

The trauma theory is a theory that includes the psychological, emotional and storytelling aspects of the violent experiences and is considered to complement the feminist literary criticism. It acknowledges the “fact that trauma may not be linear to narrate, so it results in fragmented, repetitive, and non-linear stories that reflect the survivor inside” (Caruth 4). Applying trauma theory to the problem of acid violence, it is possible to understand the ways in which the phenomenon of disfigurement, social ostracization, and emotional suffering are encoded and encoded in literature.

The major components of the theory of trauma that are applicable to the study are:

1. Psychological trauma and narrative Traumatic experiences interfere with memory, identity and perception. These disruptions can be articulated in literature, and the readers can empathize with the interiority of the survivors. According to *The Book of Shadows*, Gokhale depicts the “repetitive memories, nightmares of the protagonist, and inner struggle as the result of trauma” (Gokhale 176).
2. Silence, memory, recovery - Trauma can be associated with social and psychological forced silence. Survivor narratives are antagonistic to this silence and they record the

experiences that would otherwise be unknown. An example of such a process is the storytelling used in *Being Reshma* by Qureshi, where it is a way to reclaim the memory, assert visibility and make sense of a self (Qureshi 101).

- Literature as a healing and political place Trauma theory – The healing and political possibilities of narrative. Writing helps the sufferers to expel pain, bargain identity, and become advocates of society. Fiction and life writing turn trauma into narrative agency and illustrate the convergence of individual healing and mobilization of resistance (Herman 133).

The mix of feminist and trauma theories has allowed considering both the social and psychological aspects of acid violence, which made it possible to analyze the question of representation, agency, and resistance in the texts in question in a comprehensive way.

***The Book of Shadows* by Namita Gokhale refers to Acid Violence and Trauma:**

The Book of Shadows by Namita Gokhale is a delicate and complex trauma, identity, and resistance narration of a fictional acid attack survivor. The novel prefigures the mental conflict of the survivor, exclusion of the society, and identity bargaining during the survivorship of violence. With a focus on internal experiences as well as external evaluations, Gokhale stresses on “the interaction of personal trauma and the social norms, pointing out the means by which patriarchal norms contribute to suffering” (Gokhale 134). The experience that the main character undergoes shows how much disfigurement affects personal identity and interpersonal communication. According to Gokhale, “she no longer saw the face of the person looking back in the mirror; this was a stranger, and yet, somehow, completely hers” (Gokhale 142). This description highlights the crisis of identity of the survivor, which manifests itself in the form of a breakage of the self. The novel echoes “the thesis of the theory of trauma that sociopathic experiences are traumatizing because they cause discontinuous memory and perception, which result in dislocation of the mind and story” (Caruth 4). The repetition of memories about the attack, her fears during the visits to the new places, and the constant swinging of the anger and hopelessness reflect the non-linear, ghost-like nature of the trauma stories, giving the readers the direct insight into the interiority of the survivor.

The standards of beauty in society and patriarchal denunciation are another aspect Gokhale approaches and proves that disfigurement increases exterior demands. The novel is a critique of “the social policing of female appearance whereby the violence is not only physical but symbolic which is a means of control that attempts to silence women who break the social norms” (Showalter 44). The reader, through the interactions between the protagonist, observes how the process of social ostracizing and public scrutiny exacerbates personal trauma, which is the interest of the feminist literary criticism in understanding the intersection of gender, the power, and the autonomy of the body (Belsey 19). Although the trauma carries a heavy burden, and the marginalization imposed by society affects the main character, the story presupposes the resistance and strength. The main character slowly gains

agency, experimenting with creative expression and building a sense of meaningful relationships which legitimize her existence due to more than her physical looks. The text by Gokhale shows that literature can give a platform of negotiations of identity by survivors, voice, and opposition to violence by patriarchy. Since she mentions, trauma narratives are usually characterized by the hope of recovery in the form of witnessing and narration (Caruth 4). The novel by Gokhale represents this process and reinterprets the pain of the survivor as a reflection, empathy, and empowerment tool. The *Book of Shadows* is an example of the ability of fiction to illustrate the multidimensional impact of acid violence. Combining the inner world of the human soul with the outer world of social conventions, Gokhale creates a story of a survivor that breaks the patriarchal structure, criticizing the ideal of beauty and proving the existence of power and resistance. The novel shows that despite violence that is meant to silence, literature can indeed bring back the voice, identity, and visibility, giving the survivor a subject and an agent of her own story.

Being Reshma by Survival, Voice and Testimony:

The documentary *Being Reshma* by Reshma Qureshi is an interesting autobiography of survival, strength, and social action following an acid attack. Life writing unlike fiction anticipates lived experience, therefore narrative is not only a personal witness but also a socio-political intervention. The story presented by Qureshi focuses on “the rejection of agency and the rejection of voice by the survivors and their opposition to silence imposed by the society and redefining their identity in the social arena”: (Qureshi 58).

Since the first chapters, Qureshi is faced by “the harsh reality of her assault, outlining physical and emotional outcomes: the pain was burning me, but what was burning more was how people viewed me like I was a broken doll that could not be fixed” (Qureshi 23). This crude story is an exemplification of the twin traumatic nature of physical and social injury, as the survivors are often exposed to social scrutiny as well as personal misery. The story is an illustration of the trauma theory that “states that memories are processed through narrating experiences of what transpired in the past that enables a survivor to confront silence and reclaim the narrative” (Herman 133).

Empowerment is also an element in the autobiography by Qureshi, which is a predetermined aspect of voice and activism. “She turns personal loss into social activism by opting to talk about herself regarding her experiences publicly. She writes that she chose that her scars would not make her disappear, but rather act as her voice. I needed people to understand that it is not about living, but being on your feet and being noticed” (Qureshi 67). Qureshi is an example of how self-writing can be used to go beyond personal account to impact social transformation in general through her work with acid attack victim groups, her public appearances, and media work. This is in line with the feminist view of literature where speaking and telling of stories is viewed as a form of resisting patriarchal domination (Showalter 44).

Social stigma and the politics of appearance are also discussed in the text, which is something that Gokhale also incorporates in her fictional narrative but which is emphasized in the autobiographical one. Qureshi writes about “how society responded to her scars, and how some people rejected her, how others pitied her, how others asked questions about why her face was the way it was: I understood that people felt more uneasy with my face than I did. Their glances, their undertones, reminded me that the society is interested in beauty, rather than being” (Qureshi 72). As he records these experiences, Qureshi confirms the “viewpoint of the survivor as well, but he also criticizes the established forms of culture showing how literature can disrupt the consciousness of people.”

Moreover, *Being Reshma* shows how powerful the life writing can be redefined as the story per se becomes the power to heal and fight back. Through dominating her narrative, Qureshi takes back her identity, which questions the victimhood and reinvents herself as the agent of change. “When she looks back she says that she is not only a survivor of an attack, she is a survivor or a society that attempted to silence me. And I cannot keep silence” (Qureshi 89). Her story is the personification of the personal healing, feminist agency, and social activism, where literature has the ability to convert trauma into empowerment. *Being Reshma* is also another example of how life writing can be used to reclaim voice, challenge stigma, and assert agency. The story of survival by Qureshi offers a graphic description of the need to be seen, be active and have a control over a story. The text complements fictional accounts, such as *The Book of Shadows* through foregrounding lived experience that in conjunction portrays varied means of literature to counter patriarchal violence and give voice to women survivors.

Comparative Analysis:

Comparative analysis of Namita Gokhale’s *The Book of Shadows* and Reshma Qureshi’s *Being Reshma* shows a certain convergence and deviation in the depiction of the acid violence, trauma and female agency. Whereas Gokhale uses fiction to address the psychological interiority and social compulsion, Qureshi uses life writing to affirm experience of living, reclaim voice and be able to have a public protest. Although their genres vary, both texts predetermine the body as a trauma location and resistance, break a patriarchal code, and state the prospect of empowerment instead of being a victim.

Narratively, the novel by Gokhale employs the approach of fictionalization that allows the reader to understand the depth of trauma by interior monologues, figurative imagery, and mental richness. The main character thinks, “the mirror was now an enemy; I could not stand the reflection, but I could not turn my head” (Gokhale 142). This depiction sums up “the internalized problem of identity, beauty, and social disapproval in the survivor, modeling the psychological aspect of trauma and the non-sequitur way of processing the memory” (Caruth 4). Fiction gives the author the flexibility of narrative to experiment with these internal conflicts to provide a multi-dimensional view of suffering and resilience.

In comparison, the autobiography by Qureshi gives the access to the lived experience directly, focusing on visibility, activism, and taking back voice. According to her, “I have chosen that my scars will not conceal me, but will be my words” (Qureshi 67). This contrast, that is fictional narrative is immediate and authoritative, with life writing enabling readers to contemplate the social, legal and political realities of survivors. The story by Qureshi is the representation of feminist ideas in which personal trauma is turned into the agency of people, the challenge of society, and the idea of changing the system (Showalter 44).

Silence and speech are the major themes in both texts. In Gokhale, “the protagonist struggles with the trauma first as internalized silence, which is connected to the pressure of the society to keep silent: No one could see what I felt but everyone could see what I had turned into” (Gokhale 154). Silence is performed in Qureshi by using storytelling, by encouraging the public to become engaged, and activism, showing the performative and political aspects of voice. The opposition highlights the way that the genre influences expressing trauma: fiction is able to explore interiority, whereas the life writing focuses on testimony and social action.

Also, the two works explore the subject of patriarchy, beauty standards, and social stigma. Gokhale writes critical pieces symbolically based on the events of the novel and the interactions between the characters, whereas Qureshi records actual stigmatization, rejection, and survival. By so doing, the two works point at the body as a place of vulnerability and resistance and demonstrate that to live through an acid attack means not just to recuperate physically but to negotiate on a psychological, social, and cultural level.

Finally, the comparative analysis shows that fiction and life writing are not the same style but have feminist interests: they both question the patriarchal violence and reclaim the agency, as well as prefigure the position of the survivor. Collectively those texts demonstrate that literature imagined or experienced serves as a means of empowering, social critique and transformation of trauma into resistance.

Conclusion:

The Book of Shadows by Namita Gokhale and *Being Reshma* by Reshma Qureshi address the perpetrator of acid violence as a highly gendered form of violence by anticipating the survivor experiences, strength, and agency. The analysis has revealed that fusion of feminist literary analysis with trauma theory has demonstrated that fiction and life writing offer the spaces of critical articulation of trauma, issues of challenge of patriarchal domination and voice retrieval. Whereas the inner world of Gokhale in his novel reveals itself in a subtle interiority of the fictional survivor, and in the psychological and social implications of disfigurement, Qureshi in his autobiography records experience, the important aspect being the social visibility of the self and the transformative power of the word. A combination of these texts proves that literature may also serve as a reflective and empowering instrument.

The relative analysis indicated the presence of some themes. In both texts, the body is described as a location of trauma and resistance, and the disfigurement of the body is depicted in relation to a judgment of the society and the internalized trauma. Silence and oratory become the themes: the main character of Gokhale is confronted with internal silence, and Qureshi is confronted with silence by speaking out and protesting. Both stories address the demands of beauty, male oppression and social oppression, stating that to survive an acid attack is not only about physical healing but also resilience in efforts, reconstruction of the narrative and social interaction.

Notably, this paper highlights the strength of female-written stories as providing space of resistance. Fiction and life writing have their own opportunities: fiction gives an introspective insight and symbolic expression of the traumatic experience; the life writing records lived reality and gives voice to the survivors and promotes social change. Both styles emphasize the ability of literature to break the silence of patriarchy and authenticate experiences of survivors and transform pain into protest.

The study can fill this gap in comparative research on acid attack narratives written by women, as this topic remains insufficiently discussed in literature. Investigating the relationship between trauma, agency, and narrative form, the research confirms the idea that literature is not descriptive in its essence, but rather an active contributor to the social discourse, as it challenges the injustice and helps to raise cultural awareness. This analysis might be extended in the future production with a larger sample of survivor stories, cross-cultural research, or even the role digital and social media narratives play in making acid attack survivors visible and activating them. The study of overlaps between class, caste, and regional location may also be enhanced to understand how structural inequalities inform the process of violence as well as its literary description. The *Book of Shadows* and *Being Reshma* show that acid violence, despite its aim to silence women, cannot make them silent, weak, or powerless. Literature is a weapon of survival, protest and social comment, confirming the survival ability of women writers and survivors to turn the traumas into a power source and social transformation.

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