

Voices from the Margins

Community Knowledge as an ‘Alliance of Hope’: people to people links between India and Japan in the twentieth century

Surajit Sarkar
Centre for Community Knowledge
Ambedkar University Delhi

Memory and Nationhood

Whenever many South Asian family and friends discuss the 1947 transfer of governance to the new states of India and Pakistan, the talk is about communal tensions among Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities, or focus on contemporary political shenanigans in the region. Though many in North India were directly affected by the events of 1947, its personal and familial impact is rarely discussed. This interplay of easy conversation and silences around the Partition is a trope in the inheritances of history and family mythology in many Pakistani and Indian families.

When Guneeta Singh Bhalla went to school in the US, she would wonder why her textbooks did not include a single chapter on the Partition. "My father was born in Lahore and his family was forced to flee to the newly formed India in 1947, migrating from Lahore to Amritsar on August 14. They faced many hardships in those early days but eventually settled down in Delhi. What I found strange was that it was not even mentioned in my textbooks while we learned about the Holocaust or the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombings in world history class," said Guneeta, who was born in Delhi and moved to the US at the age of 10.

In 2008, while pursuing a Ph.D. in Florida, Guneeta spent time studying at the University of Tokyo. On a day off, she took a trip to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the site that honors the victims of the Aug. 1, 1945, atomic bombing. *"It was so powerful to hear the stories of experiencing the atomic bomb from survivors. Suddenly it was all very real and human and I felt their pain much more than watching videos of the mushroom cloud or reading written accounts of those hours that followed the dropping of the bomb."*¹ The Memorial's oral history videos influenced Guneeta much more than she realised.

"It was telling on the health of the whole family. so we thought we should better move out, it is a matter of 15-20 days of madness, let us go to Shimla. My grandparents were there in the house because usually, old people were not killed till then. He said we are very happy here, the old people will look after the house, you go... On 14 August my father was glued to the radio and we heard him sobbing and we came down to see our fathers beard had gone half grey. He couldn't bear the shock... Afterwards my father said he was leaving to rescue his parents. He travelled for 13 days on foot, on empty bullock carts from Shimla to Amritsar. Somehow he crossed the border and found his parents in a refugee camp. He called up his friend Dr Mohammed Yusuf and asked can I go to my house, and his friend said no, no, no – the

¹ <https://www.telegraphindia.com/states/west-bengal/chronicles-of-a-departure-remembered/cid/1495163>

people who have occupied it roam around with daggers all the time, because it is a huge house. They don't want other refugees to occupy the house.”(Ajit Cour, New Delhi) ²

This interview from an archive of nearly seven thousand oral histories in digital video at the Partition Archives at <https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/> gives an unexpected insight into communication between people across the border three generations later. Making it possible to conceptualize a true ‘people’s history’ at a time when the echo chambers of nationalism present a challenge in developing a three-dimensional model of how the millions of people were affected by Partition.

Guneeta Singh Bhalla believes storytelling is reshaping the memory of the 1947 partition. *“I grew up in Faridkot, a border town in Punjab and could see two TV channels, not one like elsewhere in the two countries. So I could watch both Indira Gandhi and Benazir Bhutto. It was a time when government forces were seeking Sikh separatists amongst us, in Punjab. Meanwhile elsewhere in the country in the comfort of home, life went on as usual.”*³ She remembers hearing stories of the past of the land from grandparents joined sometime by others in the dark electricity-less nights, as she lay in bed on the roof of their house. *“Such one on one storytelling between two people creates a bond that is so vital for our minds that we crave it, after the first time we’ve experienced it.”*⁴ It was in this manner, she learnt about partition, about her own family in the days before she was born. These stories inspired her love for nature, and sparked her interest in human conflict, as she lay in bed surrounded by the two.

Visual storytelling can become a deeply enriching experience and she wanted to share it with everyone. She was also troubled with the realization that the generation of eyewitnesses to partition was nearly gone, taking their stories with them. Surprised and pained at the younger generation's "lack of knowledge" about Partition, she initiated the creation of the Partition Archive. A kind of archive that could give shape to subaltern narratives, which are otherwise easily lost, scattered or obscured behind concentric circles of institutional walls or individual privacy, resulting in a relative flattening of Partition narratives in circulation.

‘Nationalised memory #1’ Hiroshima , the A-survivor (*hibakusha*)

The twelve years between August 1945, when the atom bomb was dropped, and April 1957, when the Japanese state officially "nationalized" memories of the atomic bombing by providing medical care for A-bomb survivors (*hibakusha*), living testimonials of the event, illustrate a historical transformations of Japanese collective memory of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

Mayor Hamai of Hiroshima stated at the Peace Memorial Ceremony on August 6 1949: "Today is the fourth occasion on which we, the citizens of Hiroshima, have remembered our dead. We earnestly pray that such a tragedy will never occur on the earth again." Here, what was remembered were the dead and this "tragedy" was

² Ajit Cour, Interview online at the Partition Archives. <https://youtu.be/i8LFUFVHMhw>

³ Guneeta Singh Bhalla, TEDx Ashoka University, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_QYPCDuFPk

⁴ Guneeta Singh Bhalla, TEDx Ashoka University, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_QYPCDuFPk

regarded as already over (so that they could pray that another one would never occur). By the late 1940s the equation of Hiroshima's and of Japan's postwar "mission" with a quest for peace, and, furthermore, the equation of the pursuit of peace with the pursuit of capitalist modernity, was fast becoming a dominant official interpretation of the bombing.

The Occupation formally ended when Japan signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty in September 1951. Eager to leave behind traumas of the war and look for signs of Japan's fresh postwar start; Japan's celebrated peace constitution and the discourse of peace made the Japanese adherents of what Carol Gluck called "a cult of new beginnings" that helped them forget what had preceded the end of the war.

On August 6, 1952, publication of "The First Exhibition of A-Bomb Damage," which showed photographs of the immediate aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki for the first time shocked Japanese by images of the devastation that the atom bombs had inflicted upon the humans and the cities. 520,000 copies were sold out in a single day. (700,000 copies were sold in total.) The contribution of print capitalism in forging an imagined community lay as much in the production of images as in that of the print or letters, for images did not require cultural literacy and therefore could penetrate into nonelite groups of Japanese.

This narrative created in Hiroshima credited the bomb, as Americans often did, with bringing peace and ending World War II. In Hiroshima's account, however, it was Hiroshima's sacrifice rather than the bomb itself that brought peace. With this "baptism of fire" (another often-repeated phrase), Hiroshima was transformed into a transnational city of peace with a special mission to warn the world of the dangers of nuclear war. Curiously, this discourse was both distinctively Japanese, continuing the prewar trope of Japanese uniqueness, and universal at the same time: erasing any particular ethnic identity of other non-Japanese victims.⁵

Terrains of Memory

In 2017-18, *Newsweek Japan* recently devoted four cover stories to a series of two-hour special seminars led by Professor Carol Gluck of Columbia University, the interpretive framework for the sessions emerging from her book, *Past Obsessions: World War II in History and Memory*.

"Americans say the atomic bomb "ended the war and saved American lives." For Japanese, the bomb bequeathed on Japan "its postwar mission for peace." I suppose both stories have lasted in part because postwar history has supported them: a peaceful, prosperous Japan, the US-Japanese alliance, the threat of nuclear war, and so on." The moral ambiguity in regard to the dropping of the atomic bombs still continues, and Gluck says, *"It would be good for everyone not only to remember the lesson of the atomic bombs, but also to understand the history of how and why they were developed and used. Otherwise, it could unthinkingly happen again."*⁶

⁵ Ran Zwigenberg, The most modern city in the world: Isamu Noguchi's cenotaph controversy and Hiroshima's city of peace, *Critical Military Studies*, Volume 1, 2015 - Issue 2: Re-imagining Hiroshima

6

Ross Yelsey; *Newsweek Japan Reports on Carol Gluck's Seminar 'World War II in Public Memory'*

The discussion focused on the way public memory is created, maintained, and altered over time. Among the four “terrains of memory,” the terrain of popular culture, media, films, and museums proves more important than official government views or school textbooks. War memory is both consumed in the popular terrain and also produced there by groups seeking public recognition for their own stories. The media are an important terrain of popular memory, views of the war are as often influenced by the latest movie or debate in the media as they are by what people learned in school.

When public memory changes, those changes often come from outside – international politics or pressure – and from below – memory activists in society bringing their story forward. In every case domestic and international politics provides the determining context for memory change. The media interact with and are influenced from changing social, political, or moral values, in a sense, both producing and are produced by those values. This social embeddedness accounts both for media advocacy, and also media self-censorship,

However, today with media fragmentation and the expansion of social media, the influence of the media is less likely to reach “mass” audiences than self-selected communities of like-minded people who do not talk or listen to one another, thus intensifying bitter divisions in war memory even within one country, not to mention between them.

There is seldom a straight line between what an individual remembers about an event, especially traumatic, and what actually happened. We know, for example, that many chose not to talk about the violence and horror they had experienced. Some only spoke years later; and many never did. Those who did speak in later years were often responding to changes in war memory that now enabled, even welcomed, their stories. In short, the individual always remembers in a social context. Individual memories of later generations who did not experience the war are created in similar ways, but more indirectly, remembering stories of stories rather than the war itself. Yet these “post-memories” can be as powerful as those of those with direct experience of the war.

The various national memories of the war are “good memory, bad history” that distort or ignore historical facts. Understanding how public memory works, by viewing contentious issues of war memory in a global context rather than primarily from a single national or regional perspective, is a step towards “good memory, good history.”

‘Nationalised memory #2’ – Partition: between ignorance and forgetting?

The popular and ‘true’ Partition narrative is built around the experiences of urban poor and rural folk, and appears united in its misfortune irrespective of their social class, caste and gendered experiences. This “truth” of Partition migration, masks the complexity and the multiple levels within the population movement, like those of upper class and upper caste migrants and seldom frame the popular imagination of “what happened during the Partition”. The tension between the “differing” experiences and the master narrative of the ‘last’ journey, that seeks to condense, simplify and standardise the account of Partition migration, has not been adequately explored.

April 8, 2018, Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University
<http://weai.columbia.edu/portfolio/newsweek-japan-reports-on-carol-glucks-special-seminar-on-world-war-ii-in-public-memory/>

“One elderly man got angry at me for asking about it — he raised his voice and charged: Why do you want to talk about partition, everyone knows what happened. What happened? The British came, we had to leave, we are here. There is no use in talking about the past, it's done". By recounting an official history book (day-date-event) version of partition, many did not want to elaborate further on their personal experiences. However, if there were two or three people of the first generation present, then people were willing to remember. Perhaps the grandparents' need first to recount an official history relieves the tension of remembering the event. The same man who shouted at me "Why remember?" at me, at another later time told me of his life before partition and the difficulties faced by his family. The first generation revealed how they actively forgot partition in recounting an official rather than a personal history. The pain of remembering and the desire to not tell the next generation about the earlier hardships combine to create in the first generation an active forgetting. Their active forgetting has long-term consequences appearing as ignorance in the next generation. Ignorance is not forgetting, an erasure of knowledge, rather ignorance is an absence, which occurs when knowledge is not shared".⁷

The personal remembrances and forgetting are bound to how the Indian nation state remembered, forgot and ignored this event. The silence, the erasure, the generational forgetting through repression and the resulting ignorance has left its own legacy, there is an important role ignorance plays in right wing resurgence.

The familial silence around the shared links between Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims has translated into a structural ignorance, which places prior connections firmly in the past. Nationalists reclaim the past strategically using the ignorance of partition which has created a certain memory of the event. In particular, the Hindu revivalists can emphasize Muslim violence of the time, because Muslim assistance is part of the third generation's ignorance (and the first generation's forgetting). Partition in this reading "represents another loss: that of the unity-territorial and imagined of the nation." (Tharu 1994:75)⁸. Generational forgetting has led to an intergenerational ignorance. The distinction between forgetting and ignorance lies in that forgetting addresses the erasure of knowledge, while ignorance deals with the absence of knowledge. The relations of power are also distinctive. Forgetting is the power of erasure, obliterating and revising memories. Ignorance is the power of unawareness, contributing to a strategic space unhampered by memory. Both are used in different ways at the level of the family and the state.

Partition narratives in refugee families illuminate two unresolved modalities of ‘anti-memory’ (Werbner 1998)⁹, the tension between ignorance and forgetting. Focusing on ignorance allows an exploration of how people uneasily situate, reconcile, and reproduce past experiences while altering their identity over time. The intertwined ignorance on the part of partition families and the Indian state transformed the

⁷ Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj; (November 2000) IGNORANCE, FORGETTING, AND FAMILY NOSTALGIA: Partition, the Nation State, and Refugees in Delhi : Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice, Vol. 44, No. 2 . pp. 43

⁸ Tharu, S. 1994 "Rendering Account of the Nation: Partition Narratives and Other Genres of the Passive Revolution", Oxford Literary Review 16:69-91

⁹ Werbner, R. (1998) "Beyond Oblivion: Confronting Memory Crisis" in R. Werbner (ed.) Memory and the Postcolony, London: Zed Books, 1-20.

refugees into citizens. This shift in identity construction reveals how the symbolic capital of ignorance can make memory seem disjointed and thus politically productive.

The Epitaph Dispute – the Nationalisation of Trauma

Studs Terkel's book *The Good War* (1984) includes a conversation with two hibakusha. The postscript observes there is considerable discrimination in Japan against the hibakusha and their children socially as well as economically. "There are many among them who do not want it known that they are hibakusha."¹⁰

After the Occupation years, another discourse emerged in Japan, which tried to interrogate culpability and responsibility for the suffering of the A-bomb survivors. The so called Epitaph Dispute was ignited in August 1952 by the Indian judge Radhabinod Pal, the only judge in the International Military Tribunal for the Far East who had given a 1,235-page dissenting opinion on the guilt of the Japanese wartime leaders. He pointed to the "failure of the tribunal to provide anything other than the opportunity for the victors to retaliate". The British, Dutch and French presuming to judge Japan's conduct invited attention to their own much-despised imperialisms in Asia.

Justice Pal had no time for Japanese militarism that claimed millions of lives across Asia. Though "fiendish," he argued, Japan's expansionism was not unprecedented. Like all modern imperialist and industrial powers, Japan had sought to advance its outsized ambitions and respond to perceived threats. On his visit to Japan in 1952, asked to make speeches to introduce the idea of unarmed neutrality in the world, he passionately advocated the teachings of Gandhi and strongly opposed Japan's remilitarisation as then advocated by the US.

Visiting the Atomic Bomb Memorial in Hiroshima, he expressed his bitterness on the memorial's inscription, 'Let all the souls here rest in peace. For we shall not repeat the evil.' Pal said: "*Obviously, the subject of 'we' is Japanese. I do not see clearly what 'the evil' means here. The souls being wished to rest here are the victims' of the Atomic Bomb. It is clear to me that the bomb was not dropped by Japanese and the hands of bombers remain bloodstained. ... If not repeating the mistakes means not possessing weapons in the future, I think that is a very exemplary decision. If Japan wishes to possess military power again, that would be a defilement against the souls of the victims we have here in Hiroshima.*"

Coming at a time when the framing of "Hiroshima" as national trauma began, he not surprisingly became a hero to those Japanese who felt more "victim consciousness" than guilt over Japan's brutalizing of Asia, while many expressed their discontent with the dominant American justification for the atomic bombing, "to save lives of hundreds of thousands of American soldiers."¹¹

Commemoration of "Hiroshima" was fragmented along the line between citizens of Hiroshima and the rest of the Japanese. The former constructed a solution of

¹⁰ Terkel, Studs (1984). *The Good War*. Random House. p. 542.

¹¹ Nakajima Takeshi; *The Tokyo Tribunal, Justice Pal and the Revisionist Distortion of History*, *The Asia-Pacific Journal* | Japan Focus Volume 9 | Issue 44 | Number 3 | Oct 31, 2011

transnational remembering, which refused to render "Hiroshima" Japanese, whereas the latter bought into, as it were, a "rebirth frame," to downplay and even forget damages of the atomic bombing by emphasizing the recovery of "Hiroshima." These two groups engaged in two different sets of commemorative practices in isolation from each other. In this context, the "*hibakusha*" (A-bomb survivor), the unfinished tragedy, became invisible. In fact, until 1954, peace declarations at the Ceremony did not acknowledge the existence of survivors.

Between victimhood and pacificism

The presence of a Japanese fishing boat 70 miles away from Bikini Atoll on March 1, 1954, when the United States tested a hydrogen bomb, sometimes referred to as the 'third nuclear bombing of Japan', brought these two solutions to collide into a new narrative – and together produced a new form of commemoration and structure of feeling.

In this context, the A-bomb survivor, *hibakusha*, was elevated to the status of a totem, as the unifying symbol of the Japanese community's atomic victimhood. Consolidating the fragmented commemorative practices into a multi-vocal yet single frame of commemoration, a master commemorative solution of the nationalist remembering of the transnational Hiroshima. The Peace Memorial Ceremony on August 6, 1954, five months after the H-bomb fallout, reflected the new symbolic status of "Hiroshima." For the first time, members of the Imperial Family attended the Ceremony, and the local labor unions, which had been holding their own Peace Rally previously, joined the Ceremony at the Peace Memorial Park. For people from the right to the left in the political spectrum, "Hiroshima" was a nonpartisan, unifying symbol of the nation. While only a few thousands had attended the Ceremony during the previous years, approximately 20,000 people attended this time and the Ceremony was nationally broadcast, including the moment of silence at 8:15 a.m., the exact time of explosion of the atom bomb.

However, this master commemorative solution created two new problems. The first problem was the neglect of non-Japanese victims of the atomic bombings. It is estimated that more than 50,000 non-Japanese, including, but not limited to, Koreans, Chinese, and Americans, have been exposed to the atomic bombings. It was not until August 1990 that the mayor of Hiroshima referred to the existence of non-Japanese A-bomb victims and included apologies to Asian peoples in the peace declaration. The second problem was a corollary to the first: the tendency of commemoration of "Hiroshima" to deflect discussion of Japan's wartime aggression in Asia. By setting "Hiroshima" as the origin of postwar Japan, what had preceded before the bombing to be less visible.

On the other hand, a dedication to peace and neutrality was continued in grass-roots citizens initiatives and peace oriented associations, that contributed to later establishment of permanent museums. The Hiroshima Peace memorial museum and the Nagasaki atomic bomb museum traced the death and suffering inflicted on the Japanese. With testimonies, both written and oral, about the death toll, injuries, debilitating health consequences, environmental and material damage, came to serve as sites of commemoration as cities of peace (*heiwa toshi*). Despite experiencing ostracism and discrimination within Japanese society, *hibakusha* (A-survivors), shared testimonies about their experiences to visitors at the peace museum. Born out of a

‘popular pacifism’, a principled stand against war and violence, which emerged in postwar Japan, the earliest museums also served as means to display images and to come to terms with Japan’s military past.

The nationalist appropriation of "Hiroshima" as the heart of Japan's nuclear victimhood reinforced the Japanese victim consciousness. As a result, it became difficult for Japanese to remember that they had victimized Asian countries during World War II. It continues even today, where despite Justice Pal’s warning against an easy moral clarity about Japan’s war in Asia, his statue was opened at Yasukuni Shrine in 2005. His photographs and remarks on his visit to Japan in 1952 were invoked in the context of criticising the ‘Tokyo Trial view of history’ and the ‘masochistic view of history’. Justice Pal also appeared in the comic book *Sensō Ron (On War)* by Kobayashi Yoshinori.¹² His opinion has been selectively invoked in attempts to lend legitimacy, ignoring his criticisms of Japan’s invasions of Asia following the Manchurian Incident, and severe condemnation of Japan’s war crimes. Furthermore, they do not mention Justice Pal’s passionate call for the establishment of an international agency, unarmed neutrality, and his opposition to Japan’s remilitarisation.

“It is a complex view from South and Southeast Asia,” Dr. Sugata Bose, Historian, has said. “There is some degree of gratitude for the help that the Japanese provided, to the extent that such help was provided. At the same time, there was also grave suspicion of Japan.”

Memory in Oral History

Oral histories have played a part in paradigm shifts, especially shifts from physical causes or principles to social, cultural, or political ones. The value of memory in oral histories is to oppose the massive forces that grind up and spit out our humanity. This includes not only the flow of time, which we cannot reverse, but also the endless cycles of birth and death in nature. A consumer society is full of such forces, where acquiring, devouring and moving on to ever new things are the dominant compulsions. Oral history puts an essential stop to those meaningless, monotonous processes. In its very form, oral history affirms that human experience is not a consumer enterprise; rather, it is a matter of preserving life as much as it is a matter of preserving "lives". Among all the particular things that oral histories say, oral history itself says: Here, something about human existence is worth remembering and preserving; something is not consumable. Otherwise, life really is a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing.

By preserving the experiences we deem important by whatever particular criterion, we symbolize and show respect for human beings in general as ends in themselves rather than always as means to reach other things, in endless processes of consumption and repetition.¹³ As Alessandro Portelli writes, "*To tell a story is to take arms against the*

¹² Nakajima Takeshi; 2011: The Tokyo Tribunal, Justice Pal and the Revisionist Distortion of History, *The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus* Volume 9 | Issue 44 | Number 3 | Oct 31, 2011

¹³ James Bennett: Human Values in Oral History; *The Oral History Review*, Vol. 11 (1983), pp. 1-15 OUP

threat of time, to resist time or to harness it. The telling of a story preserves the teller from oblivion."¹⁴

A very human texture built into oral history is personality. You cannot take the 'I' out of the 'I remember' of oral histories any more than you can remove 'remember'. Respect for the viewpoint of the individual resides in the very form of oral history. This is a belief that each person has qualities that make him or her not necessarily representative but, on the contrary, unique and worthy of respect as a human being.

As Jonathan Schell wrote a quarter of a century ago, "Part of the horror of thinking about a [nuclear] holocaust lies in the fact that it leads us to supplant the human world with a statistical world; we seek a human truth and come up with a handful of figures. The only source that gives us a glimpse of that human truth is the testimony of the survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing."¹⁵ But this window into the past must contend with an era when the questions concerning "how recent history should best be remembered, preserved, and interpreted [have] become less academic and more acrimonious."¹⁶

Industrial disaster, corporate reluctance and oral testimony

From 1932 to 1968, the Chisso Corporation released methylmercury in wastewater from its chemical factory into the Minamata Bay. The plant modified its operations in August 1951 and started dumping large amounts of mercury directly into Minamata Bay only from that time, and it bio-accumulated in fish and shellfish.

In May 1956, four patients from the city of Minamata on the west coast of the southern island of Kyushu were admitted to hospital with severe and baffling symptoms. As time went on, more and more people became sick and many died. Doctors were puzzled by the strange symptoms and terribly alarmed. A riot by local fisherman in 1959 finally moved the government to investigate the cause of the illnesses and deaths. Even so, it took officials 12 years from the first deaths to finally admit the cause of the contamination as mercury poisoning and order a halt to the mercury dumping into Minamata Bay.

One of the effects of all this was a process of re-thinking 'developmentalism' in civil society. This is particularly well illustrated by the 'Minamata Declaration' initiated by Japanese civic groups, signed by three hundred and sixty NGO representatives from Asia and the Pacific and adopted by thousands of NGO activists gathered in the city of Minamata in 1989. This was the first significant call to re-thinking 'developmentalism' in the region initiated by Japanese social action groups., which have echoed in the following networks among NGOs of the region. Muto Ichiyo's keynote speech at the meeting to draw the first Peoples Plan for the 21st century (PP21) called 'An Alliance of Hope', introduced the word '*janakashaba*' from the Minamata dialect, meaning "a world that does not stand like this", accepting that

¹⁴ Alessandro Portelli, "'The Time of My Life': Functions of Time in Oral History," International Journal of Oral History, 2 (June 1981): 162

¹⁵ Jonathan Schell, Fate of the Earth, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1982.36

¹⁶ Museums Management Media and Memory.pdf

there can be a break from what we are, what we have and what we are resigned to accept.¹⁷

Raising Minamata, Bhopal and Chernobyl as benchmarks of the time, the Declaration questions the nature of values in the modern knowledge system, the role of dominant enterprises and internal colonisation in the developmental process, and the role of states in protecting vulnerable people. It concludes that in additions to the struggles for subjugated peoples, it is also the trans-border political actions of the people, marginalising states and countering the power of international capital that will produce the 21st century that we hope for. Such political action, support and solidarity campaigns will gradually develop a 'new' people that transcend existing divisions.

Subsequently, in 1992, the Permanent Peoples Tribunal on Industrial Hazards and Human Rights invited doctors and community health activists to come to Bhopal and participate in a sharing of challenges, responses and initiatives by members from community organisations across Asia and elsewhere. At this event, the writer was witness to residents of Minamata pointing out the need for connecting with community groups, and find their own ways to begin the healing, in the absence of a governmental medical support system. One testimony from a Minamata disease victim declared that even if the problem of unrecognised victims was resolved, it did not erase the sadness of not having been granted recognition as a patient until the very end. *"We will have to go through the rest of our lives with these sick bodies and the feeling of not being able to accept things as they are... on the surface the conflict has ended, but the Minamata disease problem will not be over until the last of us dies."*

Similar testimonies visible at the Minamata Disease Municipal museum mention how the national and prefectural government, not to mention Chisso, did not fulfill their responsibility and deal with the damages for long. Restoration involves listening to each citizen's opinion, so the governments and Chisso can both understand what people really need in this area, so that one day all can talk about Minamata disease as it is, and not as "a disgusting thing which had happened". Discovering the effects of Minamata disease through stories of everyday survival is an important step in learning to cherish their life.

The aftermath of the Bhopal Gas Disaster brought about a stirring of interest in the lax environmental and health regulation of industrial enterprises. It prompted changes in law and a new citizens interest in the industrial complexes in and around their neighbourhoods. Unfortunately, with little encouragement from local governments, these middle class initiatives came to nought and the law that makes a place for citizens' initiatives remains unimplemented and untried. If Bhopals are not to recur, then community action and initiative is a must; but in an environment that serves up corporate India as utopia, there is little hope that communities will see themselves as watchdogs of industry's depredations.

The emerging stories from Bhopal or Minamata show that every company has secrets to hide, secrets that affect the lives of thousands of people - whether it is about the toxic nature of the products they manufacture, their production processes or the manner in which they dispose of industrial waste or about what and how they acquire, store and transport intermediate products. A first step is to ensure public disclosure of

¹⁷ Global Visions: Beyond the New World Order, edited by Jeremy Brecher, John Brown Childs, Jill Cutler, 1993, South End Press, Boston.

relevant information and a second is to seek compliance with the laws of the land. Both at Minamata and Bhopal this did not happen. It is only if the dead and the dying in Bhopal are allowed to speak and are heard that such macro issues as industrial safety and industry's obligation to the people, including its workers, the consumers of its products and those living in its neighbourhoods, can acquire clarity and relevance.¹⁸

At a time when many powerful forces (from history writers, the corporate media, the 'common' sense of our times) write histories on the basis of un-archived moments, do we really have a choice in forgetting the silences. Ignoring them allows the distortion of pauses and silences for ignorance, or consent, or triviality and unimportance, and in all cases, inconsequentiality.

Given these circumstances, scholars and community activists use the power of community narratives and storytelling to proposed another, possibly more viable alternative to turning away. This invites an expanded, and not reduced sense of history and building an archives of details that provokes more contestation. If silence is not an absence, listening to community voices demands we listen to the silences, to trace as far as possible the itinerary of suppression.¹⁹

The important question in a study of memory is not how accurately a recollection fitted some piece of a past reality, but why some historical actors constructed their memories in a particular way at a particular time. Memory is not the retrieval of stored information, but the putting together of a claim about the past state of affairs by means of a framework of shared cultural understanding.²⁰ The legacy of these tragedies, and sharings of experience has led to a culture of knowledge creation, which emphasizes the integration of knowledge with life in its totality, central to initiatives that emphasise ideas of justice and peace.

¹⁸ Proceedings of the Permanent Peoples Tribunal on Industrial Hazards and Human Rights, Bhopal, First Session, 19-23 October, 1992.

¹⁹ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999): *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

²⁰ Elizabeth Yakel, (Spring, 2000), *Museums, Management, Media, and Memory: Lessons from the Enola Gay Exhibition*, *Libraries & Culture*, Vol. 35, No. 2, University of Texas Press. pp. 296