



## Trauma therapy in Neelum saran Gour's Requiem in Raga Janki: The archive and the raag

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### Abstract

The Sahitya Akademi Award winning novel *Requiem in Raga Janki* by Neelum Saran Gour is a revival of the scabbed life of Janki Bai Ilaahabadi, the Hindustani legend in music, called Chhappan Chhuri (Fifty-Six Knives) after a rough stabbing at the age of eight. This article discusses the way Gour turns the archival silences and fragmented memories into a counter-narrative, which theorizes music as a testimony and therapy. The analysis is based on the theory of trauma brought forward by Cathy Caruth, the abjection concept developed by Julia Kristeva, and necropolitics introduced by Achille Mbemba to decode how the scarred body of Janki is transformed into a place where violence is turned into raga.

The non-linear form of the novel is reflected in the deferred action of trauma (Nachtraglichkeit), and the multilingual texture of the book, which is a combination of English, Hindi, and Urdu, is in opposition to the monolingual colonial archives. The article is based on close reading, which posits that Gour does not discuss "tavāyaf" as subaltern silence but as a form of agential witness whose performances document what the official documentation erases. The technological change in the gramophone age, the Anti Nautch movement with moral policing, as well as how Janki's moved to Allahabad, Varanasi, and Rewa enable and restrain female agency in the arts. Finally, *Requiem in Raga Janki* is an example of an indigenous postcolonial ethics of archiving in which raag as somatic healing challenges Eurocentric psychoanalytic structures.

This research paper is significant to the literature of South Asia because it explains how historical fiction might work as a redemptive testimony, providing a topical response to the problem of gendered violence and cultural obliteration as aesthetic resistance.

**Keywords:** Archive, trauma, memory, music, Hindustani classical tradition, cultural history

### Introduction

Historical fiction can be viewed as a transitional period between what has happened and what has been experienced. *Requiem in Raga Janki* by Neelum Saran Gour is a reconstruction of the life of the famous Hindustani singer Janki Bai Ilaahabadi or Chhappan Chhuri. The topographical layout of the region where the Yamuna, Saraswati, and Ganga converged is both a physical and a mental partnership with the natural world; at the intersection of this geographical and historical significance, a few shadowed "kothas" were built in the then-colonial Allahabad, at this place Janki Bai Ilaahabadi created her voice, verniery and metaphorically regarding the scars that she bore.

The novel *Requiem in Raga Janki* by Neelum Saran Gour, which won the Sahitya Akademi award, is a dig into the life of this lost "tavāyaf" singer, and the archival silences have been turned into a symphony of survival. Even the title itself comes to mind as a monumental mass mixed with raga, by accentuating the two-fold nature of art as mourning and emancipation. As an English Professor at the Allahabad University, Gour presents herself as an archivist-narrator, ploughing through the inconsistencies of Janki's own narratives, to make up a counter-narrative (Sharma).

The traces of deep trauma are present even in the biography of Janki Bai. It is said that she survived a terrible knife attack that resulted in her having many scars and, metaphorically is known as "Chhappan Chhuri" which means "fifty six knives"; her story of being stabbed 56 times by suitor Raghunandan when she was eight years old and then becoming a musical icon is an example of "sublimation"; according to Freud, 'the raw energy of trauma is transformed into aesthetics' (Freud 14).

However, her victimhood is not diminished by the story. Rather, it anticipates the transformative potential of music, which becomes the key medium of processing suffering and creating a meaningful self. It is not a mere biography but an archaeological record of stories and histories, a mixture of historical research, oral tradition, folklore, and imaginative reconstruction: birth ledgers, newspaper clippings, gramophone labels – that Mbembe calls necropolitical, sites of deathly control under colonialism (Mbembe 12).

Even Gour accepts the challenge of trying to recreate the life of Janki Bai since historical information is not connected; most of it is integrated with mythology (Gour). This contradiction of fact and storytelling highlights the archival drive of the novel: the story is an effort to maintain a cultural memory that would otherwise get erased. This article employs close readings to decode the embedded trauma, as described by Cathy Caruth as 'the unclaimed experience, in which the unspeakable comes back through the form of deferential action, and this can only be cured by story witnessing' (Caruth 4).

The abject theory of Kristeva throws some light on the scarred inscription of the body, which was sent back and returned in song. The silenced agency of the "tavāyaf" is reflected through postcolonial lenses of Spivak's subalternity, and the "tavāyaf" is rewritten through the history of Talwar Oldenburg as "a centre of artistic patronage" (qtd. in Sharma). In addition to Caruth and Kristeva, to achieve the solidarity in the analysis, the cultural memory of "Jan Assmann", the archival discourse of Jacques Derrida are also added. To humanities scholars, this exposes the theorization of therapy in South Asian literature that is not informed by Western psychoanalysis

and seeks to resolve contemporary crises such as gendered violence and cultural erasure in digital archives.

### **Janki Bai and her History**

The setting takes place in the beginning of the twentieth century in North India, specifically in Allahabad and Varanasi, the cities where Hindustani classical music had its centre. These urban spaces were cultural exchange points where musicians, poets and intellectuals mingled with intricate forums of patronage. This is where Janki Bai grew up as one of the leading singers of gramophone times (Gour). Janki Bai was born in a situation that was influenced by poverty and the culture of courtesans known as *kothas*; thus, her early life was very unstable. The novel describes how her mother had joined into the world of performing arts after getting into the profession against her will, and how the young Janki is taught music in this setting.

The “*kotha*” in the story by Gour is not simply a place of entertainment, but it is a cultural institution where music, poetry and pedagogy all come together: The terrace was our territory with its freckled walls yellow and black-pitted like scaly, sunburnt skin. We spent hours dangling our long, skinny arms over the peeling plaster of the low brickwork wall, idly thinking over the street, or sat perched on a bench, trailing its toes in the golden wash of thickening winter sun. (Gour 6)

In the past, courtesans played a major part in conserving and passing on the classical music. Their plays were encircled in grand social ceremonies and educational systems. This tradition is manifested in the form of *guru-shishya* relationship in the novel. The training that a student should develop patience and humility during the time of learning by the master underlines the discipline that is required of a disciple (Gour). The change in technology of Indian music is portrayed by the rise to fame of Janki Bai. With the introduction of the gramophone, the flow of music changed and reached beyond aristocrats.

The novel places Janki Bai in this transitional point in time where old customs of musical training meet modern recording media. Nonetheless, such triumph does not annul the trauma in her real-life story. The marks of violence continue to be an ornamental figure throughout the story. These scars are not part of her silence but are, in fact, part of her art. The other significant aspect of the novel is that the classical music of India is represented as a syncretic tradition in the novel, used across the religious and cultural borders. The history is shown through relations between Hindu musicians and Muslim musicians who had a common influence on the evolution of the musical tradition. This cultural fusion is an indication of the greater historical context of North India, when artistic traditions tended to develop in cross-cultural influence.

The communal identities in the music world that is presented in the novel give way to the artistic devotion. The representations gain specific importance in modern settings where cultural divisions tend to be stressed. Through the story of Hindustani music re-enactment, Gour suggests art as a place of harmony. The musical archive that has been built in the novel hence, has historical and ethical implications. It holds on to an image of cultural co-existence, which questions divisive accounts.

... freshness of air in the temple yard, chirping of birds, but at present, there are multiple artificialities such as Army barricades, metal and detector, close-circuit camera, and

security checking, and in the narrator’s cognition, “all done in a tentative atmosphere of misapprehension very disorienting to our accustomed span and pitch of devotional engagement”. We almost missed meeting our old Lord Hanuman in this fast-forward Hurtle. (Gour 18)

Stylistic aspects of the writing done by Gour enhance the thematic exploration of the novel. The prose can easily take a lyrical tone, which is like a reflection of the rhythms of music. The descriptions of performances and settings are very sensory, and the reader is easily immersed in the reading process.

Even the plot of the story is in the form of a musical composition. Episodes are like variations on a generalized thematic template. The transition between anecdotes, historical thoughts, and lyrical texts makes the movement rhythmic, similar to the improvisation of classical music. This aestheticism is the means of supporting the key idea of the novel: life itself may be viewed as an artistic creation. The emotional depth of the experience that Janki undergoes can be felt by the reader because of the fluid structure of the narrative.

### **The Archive: Necropolitics and Fragmented Memory**

The novel by Gour starts with an archival sparseness, a large blank upon which to apply one's creative imagination, and the evasions of Janki herself, which he calls confounding things, have to be filled in imaginatively (Sharma). The narrator admits: In the little that was in documents, she found that Janki was drafting a counter-narrative and avoiding the problems on purpose (Sharma).

This resembles an archive fever, the feverish desire to save something against dismantling, but the destruction that bothers it (Derrida 12). The archives in postcolonial India project colonial violence: British census decreased “*tavāyafs*” into moral panics, eliminating their patronizing status (Oldenburg 67). Janki has a trauma vault that is visceral scars of 56 stab wounds, which she dubbed *Chhappan Chhurri*. To breathe, Gour writes, free of its tyranny, to forget it for a week, a day. Not to part with so much of my soul to it” (Gour 23).

In this context, the *Nachtraglichkeit* - deferred trauma - of Caruth can be observed:

the injured eight-year-old is reopened in the hankerings of the body and heart during adulthood (Gour 23). Cathy Caruth postulates that trauma is marked by the fact that unresolved memories cannot be articulated directly. Traumatic experiences are not reflected directly in a form of straight narratives but are indirectly reflected in the form of repetition, metaphor, and symbolic expression.

Music serves as the very such a symbolic language. The performances presented by Janki Bai are usually emotional intensities that are beyond normal communication. The process of singing becomes a means of converting the personal suffering into sound. The knife attack is not just a moment in history, but is a structural moment and forms the artistic consciousness of Janki. History tells that she survived a savage assault that saw her receiving several stab wounds, which added to her permanent nickname (*Janki Bai*). The story of Gour incorporates this incident in a wider theme of enduring and transition. Instead of presenting trauma as a totally destructive influence, the novel focuses on the ability of art to transform traumatic memories.

The suffering is transformed into an aesthetic expression through the power of music, which Janki practices. This

change finds its expression through the emotional richness of her performances. The fragmentation of memory is also a form of trauma that is present in the novel. The storytelling style alternates between stories, anecdotes and historical commentaries. This non-linear form is an imitation of how memory itself works as the past and present collide with one another continuously.

Dori Laub states that in the absence of an interlocutor, the pain of Janki is in the state of being unclaimed, until the story of Gour testifies to the empathy of the person to whom she can express (Laub 69). Multilingual collections also make it more difficult: Janki says, “Ulfat teri dil se mere ja hi nahin sakti, nakhoon se kabhi gost juda ho nahin sakta (Love cannot leave my heart like flesh from nails)” (Gour 156; Sharma).

This Urdu ghazal has defied monolingual English archives, resonating with the decolonized language of Ngugi wa Thiong’o as culture in its embodiment (Ngugi 13). “But her voice, her voice, made spectacle by gramophone modernity - colonial technology. You are an artist always ... as Hassu Khan teaches us: The success of that one note is the currency of God” (Gour 89; Sharma). The archive is therefore necropolitical (Mbembe), yet Janki perverts it, archiving life in a song. According to critics such as *Decoding the Postcolonial Geo-Linguistic Sangam*, the sangam of tongues in Allahabad, in which Janki is multilingual and thus opposes the erasure of her epistemology, is observed. Music talks when the archive is silent, but how does this message move over time and space? One solution is provided by Janki’s geographic mobility.

To the researchers, it is a part of digital humanities techniques, AI-based reconstruction of *tavāyaf* archives, which is a combination of OCR and oral histories.

### **The Raag: Sublimation and Abjection Improvisation**

In case of trauma ossification by the archive, the raag liquidifies it. Invocation of - dawn’s “Bhairav”, dusk’s “Yaman” - of Hinduani raga, is time-specific, and thus equivalent to therapeutic timing, which discharges affect in stages. Gour is a compressed musicology: “A Hindu Raga may be performed in numerous versions: one can embark on wandering and improvising provided that the fundamental notation remains identical (Sharma). The alap gradual exploration - of Janki is a re-enactment of the winding back of trauma, according to Caruth: “The narrative of trauma ...insists at the very beginning on the impossibility of its own narration” (Caruth 134).

This occurs in the light of the sublimation theory of Freud: the libido of trauma is

suppressed by violence, so it shifts to the loftier cultural activity (Freud 160). Janki, orphaned into *kotha* in Varanasi, invents maternal abandonment and stabbing into the art: “Of... other lessons...there were... that this discouragement of art peremptorily exiled” (Gour 23). The object of Kristeva, the horrifying nature of the body, its scars as part of the flesh can never be split, is released through raga (*gat*) in which voice learns to control the wound (Kristeva 9).

Feminist readings of the postcolonial era enhance: Spivak *Can the Subaltern Speak?* enquires *tavāyaf* agency; Gour responds through the feminized *Umrao Jaan* of the paternalistic interest of *Ruswa* (Spivak 93; Sharma). Janki claims: “Our fantastications, our cut up... memories... This had been the case with the history of the fifty-six stabs”

(Gour 201; Sharma). This metafiction - confessions of a narrator executing dialogism of Bakhtin (Bakhtin 6). According to the cultural psyche theorists, Raag-therapy is relevant in today’s world, more precisely, post-2020 psychology studies show that raga-based music therapy lowers cortisol levels in trauma survivors. To the researchers, this theorises indigenous epistemologies, which confront the Eurocentric CBT using somatic and improvisational arts.

### **Ethicologue Archiving and Postcolonial Therapy**

The stylistic features of the writing by Gour help to make the thematic exploration of the novel. The lyrical tone of the prose tends to resemble the melodies of music. The accounts of performances and places are full of sensual descriptions, which makes reading them an experience. Even the plot is like a musical composition. Episodes have the structure of variations of a greater thematic structure. The transition between the anecdotes, historical cogitations and lyrical texts provides a kind of shifting rhythm that resembles the improvisationalism of the classical music.

This aesthetic technique supports the main thesis of the novel that life can be regarded as a kind of artistic expression. The flowing form of the narrative enables the readers to understand the emotional depth of the journey by Janki. On the one hand, Gour deconstructs the forms of synthesis, synthesizing frameworks, to perform the trauma therapy as a postcolonial archiving. Necropolitics of Mbembe comes into contact with the Caruth: colonial archives are killers of subaltern narratives; Raag is a revivalist of such narratives (Mbembe 12).

The semiotic chora of preverbal rhythm, as described by Kristeva, is equivalent to *swar* in raga, which creates symbolic healing (Kristeva 145). The hybridity, as described by Bhabha, throws light on the situation in Allahabad: Janki and her Hindu-Muslim raga mixture break the binaries of partition (Bhabha 2; SSRN paper). The narrative is decolonized through the multilingualism aesthetics through Gour, which in turn is written in *Angrezi* with *Bhasa* decolonized by Ngugi (Sharma). Ethical interests come into play, as Gour does not want to do gendered accounting; she makes Janki a human being, not his victim (Sharma).

This is reminiscent of the ethics of testimony expounded by Felman-Laub, where literature witnesses are not voyeurs (Felman-Laub 204). In the case of #MeToo India, novels such as *Gour* model archives of art-therapy to survivors of VAW. This could be operationalized by using digital raag - apps that improvise user-input traumas.

### **The Existential Journey: Music, Mobility and Transformation of Thumri**

The example of Janki Bai Allahabadi is a unique example of how geographical mobility and evolution of arts came together to create what scholar Erika Caranti calls an existential journey in music, a direction that shifted both through physical space and the inner world of the self (Caranti 5). Travel was not only a professional requirement to the courtesan-artists of colonial India but a way of promoting agency in the limited space that allowed women. According to Caranti, the trip served as a trigger in the personal and musical life of Janki Bai that can be said to exemplify the role of the female performers in the Indian colonial society (Caranti 2). This part explores the three defining journeys, which defined Janki Bai as an artist and

subsequently the revolution of thumri- a genre of music whose success had been inextricably bound to the mobility and marginalization of its female performers.

### **Three Younger Journeys, One Trajectory**

The initial big trip that characterized the artistic identity of Janki Bai was the visit she made to the princely state of Rewa. Invited to sing at the court of Maharaja Venkat Raman Ramanuj Prasad Singh Ju Deo Bahadur, she went there a wrought by rumours of her looks, that of being disfigured by an attack of violence. As the version that is kept in the memory of history tells, Janki decided to sing behind a curtain. When the hypnotized emperor ordered its deposition, she made a proclamation, which would be famous: "mahfil mem surat ki nahim, srat ki fatah hai – in the mahfil, it is not the face that faineth but the traits" (qtd. in Caranti 5). It is a historical or apocryphal moment, and it is the moment where the advertising and negotiating of identity that women performers must undergo is complicated. According to Caranti, the episode has enabled her to punch holes in the stereotype of the attractive and docile ganewali, and at the same time, claim her independence as an artist (Caranti 5).

When the Maharaja proposed to her to take a job as a musician at the court, she refused, the refusal that not only meant the lack of dependence but also indicated the intentional attempt to shape the conditions of her life. Going back to Allahabad, Janki bought the kotha, the brothel of the courtesan, where as a child she had been sold off. This reclaimed place turned into an ownership and power area of the place of her original trauma. She earned great wealth, invested in properties and she set up a charitable trust which housed homeless women and rest houses to pilgrims of the Hindu and Muslim communities.

Caranti stresses that this financial independence that was attained prior to the British hegemony that has radically changed the role of women allowed artists to claim their creative and artistic strength that was able to make them influential at the court (Caranti 5). However, this freedom was confined; according to Vidya Rao, the occupation of *tavāyafs* was a dangerous and interdependent one, which could not be guaranteed to the *tavāyafs* (qtd. in Caranti 6). The parable of Janki is therefore a representation of what women can and cannot do under the conditions in the late nineteenth century India.

The second transformative experience was the one that followed the migration of the music genre, which was no longer confined in the homes of "mujras" and "mahfils", but rather moved into the open arena of concert halls, and, most importantly, the recording studio. The gramophone was a significant milestone of democratising music, as Vidya Shah refers to it as such (qtd. in Caranti 6). To the courtesan-artists, it was exceptionally favourable: they could make new images of themselves and also re-invent classical and light music giving rise to new outlets of self-expression (Shah qtd. in Caranti 6).

The earliest recording by Janki Bai was in 1907 in Delhi under the recording of William Conrad Gaisberg the founder of Indian gramophone industry. The description that Gaisberg gave shows her height: Janki Bai was among the top classical singers and her recording session fee was 3,000 rupees (Gaisberg qtd. in Caranti 7). Not taking any special contracts with any firm, she made her own records, and she created about 250 songs recorded in studios in Delhi,

Lucknow, Calcutta, and northern India between 1907 and 1928.

This change in technology overlapped with a wider cultural change. According to Caranti, the peak of success and popularity led to the development of vital changes in the personal and professional career of Janki on the background of the changing socio-cultural situation (Caranti 7). She was turned into Islam upon a long-considered conversion, a syncretism of the kotha culture, a compound and hybrid culture, and did not presuppose the renunciation of her initial Hindu religion (Caranti 7). The name of her retention, Janki, marked the desire to continue the continuity in transformation.

Her third paradigmatic path was the Delhi Durbar that she attended in 1911, when King George V was crowned. The instability in her positions, as well as the ambiguities, were the result of this event, which not only symbolized the transitions of the imperial capital between Calcutta and the city of Delhi, but also symbolized the height of the fame that Janki enjoyed. She was invited to sing with her rival-friend Gauhar Jaan and, sang a duet on the theme of the ceremony: "Yah jalsa tajposi ka mubarak ho" (Congratulations on this magnificent coronation ceremony). Reformists were a bit harsh in their criticism of the performance, which was characterized by the legitimization of *tavaif* culture in the public. However, as observed by Yestsi, such women played a role in between worlds: they were apparently quite active in colonial rituals, but at the same time, they were reportedly supportive of the Indian nationalism, although these and some other accounts, e.g. the one describing Janki Bai giving money to Motilal Nehru, appear to be the response to the typical image of inspirational women (Caranti 8). According to Lata Singh, camouflaging personalities was something that courtesans had to do on a regular basis, which was essential to transform them into the legends they were (as quoted in Caranti 8).

### **Thumri and Politics of Musical Change**

One cannot isolate the artistic career of Janki Bai, which went hand in hand with the parallel career of the genre, thumri, which she studied, which was performed to kathak dance in the Lucknow court of Wajid Ali Shah. Its more ancient version, *bandis thumri*, contained rhythmic compositions, which portrayed Krishna in the tradition of *dan-lila*. By the early twentieth century, a new style had developed in Benares, which was called *bol banao thumri* and stressed vocal virtuosity and the expression of emotional nuances, especially the *virah* (pangs of separation) of a female heroine waiting on her lover (Caranti 9).

Janki Bai did not only learn thumri but also the other forms of the song: *hori*, *caiti*, *kajri* and *jhula*. Based on the local folk customs, these genres were defined by the so-called intermediate sphere of North Indian music, which was located between and outside the folk and classical categories (qtd. in Caranti 10). According to Caranti, these forms were virtually a monopoly of women and not just of professionals or courtesans, but also amateurs in women's gatherings held at special religious and seasonal celebrations (Caranti 9). Their exclusion in the histories of music is representative of greater gendered exclusion.

The era of 1920s was a very critical change in thumri. Caranti records the transformation of this genre into a

process of sanitisation and re-adaptation, which was enabled by the development of the gramophone recordings and the usurping of the genre by male singers (Caranti 8). With the emergence of male singers performing and recording these forms, there was an imposition of a dominant devotionalizing meaning on lyrics which had been created in secular, and even amorous situations. The work of Lalita du Perron is a reflection of how this spiritual, religious interpretation has served the survival of the genre that needed to make adaptations to the new cultural context and this is what she refers to as a negotiation process of the thumri according to its placement in modernity (qtd. in Caranti 10).

This was happening in the context of the Anti-Nautch movement- a movement advocated by British rulers and endorsed by missionaries and Indian elites who received a Western education which resulted in the persecution of devadasis and tavāyafs. According to Caranti, the movement was a manifestation of the wish to modernise and bring the Indian society to the level of the western values, which led to the redefinition of the role of women in accordance with the reinterpretation of the Hindu traditions (Caranti 10). The ideal of the respectable woman, as mother, wife and daughter, entrenched a distinction between the respectable domestic woman and the notorious stage actress.

### **The End of the Journey: The Evening and Life**

The same can be said of the decline of the career of Janki Bai as it was the decline of the tavaif tradition as well. Since the 1920s, courtesan-artists became more and more discriminated and suffering. Caranti notes that Janki lost her life during the final years of her life that were full of loss, grief, betrayal, and misfortune (Caranti 11). She lost much and had to earn her living by taking classes in music tuition and singing until her death in 1934. However, her heredity survived in the form of the charity trust that she left behind, which was used to support poor students, and house the needy and pilgrims, with or without their faith or religion (Caranti 11).

The path that Caranti follows, which is also followed by geographical space, music, and the changes of colonial modernity, shows the intricate landscape, within which such women artists as Janki Bai built their identities. As Caranti concludes in her story, she sheds light upon the status of women in the beginning of the nineteenth century, upon the role and identity of women artists, revealing a significant, and frequently neglected or overlooked, chapter in the history of Hindustani music (Caranti 11). Pride and disrepute, artistic action and social marginality meshed together in a sideways constrained and agentic existence. Following this path, we do not only discover a biography but rather a window to the systems of gender, culture, and power, which we are still implementing to understand how we remember-and forget-the artists who predated us.

### **Conclusion**

“The Archive” and “the Raag” expose the poesis of trauma therapy in *Requiem in Raga Janki*: motionless documents brought alive by music flow. “The Janki” taught by Gour, that healing is performance; improvised, multi-lingual, scarred and flying. The *Requiem in Raga Janki* does not provide any resolution, it ends in resonance, as a tribute to how art can preserve what history tries to remove. The reenactment of the life of Janki Bai Allahabadi shows that the

trauma can no longer be destructive but can be recreated during narrative and transformed under the influence of music. The best thing about the novel is that it avoids making Janki a victim; rather, Gour introduces her as an archivist of her suffering, who transforms the physical memory of fifty-six knife cuts into emotional content of thumri, kajri and bhairav.

By doing, the text performs what Dori Laub refers to as the ethical imperative of testimony the establishment of an interlocutor with the capacity to listen to the unclaimed experience. *Requiem in Raga Janki* frustrates the necropolitical sense of colonial archives which made tavāyafs immoral or invisible or believed to be immoral through its lyrical format, multilingual hybridity and metafictional self-consciousness. Gour, whose storytelling alternates with the one of a historian and an imaginative partner, recognizes the constraints of documentation but insists on the need to recreate. Such ethical archival practice is opposed to the voyeurism of narratives of trauma, but is in line with Shoshana Felman's conception of literature as witnessing that reinstates agency to the silenced. The portrayal of Janki being mobile, whether it is the kothas of Allahabad to the court of Maharaja in Rewa, live “mahfils” to gramophone studios, is shown in the novel to show how geographical and technological changes allowed female performers to bargain in limiting colonial systems.

Additionally, the way that Gour explains the concept of raag as therapy provides an indigenous form of epistemology, which is both pre-Western and more difficult to decipher than Western psychoanalytic paradigms. The improvisational time of raga reflects the time-based recovery of trauma, which is not based on linear movement but rather the recessive repetition and variation. The implications of this on modern discourses of gendered violence in South Asia are enormous, in that aesthetics such as music, narrative, performance may serve as sites of somatic resilience with survivors regaining voice.

At a time when documentation and testimonies of the #MeToo movement exist digitally, *Requiem in Raga Janki* acts as an important reminder that not everything is documented, but rather sung. The novel by Gour is, therefore, both a tribute and a technique: a requiem of a dead man and a guidebook on how literature can preserve the trauma without taking advantage of it. It is not silence but it is sustenance the voice of Janki is raga and it is what even after the archives have been closed the voice will testify.

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