



The Scarred Womb

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Ruchika Wason Singh is a visual artist, art educator and independent researcher based in Delhi, India. In 2016, Ruchika founded A.M.M.A.A. -The Archive for Mapping Mother Artists in Asia, a project fostering the mapping, visibility and mobility of mothers/artists of Asian origin through documentation, workshops and artist residency programs.

The Scarred Womb series, shared here, aims to create a visual resonance with the emotional value of the trauma of loss. Through forms created with pencil, ink and paint, followed by scraping, etching, and digging into the paper's surface, these works explore embodied experiences of the trauma of communal violence.



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Works on Paper

My works are an expression of my observations and experiences of communal riots in India as a child. Though the trigger point to creating these paintings is the 1984 Sikh pogrom, the art pieces are not limited in their affiliation to a specific community or historical time frame. I am interested in the embodied and psychological experience of the trauma of communal violence, where maternal loss is the central concern of emotive expression. Situating the works in this context, they seek to evoke the affective quality created by the loss of the child for the mother; such that the protagonist of the narrative becomes the absence of the child.

A large number of the survivors of the 1984 pogrom were women, whose male kin, including children, were killed in the massacre. In the Delhi riots of 1984, I witnessed the crisis of human trust fueled by revenge and hatred. While I survived, the stories of those who lost members of their families, including children, became tales I heard and reheard. The emotional affinity embedded in my experience as a witness has re-emerged time and again, as a cyclical reality within the socio-cultural labyrinth of India. The anti-Muslim Gujrat pogrom in 2002, for instance, brought back memories of when the Sikh community was attacked, as the patterns of hate speech and organised violence, including sexual violence and violence towards infants and children, were repeated. Many of the testimonies I encountered felt similar to the acts of communal violence in 1984. Memory and its sentiments cut across time, identity and space to recall an unhealed experience.

The process of mark-making serves the purpose of creating a visual resonance with the emotional value of the trauma of loss. I see it as an anti-thought exercise rooted in intuitiveness, which spontaneously follows the rhythm of recall of the past. The marks created through sharp-edged cutters are forms within themselves. In continuity, they surface as erasures, disruptions and intrusions into the world of the mother and the child. The forms are drawn and painted with pencil, ink and paint, followed by scraping, etching, and digging into the surface of the paper. What emerges are images of catastrophe, grief and anguish. There is the scarred, unidentifiable body of the child and a ruptured landscape. To create and then to deface, seems like an act of mental recollection. While the body has vanished, the marks and the symbols of the scars created in the works bring the viewer to imagine what the body would have looked like, and what could have happened to make it disappear.



Ruchika Wason Singh, *The Scarred Womb-I*, ink, pencil & gouache on paper, 15 cms × 21 cms, 2023.



Ruchika Wason Singh, *The Scarred Womb-II*, ink, pencil & gouache on paper, 15 cms × 21 cms, 2023.



Ruchika Wason Singh, *The Scarred Womb-III*, ink, pencil & gouache on paper, 15 cms × 21 cms, 2023.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

