

EMPOWERING LIVES: The Journey of Jaycee Dugard, Elizabeth Smart, and Mukhtar Mai

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Abstract: Social activists and feminist scholars across the globe have endlessly stressed on the need for women to lend support to other women; for victims to help other victims and for survivors to aid other survivors. Empathy and compassion for fellow human beings is one of the possible ways of raising the standards of humanity. The present paper highlights the endeavours of Jaycee Lee Dugard who was illegally held captive for eighteen years, Mukhtar Mai, who survived a gang rape, and Elizabeth Smart, who suffered nine months of abduction and sexual abuse, to provide shelter and assistance to survivors like them and to make the society a better place to live in. While Smart and Mai are attempting to work against violence through spreading education and awareness, Dugard's foundation, 'Just Ask Yourself To Care' aims at not only providing support to the survivors of traumatic experiences but also helping their families to reintegrate into the society. Since the change is envisioned by those who are typically expected to have a submissive demeanour, there shall also be an attempt in this paper to trace the socio-cultural elements that facilitate or hinder such initiatives.

Keywords: Elizabeth Smart, Empowerment, Jaycee Dugard, Mukhtar Mai, Protected Spaces, Trauma.

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1. Introduction

...life has a way of throwing unexpected things in our direction, and sometimes we have to decide what we're going to do with the challenges we face.¹

The events that modify the seemingly natural functioning of daily life can be both foreseen and unanticipated. Since every human experience is examined through various interpretations, both these kinds are equally capable of producing positive and negative impact on one's life. However, owing to their nature, unanticipated events usually leave an individual in a state of ambiguity and as a result they might not generate a favourable response. Also, not all events at least immediately are harbinger of good change and are therefore most competent of bringing along distress. These events are turning points that entail "some degree of agency on the part of the relevant actor in whose life or domain the turning point presents."² Perhaps, it then stands true that irrespective of whether events offer suffering or pleasure, it is not beyond human endeavour to alter them in ways to serve one's best interest. Nevertheless, it demands a great strength of mind to look beyond sufferings to transform them into rewarding opportunities.

Suffering is, as Stoeber suggests, an "experience of emotional pain ... a painful state of consciousness that we wish we did not have to experience." It "can stimulate the search for life-enriching meaning, or it can lead to the development of facets of one's personality or character that make one a better or complete person, or it can awaken one to such beneficial qualities."³ Surely, each suffering cannot be channelized towards positivity and some might as well turn out to be purposeless but those

¹Elizabeth Smart, *My Story*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013, 316.

²Robbie Gilligan, "Positive Turning Points in the Dynamics of Change over the Life Course," in *Pathways of Human Development*, eds. Jay A. Mancini and Karen A. Roberto, Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2009, 16-17.

³Michael Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflection on Suffering, Compassion and Spiritual Transformation*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 20.

which lead to development often have the ability to outreach the boundaries of personal growth and contribute towards the good of humanity. In attempts to combat such situations of suffering, one does not just witness one's own growth but more often than not become empathetic towards the sufferings of others. This can further induce a desire towards creating change, to make the world a better place in every way possible.

Examining the lives of Jaycee Dugard,⁴ Elizabeth Smart⁵ and Mukhtar Mai,⁶ the paper highlights how certain pain inflicting events have not only helped these women towards self-exploration but have guided them into social activism of various kinds. Not essentially social activism always demands a pre-experienced tumult of sorts but the women under discussion have gained the particular insight of seeing and understanding the world only after undergoing unspeakable sufferings in their personal lives. The ordeals that Dugard, Smart, and Mai have experienced in their lives have turned them into important public figures, making them crucial for this study. These women have experienced sexual abuse in possibly its worst forms imaginable. And yet none of them have allowed their lives to be dictated by the brutality of these events. Advocating that the tribulations one experiences in one's life can to a great degree trigger one's latent physical and mental strength, Stoerber

⁴On the 10 June 1991, on her way to her school, Jaycee Dugard was kidnapped from the streets of Tahoe, California. In 2009 when she was discovered by the California police, she was twenty nine years old, a mother of two. For eighteen years, Dugard was kept as a captive and subjected to various sexual assaults in the backyard of her captor's house.

⁵When she was fourteen, Elizabeth Smart had been kidnapped at knifepoint from her home in Utah in 2002 by Brian David Mitchell. She was discovered after nine months. Her captor was determined to have multiple wives if not consensually then forcefully. And abducting Smart was one of his first attempts at obtaining the seven wives, he thought he was entitled to.

⁶In the year 2002, Mukhtar Mai, a Pakistani woman was gang raped by the men of a higher clan of her village in order to punish her for an 'honour crime' allegedly committed by her younger brother.

stresses, "...we overcome it and transmute it, and grow in various respects: we gain skills and knowledge, we become aware of life's gifts and pleasures, we become resilient to life's conflicts, or we acquire a depth of moral character not otherwise possible."⁷ Likewise, surviving major criminal offences of recent times has helped these women in gaining a transformative perspective of the social problems gripping the contemporary world.

2. Violence Against Women: Some Statistics

Across the world, women are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence irrespective of their nationality, age, class, income or education. Violence Against Women (VAW),⁸ including rape, murder, domestic abuse, kidnappings, child marriage, honour killings, foeticide, and female genital mutilation, is the most rampant sociological problem impeding the world's development and peace. According to a report by the UN, one in three women has experienced physical or sexual violence at some point in her life. Although 119 countries have passed laws against domestic violence, 125 against sexual harassment and 52 against marital rape, yet "more than one billion women worldwide are affected by VAW."⁹ In the year 2013, three women in Cleveland were discovered to have been held captive for more than a decade by a school bus driver in the basement of his house. In New Zealand, in the same year a group of young men calling themselves 'Roast Busters,' were

⁷Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy*, 20.

⁸Violence Against Women (VAW) is defined as any act of "gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of acts such as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." See, "The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics," United Nations Statistics Division, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worlds_women.html> (20.2.2016).

⁹"Close the Gap: How to Eliminate Violence Against Women Beyond 2015," OXFAM International, March 11, 2014 <www.oxfam.org/files/bn-close-gap-violence-women-2015-110314-en_0.pdf> (24.2.2016).

reported to have allegedly intoxicated underage girls to gang rape them. A pregnant woman, in 2014 was stoned to death outside the Lahore High Court for marrying the man of her choice. And more recently, while a student at Stanford University was charged with sexual assault of an intoxicated, unconscious woman, in India, a political leader has been arrested for raping a nursing student. These few cases chosen indiscriminately substantiate that despite all efforts, violence against women continue to persist. What shocks one about these incidents of violence is perhaps their occurrence in also liberal, developed and sensitised cultures, which to the naked eye seem immune to injustices of such gory detail.

These incidents do not just violate a woman's body, but usually have devastating psychological effect, leaving the victim trauma stricken. Psychoanalytical studies have constantly reiterated that since memories of a traumatic experience cannot be erased out completely, they often get triggered or revived by reminders even years after the event. Judith Herman states that "traumatic experiences overwhelm the ordinary system of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning" and those who have experienced trauma often find it difficult to invest trust and faith in human relationships, friendship, family and community. She believes that "a supportive response from other people may mitigate the impact of the event, while a hostile or negative response may compound the damage and aggravate the traumatic syndrome."¹⁰ It is precisely in this context that the society's role in helping victims recover from their trauma becomes significant.

Unfortunately, the sense of shame and stigma associated with the victims of sexual abuse in particular prove to be major hindrances in the path of their recovery because one feels ashamed in sharing it even with one's closest associate. As Herman asserts, "The issue of doubt becomes central to many survivors because of the immense gulf between their actual

¹⁰Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, New York: Basic Books, 2015, 61.

experience and the commonly held beliefs regarding rape ... Under these circumstances many women may have difficulty even naming their experience."¹¹ Recent figures show that in most countries, of the women who experienced violence, less than forty percent sought help of any sort and of those less than ten percent sought help from the police.¹² This underreporting by and large acts in favour of the perpetrators leaving the victims with a sense of denial, guilt and self-reproach. And in sexual assault cases which are reported, the floods of rumours, analysis, and the public and media's interest for details do not so much help the survivors as they deter them from recovering and reintegrating into the society. Since a traumatic experience can rupture one's sense of order and control, the establishment of safety becomes the most essential step towards healing. But because safety permeates from stable living conditions and absence of outside insecurities, it might not always be easy for the victims of sexual abuse to achieve this state.

Similarly, like most victims of sexual violence, Dugard, Smart, and Mai too have faced challenges beyond the event. And especially because their cases attracted immense media attention, they found it all the more difficult to reintegrate into the society. As Dugard in her memoir laments,

Sometimes I feel like I'm still a prisoner ... I have trouble untangling my past and my present. My past was spent in hiding and feeling nervous when I was out in public ... Now it is almost the same. Inside, I fight a war about being the person I want to be and tempering with that with who I need to be ... When will the battle end?¹³

However, despite these challenges which victims of such abuse experience, the three women under discussion have

¹¹Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 67.

¹²"The World's Women 2015: Trends and Statistics," United Nations Statistics Division, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/worlds_women.html> (20.3.2016).

¹³Jaycee Dugard, *A Stolen Life: A Memoir*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011, 229-230.

moved ahead with unshaken conviction in overcoming their trauma and aiding other survivors like them.

3. Empowering Lives

It is important to note that had they not met the terrible fate of falling prey to the vicious inhumanity perpetrated against women, Dugard, Smart, and Mai would have not made social activism the larger goal of their lives. But in involving themselves in activities which are intended to help others these women are perhaps simultaneously helping themselves. While discussing the essential stages of recovering from traumatic experiences, Herman argues that,

Most survivors seek the resolution of their traumatic experience within the confines of their personal lives. But a significant minority, as a result of the trauma, feel called upon to engage in a wider world. These survivors ... discover that they can transform the meaning of their personal tragedy by making it the basis for social action. While there is no way to compensate for an atrocity, there is a way to transcend it, by making it a gift to others. The trauma is redeemed only when it becomes the source of a survivor mission.¹⁴

Likewise, after spending considerable time with her therapist post her freedom, Dugard discovered within her the desire to transcend her tragedy and make it a gift to others by establishing the 'Just Ask Yourself to Care (JAYC) Foundation' in 2010. Herman further goes on to stress that recovery cannot occur in isolation and therefore "relatives or close friends who take on the task of participating in the survivor's safety system must expect to have their lives disrupted for a time."¹⁵ This awareness that it is not barely the victims but also their families which need help in reconciling with the traumatic event led Dugard to take up this cause:

When I recovered from my captors eighteen years later, my family needed help reconnecting. The process required an extensive, multi disciplinary approach to get through a very

¹⁴Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 207.

¹⁵Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 162.

difficult transition in our lives. We needed protection, expertise, support and the ability to make choices as we started our healing journey. I believe that families who survive major life traumas need and deserve the kind of support we received. Because of this belief my family has formed The JAYC Foundation.¹⁶

The foundation aims at providing assistance to families facing challenges post a traumatic event such as abduction, murder or even military deployment. Using various approaches, including traditional therapy, animal assisted therapy¹⁷ and other experimental therapies, Dugard and her team help families untangle the knots of disintegration, which they might be experiencing due to a crisis. In order to empower them against further harm caused knowingly or unknowingly by intrusive entities such as the media, courts or other political and social organizations, they encourage all the members of a family towards fostering a working relationship. The basic premise of all the programs and activities of the JAYC Foundation is towards creating 'Protected Spaces'. Since as discussed, establishment of safety is the primary step towards recovery, these spaces, which may or may not be physical locations, are meant to provide physical and emotional safety and a sense of security to the members of the concerned families. Besides providing support to families, the foundation also conducts workshops through its JAYC School Groups. These aim not just at raising awareness amongst school children but also teaching them to develop lasting bonds beyond their grade level, economic and cultural backgrounds. Dugard asserts,

My little sister inspired our program for school children. I learned that she was bullied and teased after I was kidnapped, which shocked me and made me sad. Children struggle to understand unusual situations like mine that are beyond ...

¹⁶Jaycee Dugard, "The JAYC Foundation, Inc," <<http://thejaycfoundation.org/about-us>> (20.2.2016).

¹⁷The horse therapy largely helped Dugard in her rehabilitation.

their level of experience. They can hurt each other when they are scared.¹⁸

The Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that during the year 2013-14, about 65 percent schools reported of having witnessed one or more incidents of violence and about 22 percent of students in the age group of 12-18 reported being bullied during the school year.¹⁹ Such environments in all likelihood hamper children's development and growth and therefore the workshops conducted by JAYC aim at eliminating such hostility by enhancing children's sense of responsibility, empathy and respect for each other.

Another distinguishing feature of the JAYC Foundation is its Law Enforcement Officers (LEO) program. Interestingly enough, the delay in her discovery due to missed clues by the Californian police triggered Dugard to introduce this program as an essential part of her foundation. According to Bureau of Justice Statistics, at the yearend 2014, about 1 in 52 adults in the United States was under community supervision. The figures include 47,08,100 adults being either on probation, parole or any other post-prison supervision.²⁰ While the goal of such supervisions is to help offenders rehabilitate and reduce the probability of them committing further crimes, these sometimes might lead the concerned officials in overlooking the prospect of greater criminal offence. A convicted sex offender, Philip Garrido, for example, was on parole when he kidnapped the eleven years old Jaycee and surprisingly for eighteen years the California police did not have the slightest clue of the activities in his backyard. After her discovery, the California Office of the Inspector

¹⁸"A Foundation of Healing, Reconnection," *The American Legion*, August 29, 2015 <<http://www.legion.org/convention/229685/foundation-healing-reconnection>> (20.2.2016).

¹⁹"Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2015," Bureau of Justice Statistics, May 4, 2016, <<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/iscs15.pdf>> (20.2.2016).

²⁰"Probation and Parole in the United States, 2014," Bureau of Justice Statistics, November 19, 2015 <<http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ppus14.pdf>> (20.2.2016).

General issued a special report on the failure of the California Department of the Corrections and Rehabilitation's supervision of the parolee suggesting that many warning signs were overlooked. Nigel Cawthorne mentions that the Inspector General David R. Shaw admitted to the negligence on the part of the department in paroling Garrido,

No one can know, had the parole agents had done everything right, whether we could have discovered Jaycee and her children any sooner. However, our investigations revealed that there were missed clues and opportunities to discover their existence sooner than they did.²¹

Therefore, the LEO program initiated training of law personnel to improve problem solving, communication and leadership skills and helping them to "discover that a life can be saved by taking the extra time to search a house or backyard."²² Focusing on "communication, teamwork, self-care and, above all, attunement and intuition" the purpose of the workshops under this program is

to enhance the protection and the experience of victims through the cultivation of awareness-based law enforcement practices. We believe law enforcement, including probation officers, can benefit from slowing down and reminding themselves that self-care, awareness and just plain common sense can change the outcome of their work.²³

Just as the lessons from her own case directed the course of Dugard's social activism, Elizabeth Smart too was governed by her abduction experience in her decision to advocate for children's rights. Founder of the Elizabeth Smart Foundation

²¹Nigel Cawthorne, *Against Their Will: Sadistic Kidnappers and the Courageous Stories of Their Innocent Victims*, Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 2012, 37.

²²Jaycee Dugard, *The JAYC Foundation, Inc.*, <<http://thejaycfoundation.org/programs/jayc-law-enforcement-officer-leo-workshops/>> (20.2.2016).

²³"A Foundation of Healing, Reconnection," *The American Legion*, August 29, 2015, <<http://www.legion.org/convention/229685/foundation-healing-reconnection>> (20.2.2016).

(2011), she is now a well-recognised American activist. Her foundation campaigns against child abduction and predatory crimes. Apart from attempting to empower children through education and awareness, Smart has actively participated in promoting various safety legislations within the United States such as the America's Missing: Broadcasting Emergency Response (AMBER) Alert,²⁴ the Adam Walsh Child Protection & Safety Act²⁵ and more recently has collaborated with the Operation Underground Railroad²⁶ to fight against human trafficking around the world.

In order to help other survivors like her, she has also contributed in creating a survivors guide, *You're Not Alone: The Journey from Abduction to Empowerment* published by the U.S. Department of Justice. One of the primary reasons for Smart to continue narrating her story through such media is encouraging others in doing the same. The National Sexual Violence Resource Center reports that 81 percent of women who have experienced sexual violence suffer from long term or short term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.²⁷ And according to Rape, Abuse &

²⁴"AMBER alert," Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AMBER_Alert> (15.3. 2016).

²⁵Adam Walsh Child Protection & Safety Act was brought into law by the U.S. President George W. Bush on July 27, 2006. Depending on the nature of offence, this law organizes criminals of sexual offences into three tiers. Tier 3, Tier 2 and Tier 1 offenders are required to update the investigating agencies about their whereabouts every three, six and twelve months respectively. See, "Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act," Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Walsh_Child_Protection_and_Safety_Act> (15.3.2016).

²⁶Operation Underground Railroad focuses on rescuing victims of human and sex trafficking, especially children. It is a non-profitable organization which works in consonance with governments across the world. See, "Operation Underground Railroad," Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Underground_Railroad> (15.3.2016).

²⁷National Sexual Violence Resource Center, "Statistics about Sexual Violence," 2015, <<http://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/>

Incest National Network, an anti-sexual assault organization in America, 33 percent of the women who have been raped contemplate and 13 percent of them actually attempt suicide.²⁸ However, being able to share the experience can, to a large extent, reduce such syndromes. Herman stresses that "The encounter with others who have undergone similar trials dissolves feelings of isolation, shame, and stigma."²⁹ Therefore, in sharing her story, she is helping those who have not been fortunate enough to unburden themselves of the trauma of such experiences.

Since sexual assault is the most underreported crimes, in encouraging victims of sexual abuse to speak out, Smart reaffirms the feminist perspective of 'the personal is political'.³⁰ She is not just attempting to emphasize that sexual assault cases need immediate addressal by civil and legislative bodies but also that there has to be a movement towards a complete eradication of such crimes against women and children. However, she strongly insists that it is essential for one to speak for himself or herself. Her foundation page very explicitly narrates its mission of encouraging children and women to come out of their darker experiences and begin their life afresh. This spirit of resilience in Smart and her foundation somewhere carries the echoes of her personal experiences which she carries forward in the public domain to transform the lives of other survivors. Reports

publications_ nsvrc_factsheet_media-packet_statistics-about-sexual-violence_0.pdf> (20.3.2016).

²⁸rainn.org, "Scope of the problem: Statistics," <www.rainn.org/statistics/scope-problem> (24.3.2016).

²⁹Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 215.

³⁰"The classic feminist slogan 'the personal is political' states a basic feature of feminist and gay politics, a link between personal experience and power relations. In many cases the power relations are immediately present in personal life, in matters conventionally thought 'private': housework, homophobic jokes, office sexuality, child rearing. Yet there is also a highly 'public' dimension of these politics." R. W. Connell, "The State, Gender, and Sexual Politics: Theory and Appraisal," *Theory and Society* 19, no.5 (Oct 1990): 507-544, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/657562>> (15.3.2016).

suggest that although there has been a decline in the numbers yet there are 288,820 victims (age 12 or older) of rape and sexual assault each year in the United States.³¹ Further, in 8 out of 10 cases of rape, the perpetrator is known to the victim.³² And two out of three of these cases go unreported.³³ This underreporting could bear several explanations, ranging from the victim's sense of shame and self-blame to the offender being a member of the family or a close associate. The sense of shame that comes with being sexually abused is alarmingly high in cases where the victim has been abused on college campus. Because some of them are survivors of 'incapacitated assault' that is, they are sexually abused while they are drunk,³⁴ the sense of guilt prevails and as a result 90 percent of such assaults which occur on campus go unreported.³⁵ Therefore, in sharing her experience time and again and motivating others to do the same Smart assists in embedding the personal experiences into the larger political concerns. Asserting that the solution to these personal experiences of abuse is political in nature, she writes,

I can't tell you how many times I've been approached by one of the victims of such a crime. It happens after every one of my presentations; someone in the audience will come to me ... Many of the victims have never told anyone before ... This is the thing that has fuelled my passion to keep sharing my story, to do everything I can to keep this issue alive.³⁶

Similarly, Mukhtar Mai is attempting to keep the issue of violence against women alive in Pakistan. According to Country Information and Guidance findings, Pakistan is ranked as the

³¹"Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics," <<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/victims-sexual-violence>> (15.3.2016).

³²"Statistics about Sexual Violence."

³³"The Criminal Justice System: Statistics," <www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system> (15.3.2016).

³⁴"Not alone: The First Report of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault," <<https://www.notalone.gov/assets/reports.pdf>> (20.2.2016).

³⁵"Victims of Sexual Violence: Statistics."

³⁶Smart, *My Story*, 315.

third most dangerous place for women in the world.³⁷ There is widespread violence in the form of honour killings, acid throwing, domestic violence, sexual assault, forced marriages, abductions and murder. The Aurat Foundation claims that on an average six women and girls are kidnapped and abducted per day, four are raped or gang raped, four are murdered, three commit suicide and at least two cases of honour killings occur every day in Pakistan.³⁸ From the ordinances such as Hudood,³⁹ *qisas* (retribution) and *diyat* (monetary compensation),⁴⁰ to the parallel justice systems such as *jirga*⁴¹ and finally to the high women illiteracy rate all contribute to the plight of women. The year 2015 also did not witness much difference in terms of an equitable and just environment within Pakistan. The Gender

³⁷Country Information and Guidance, "Pakistan: Women Fearing Gender-Based Harm/Violence," <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/500817/PAK_Women_Gender_based_harm_and_violence_feb_16.pdf> (20.2.2016).

³⁸Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation, "Violence against Women in Pakistan: A Qualitative Review of Reported Incidents," <<http://www.af.org.pk/PDF/VAW%20Reports%20AND%20PR/VAW%202014.pdf>> (20.2.2016).

³⁹Hudood Ordinance criminalises all consensual intercourse between adults outside marriage. Female minors can also be charged with *zina* (extramarital sexual intercourse), if the age of puberty is reached. Owing to this and its abuse by the patriarchy, if a woman is gang raped, only then it is considered *zina-bil-jaber* (rape), but if there is only one aggressor then it is considered *zina*. See, International Crisis Group, "Women, Violence and Conflict in Pakistan," <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/south-asia/pakistan/265-women-violence-and-conflict-in-pakistan.aspx>> (20.2.2016).

⁴⁰*Qisas* and *Diyat* allow a victim's family to pardon a killer in return for compensation. See, "Women, Violence and Conflict in Pakistan."

⁴¹*Jirga* is an assembly of rural set-up, in the Pashtun/Pakhtoon belt of Pakistan and Afghanistan. There are levels of *jirgas*: a *maraca* (local *jirga*), a *qawmi* (tribal *jirga*) and a *loyajirga* (national assembly). See, SanchitaBhattcharya, "Status of Women in Pakistan," *J.R.S.P.* 51, no.1 (January – June, 2014), 207, <http://www.academia.edu/9835338/Status_of_Women_in_Pakistan> (20.2.2016).

Gap Index⁴² ranked Pakistan 143rd among 145 countries in respect to prevalence of gender based disparities.

Despite such bleak environment, where women rarely witness justice, Mai is doing her best to bring positive change at a grass root level through education as well as providing one of the few safety nests for women in Pakistan. Having been made the scapegoat for settling tribal disputes, she has ever since committed herself to the cause of women empowerment. One of the major ways in which she aims to overcome the hurdles in the path of the woman's development is through girl child education. While narrating her story in *In The Name of Honour*, time and again, Mai stresses that illiteracy has been a major setback for her. Within the rigid patriarchal order of her village,⁴³ where women "... are the ones exchanged as merchandise to help resolve conflicts and exact punishment" where "woman have but one duty, serving their husbands" and girls have nothing to learn, "except the silence of submission,"⁴⁴ Mai, found it immensely difficult to get her violators punished by the law. Belonging to a lower clan and being deprived of education all her life only added to her problems. She writes,

... he has me ink my fingertip and press it at the bottom of the page as a signature. It is not my statement, but people will claim that it is ... I do not know whether I have just placed my

⁴²Gender Gap Index – published annually by the Geneva based World Economics Forum – measures national gender gaps in economy, politics, education and health. See, "Rights of the Disadvantaged: Women," Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Annual Report 2015, <http://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Women_12.pdf> (20.2.2016).

⁴³Meerwala is a small village in Muzaffargarh district in Punjab province in Pakistan. Statistics show that Punjab witnessed the highest number of cases of violence against women in 2014 and Muzaffargarh ranked 8th in a list of 15 district of VAW crimes in 2014. See, "Violence Against Women in Pakistan."

⁴⁴Mai, *In The Name of Honour*, 110-140.

fingerprint on a document saying that nothing happened, or that I had lied.⁴⁵

This sense of ignorance coupled with the feelings of helplessness impelled her to begin a lifetime campaign for the rights of women in Pakistan. The Five Lakhs she received as compensation from the government was utilised in setting up a school in 2003 with aid from other NGOs. Today, Mukhtar Mai Girls' Model School provides free education to over five hundred fifty girls. Given the fact that there were no schools for girls in Meerwala until then and the only thing that was taught to them was domestic chores, it was a challenging task for Mai to convince parents to allow their daughters to attend school. However, driven by the new found wisdom that "knowledge must be given to girls, and as soon as possible, before their mothers bring them up the same way they were raised themselves"⁴⁶ Mukhtar Mai set out to prevent the future generation of women from suffering the same fate as hers. One of the primary concerns of social activists across the globe and feminist leaders in particular is fostering equality. Bernice Lott in describing the feminist perspective asserts, "Fundamental to feminism is the value that all persons should be permitted equality of opportunity for full development to the extent that this development does not impede that of others."⁴⁷ Perhaps it is with this intention of achieving equality that Mai also has a boys' section in her school and to her this means that, "My girls, my little sisters, will be learning the same things that boys study."⁴⁸ The school is now a part of a larger organization that lends support to women who have been victims of violence. Its Shelter Home and Women Resource Centre provides "shelter, medical

⁴⁵Mai, *In The Name of Honour*, 29.

⁴⁶Mai, *In The Name of Honour*, 77.

⁴⁷Bernice Lott, "Models of Leadership and Women: Reconciling the Discourses on Women, Feminism and Leadership" in *Women and Leadership: Transforming Visions and Diverse Voices*, eds. Jean Lau Chin, Bernice Lott, Joy K. Rice, Janis Sanchez-Hucles, Melbourne: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 26.

⁴⁸Mai, *In The Name of Honour*, 81.

and legal aid, psychological counselling, rehabilitation and access to media and justice system"⁴⁹ to hundreds of women who have been subjected to violence.

Examining their potential through the lenses of their wounds has allowed Dugard, Smart, and Mai to create change that is not confined to them alone. Therefore the social activism that they engage in has its basis in empathy and compassion. As the therapist John Nelson suggests, "When empathy is coupled with compassion, it becomes the most potent force of healing."⁵⁰ In aiding others to heal, Dugard, Smart, and Mai in some way or the other also empower the lives of those who come to them seeking help. That is to suggest, they are not merely interested in addressing the immediate problem at hand but endeavour towards familiarising the ones they help with their inherent capabilities.

However, the road towards change has not been easy for them. At present the three women have been travelling across the globe, attending talks, discussions and representing their respective cause; but being public figures has more often than not been detrimental to their cause. Sharon Doetsch-Kidder emphasizes, "as public figures, activists are open to scrutiny and judgement by the media and others, which can be difficult or painful to accept."⁵¹ Their competence and the decisions that they take are susceptible to questioning. Because as Douglas and Philpot suggest, "... the lay person's views are often formed by media coverage of cases that go badly wrong ..." ⁵² mistakes are unaffordable.

Also, functioning within geographically and culturally different communities, these women have faced both help and impediment from the government of their respective countries.

⁴⁹Mukhtar Mai, "Mukhtar Mai Women's Organization," <www.mukhtarmai.org/projects/shelter-home/> (20.3.2016).

⁵⁰Stoeber, *Reclaiming Theodicy: Reflection*, 29.

⁵¹Sharon Doetsch-Kidder, *Social Change and Intersectional Activism: The Spirit of Social Movement*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 79.

⁵²Anthony Douglas and Terry Philpot, *Caring and coping: A Guide to Social Services*, New York: Routledge, 2005, 4.

However, there is a huge disparity between America and Pakistan in terms of the reception of the work that these women do. While Dugard and Smart have been more fortunate in receiving appreciation and recognition⁵³ by various government bodies, Mai has faced trouble more than once for attempting to change things. From being put on 'exit control list' to having her mails and phones tapped and more recently being accused of stealing electricity for her organization, Mai has experienced it all. Nicholas Kristof, the American journalist whose efforts have continuously facilitated international coverage of her case, writes in the foreword to Mai's memoir,

For all the acclaim and goodwill that Mukhtar has won for Pakistan, she has had mostly trouble from Pakistan's leaders. I think the problem is twofold. First, they feel she is displaying Pakistan's dirty laundry in public, embarrassing her country. Second, they're resentful that an uneducated peasant woman from a Punjab village is celebrated as a hero, getting more attention than they are.⁵⁴

This is not to suggest that Dugard and Smart have not witnessed moments of disappointment; but like Mai, they too have held on to their faith and continued to believe in the potential of their leadership.

4. Conclusion

Julia Kristeva in "Is There a Feminine Genius" says, "You are a genius to the extent that you are able to challenge the socio

⁵³Dugard received the 'Inspiration Award' from DVF Awards in 2012 and the Hope Award by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in 2013. In recognition of its commendable project, "Creating Protected Spaces", her foundation won an award of \$50,540 by The American Legion Child Welfare Foundation in 2013.

Similarly, Smart too received the 'Inspiration Award' at the DVF Awards in 2011 and was also honoured at the Common Wealth Award of Distinguished Services in 2016.

⁵⁴Mai, *In The Name of Honour*, x.

historical conditions of your identity."⁵⁵ True to this understanding, the three women have proved to be geniuses in reconstructing their identities from victims to leaders.

Voicing her opinion as a leader, Smart emphasises, "We're not defined by what happens to us, we're defined by what decisions we make."⁵⁶ And in response to the injustices perpetrated by patriarchy against them, these three women have chosen to channelize their dissent towards eliminating the socio-cultural elements which make a victim out of a woman. Instead of waiting for government or other similar authorities to foster change, Dugard, Smart, and Mai have shouldered the responsibility of building alternative spaces in which they can execute the envisioned change for their fellow sufferers. As a result of which today, these women are defined by the work they are doing and not by the tragedy that had struck them.

However, while it remains indisputable that their own victimization has led these women towards social activism, it would be inappropriate to suggest that the welfare of the contemporary society essentially rests on women like these who have had a firsthand experience of such inhumanity. That is to suggest that the readiness to engage with social activism need not always be informed by personal vicissitudes. However, the society's concern for the victims of such criminal activities as sexual abuse unfortunately is directly proportional to the number of days that their cases get featured in the media and gradually wears off with the day, as was evident to the world in the Nirbhaya case. Moreover, the will to change the general reception towards women dissolves with a couple of candlelight vigils. Consequently, it is left only to the victims and their immediate family members to fight the battles. This myopic

⁵⁵Julia Kristeva, "Is There a Feminine Genius?" *Critical Inquiry* 30, no.3 (Spring 2004), 493-504 <<http://dxdoi.org/10.1086/421159>> (20.2.2016).

⁵⁶Abby Hobbs, "Fight Like Girls Group Helps Women Battle Life's Attackers", *Deseret News*, June 23, 2016 <<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865656783/Fight-like-girls-Elizabeth-Smart-woman-who-fought-off-man-with-knife-to-share-stories.html?pg=all>> (20.2.2016).

attitude does not so much curtail the occurrence of the crime as it contributes to their inflation and further to the silencing of the survivors.

Around the world, there are millions like Dugard, Smart and Mai who as mentioned have been victims of similar crimes and yet most of them usually succumb to the damage and only a few are able to transform themselves out of the status of a victim. Albeit few, geniuses like Dugard, Smart, and Mai are found in all corners of the world and their contribution to society stretch beyond geographical boundaries. However, the scope of a single paper allows us to focus on some of the outstanding personalities based on certain commonalities. In order to create a just and compassionate society, more women like these three need to allow the geniuses within them to surface, transforming their identity of being the weaker sex and contributing towards making the society more just and compassionate. And while survivors like Dugard, Smart, and Mai have been providing the impetus towards change, at present, the need for each individual is to recognise the threat that these criminal offences pose not only to one section of the society that is, to women but to the very conducive nature of human sustenance.