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*Today You are You,
That is truer than true.
There is no one alive
Who is Youer than You.*

Dr. Seuss

It may strange but here in Beijing in China, where I am currently on a visit, I come across a book about the horror stories of women who were raped and violently assaulted by hundreds of thousands in the Rwandan genocide of 1994 that killed, as part of 'ethnic cleansing', more than 800,000 men, women and children in less than 100 days. The stories are heart-wrenching, and as dehumanizing as any human acts can ever be. Thousands of these women then became mothers of children, whose fathers were rapist brutes and part of that horrid memory that only aroused disgust and shame.

What about these children? These are 'unwanted' children, symbol of shame, a reminder of a horror, a seething pain that cannot go away; instead, it must be cared, nourished and loved. Many women committed suicide; many more tried to abort; many were rejected by their families and abandoned; some endured the pain and said 'No' to horrors and 'Yes' to life.

How shameful it is to realize that for millennia, in every civil conflict or war, women have been considered as part of the war booty, to be possessed, or assaulted and humiliated, and for the soldiers, and other men too, to feel that this is part of their manly right: to plunder, to destroy, to rape, to humiliate, and to desecrate.

During the Second World War, as Japanese militarism ran amuck in Asia - in China, Korea, Philippines - hundreds of thousands of women from these countries were used by Japanese



armies as 'Comfort Women' in their barracks, to bring 'comfort' to them as they raged war and destruction in one city after another. For decades, Japan denied that any such thing happened; as part of their militant pride, they denied that they ever committed any atrocities, thus only exacerbating the pain of assault and humiliation. As part of the 'Asian Values', these young women, lived in shame and literally underground, because they were not accepted by their own families and communities; they had been 'defiled' by the enemy, and like a rotten fruit, were only to be thrown away.

In 2004, a group of these women, now in their 70s or older were brought to Toronto by some brave Canadian-Asian women to 'tell their horror stories' to the world, before their deaths. To die silent and unacknowledged would be only to perpetuate the horrors, and to submit to that perverted morality that, in the face of such horrors, turns its face in the other direction in some hollow spiritual resignation, or obscene

smirk. Death lurked around these women, but in their final exit they were being urged by some brave young women 'to rage against the dying of light....not to go gentle into that good night.'

Where are the women who were assaulted by the thousands in Bangladesh in 1971 during its war of independence from Pakistan? Where are the writers, filmmakers and artists to tell their stories to the world? Where are the mosques and temples to render them their shelter and to condemn the arrogant and cruel soldiers?

When a society become silent to its own history, or insists on telling only entertaining fables, it diminishes itself; it dies a slow death. For the past seven decades, the horrors committed against the Jews by the Nazis have been enumerated time and again, in annual lectures and film showings, in museums, in plays and novels, in history classes in schools and colleges, so that those horrors are not forgotten, and are not committed ever again. We

learn history so we can learn to forgive, not be vengeful.

In 1946-47, India experienced the horrors of her partition, and the sectarian, communal frenzy that she went through, resulting in the death and destruction of some million people. It was the largest movement of refugees in the world history, in which thousands of women are said to have committed - or forced or commanded by their men to commit suicide for the sake of their honour, their 'izzat.'

Yet, for all intents and purposes, we are completely illiterate about it. We talk about it, if at all, in rash, sentimental generalities, with little poignancy, with scant knowledge or understanding. Could India dare to create a museum about her partition and early years of freedom? What photographs or paintings, or songs, or films, or novels sear through our memory of that momentous event in the life of our nation?

It is through memory that a living organism become what it is. A hand has a memory. An eye has a memory. An ear, the tongue, the skin, the feet have memory of hundreds of millions of years of evolution built into them; that is how a human child at birth is destined to stand up at about one year of age and walk, and speak, and create wonders of thought and imagination through words.

Nations too have their memories. If those memories are thwarted, or distorted, or locked up in some inaccessible dungeons underground, we live shallow lives. Our art and literature are shallow. Our dreams are flimsy; they touch nothing, because they come from nothing.

To see the full fruition of our being, we need peace, both within and without. My next stop on the cruise is the city of Nagasaki that was hit with Atom Bomb seventy years ago, killing more than 100,000 people, and ushering in a new age of fear and cold war.

Albert Einstein was asked after the bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki had unleashed an unprecedented destruction, what kind of weapons might be used in the Third World War. He said: "I don't know. But I know that in the Fourth World War the weapons will be stones and sticks."

We need courage to stand against forces of barbarism.