

## **Current Book Project: Under Submission**

### **Title**

*A Memoir of Kashmir: MyStory*  
(Revisiting Operation Gibraltar, 1965)

My current book project, *A Memoir of Kashmir: MyStory (Revisiting Operation Gibraltar, 1965)* is a cutting edge interdisciplinary narrative of the kind that is the current mode in the humanities. It develops from a master's thesis in creative writing from the University of Texas at Austin (2002): the 206 page novella is a fictionalized, historicized narrative of my own life in which I lost my husband within months of our marriage in Indian Kashmir in 1965 in Operation Gibraltar. I was pregnant at the time; my daughter was born after my husband's death.

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The memoir has a methodological as well as theoretical approach that is derived from known anthropologists, such as Ruth Behar's work: *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks Your Heart*, and Patricia Clough and Jean Halley affect theory reader: *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Furthermore, I use models from known memoir writers such as Italian American writer Louise DeSalvo who specializes in the memoir and teaches at Hunter College. She's a professor of English. I use her book, *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*. Edvige Giunta, another Italian American memoir writer at the City University of New Jersey is DeSalvo's writing partner. She is my mentor for the memoir. Additionally, I use Fawzia Afzal-Khan's, *To Lahore With Love*, a memoir from Syracuse U Press as an example of a Pakistani memoirist writing the history of Pakistan through her personal narratives of girlfriends' lives that reflect what happened in the culture and society at large during the period of the 60s and 70s as the country rapidly transitioned from a secular democracy into a theocracy under General Ziaul Haq and the invasion of Afghanistan through a covert operation orchestrated through the CIA.

The memoir develops as a narrative of my husband's death in Indian Kashmir in 1965: an event that completely transformed my life over the last fifty years and which has me eventually live in exile in the United States for the last sixteen years. My husband, Captain Nisar Ahmed, a national hero in Pakistan was assigned to lead, Operation Gibraltar a guerilla action in Indian Kashmir. This is a disputed region between Pakistan and India since the British partitioned the continent in 1947. The Pakistani military, to this day has not owned up to Operation Gibraltar. As a result, I did not know exactly where my husband was killed and buried. For fifty years, part of me believed that he was missing in action or may perhaps even be alive in an Indian prison. I had no closure on my husband's death.

However, in April of 2015 I accidentally found a folder of my late husband's letters, close to one hundred of them that he had written to me in our three-year relationship mainly through letters. The uppermost letter in the folder was the one that he wrote last, before he crossed the line of control into Indian Kashmir in July 1965. The eight-page letter, painful as it is, also tells me what his mission was and where he was going. I had obliterated all details of the letter from

memory, as I never re-read it. This letter and the others had travelled with me across the continents for fifty years wherever I studied or worked but I never re-read them. I was angry with my husband for abandoning my daughter and me especially as I did not want to have a child right away in our marriage and especially as he knew about the secret mission that he would be assigned on in Kashmir, though he never told me anything.

In order to deal with the trauma of his death and the pregnancy that I was dealing with, I turned the switch off, on any memory of our short-lived marriage. So great was my anger. However, with support from my family and friends, I rebuilt my life fast. Within weeks of widowhood I applied for a British Commonwealth Scholarship to study for a master's degree in England. I did indeed get one from the University of Leeds. Within three years of my widowhood I was on the path to a successful career as an educator in Pakistan and in international settings. Eventually, I also obtained a PhD in applied linguistics from the University of Texas at Austin that further enhanced my life opportunities together with my daughter's who is now a successful certified public accountant who works for a *Fortune 500* company in the U.S. The memoir now contextualizes John Locke's "memory theory of personal identity."

Nevertheless, I did not let go of the anger toward my husband: despite the fortunate educational opportunities and a cutting-edge international career the ride was bumpy. I had to deal with the militaristic Pakistani establishment and a society directed by patriarchs, foremost among whom were members of my own family. In 1999, I left Pakistan to go into exile in the United States because of a blasphemy fatwa against me by the state establishment there. Thus, this memoir is also a narrative of the geography of religion as well as a text on postcolonial governance and sustainability.

The discovery of my husband's letters in spring 2015 enabled me to let go of my anger, as he too seemed a victim of his circumstances. In fact, re-reading the letters after fifty years was cathartic. Within weeks of the letters' discovery I was researching in the archives of my alma mater, the University of Texas at Austin. What I found in the letters were great insights into the role of the Pakistan military in Kashmir in which American aid given to the army for the Cold War against the Soviets was used to make inroads into Indian Kashmir. Additionally, I got insights into the nuclearization of South Asia and the current U.S engagement with the Taliban. Pakistan's elite commando unit that the U.S. set up in Cherat, Pakistan, bordered Central Asia. This then enabled the U.S to keep an eye on the Soviets and Communist China. These Special Services Group units were further used in the early 1978 to train the *mujahideen*, now the Taliban when the U.S. was engaged in the region, to oust the Soviets from Afghanistan. All this fits into the Great Game in Central Asia where the key players are: Russia, the U.S, Great Britain, China and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan is a front line proxy state in the game. As a result, the memoir further addresses Great Game theory. It is valuable for military studies, strategic studies and international relations with a focus on South Asia. Principally, it deals with American foreign policy.

What I've discovered is that my personal history plays into a larger national/international narrative. The work follows earlier Pakistani female memoirs such as, *The Upstairs Wife* by Rafia Zakaria, Fawzia Afzal-Khan's, *To Lahore with Love* and Sara Suleri's, *Meatless Days*. The memoir like its predecessors interfaces the personal with the international: its range is

multidisciplinary as it covers diverse areas such as political history, regional geography, cultural anthropology, gender studies, comparative literature, comparative religion and issues of race, gender and ethnicity. Though the narrative technique is memoir, the application is to a wide range of issues such as human rights and rights of citizenship in postcolonial states like Kashmir, India and Pakistan.

### **Fieldwork**

My research in summer 2015 in the University of Texas at Austin libraries and the Lyndon B. Johnson archives led to the collection of the following primary data (samples attached):

#### **1**

**A memoir written in Urdu** by a commando officer who survived Operation Gibraltar. The officer, commando Alamgir writes a field diary of Operation Gibraltar and gives details of my husband's participation in the mission, how he was killed and where he is buried: in village Khag in Kashmir. This is the only reliable account of my husband's death and burial. Commando Alamgir's memoir/field diary gives significant details about the mismanagement of the operation and the political realities of the Kashmiri people who never wanted a Pakistani intervention. The memoir further describes my husband's talents that I never knew about: that he was a masterful tarot reader, as well as a singer. I hardly knew the man, as ours was a romance based on letters. Affect theory thus embellishes the narrative.

#### **2**

**Declassified CIA documents** in the Lyndon B. Johnson archive in Austin that point to the role of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, at that time in 1965, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan and at whose behest Operation Gibraltar was undertaken. It was Bhutto who persuaded Field Marshall Ayub Khan and the Pakistani generals to capture Indian Kashmir. As mentioned, Operation Gibraltar was the Pakistan army's Bay of Pigs. Later General Ziaul Haq executed Bhutto when the latter was a nationally elected Prime Minister; General Haq led the successful U.S. intervention against the Soviets in Afghanistan in 1978.

#### **3**

**Personal interviews** with family members and friends in the U.S. and in Pakistan. As a result I discovered my own family's colonial and postcolonial military links with the British. I discovered further details of my family's distinguished lineage as Muftis or Islamic scholars and Sufis.

### **The Narrative Writing**

I've written close to seventy pages of the memoir, which is in the *epistolary form*. I write letters to my husband, to my daughter, to my mother and some close friends. To each, I write letters about the difficulties in our relationships, as well as the support or joy they gave. Some letters expose the patriarchy.

My memoir is not only a narrative about a woman's perspective of a militarized postcolonial state; it further brings insights into the life of a secular Pakistan where women have autonomy through modern education. I will bring knowledge through digital materials such as photographs of at least five generations of South Asian women mainly from my own family. I additionally use Google maps to describe Operation Gibraltar. I propose to put wedding photographs of myself with my husband in his army uniform on Facebook to solicit his *hadith* or history from his colleagues. I hardly knew the man.

The memoir links with my recent publication, *Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws: From Islamic Empires to the Taliban* (2013), and an earlier monograph, *The Female Voice in Sufi Ritual: Devotional Practices of Pakistan and India* (2003). I look into the role of memory as I reconstruct personal and political history.

## **PROPOSED CHAPTERS**

### ***A Memoir of Kashmir: MyStory (Revisiting Operation Gibraltar, 1965)***

Preface

#### **Chapter 1**

Pakistan's History with Kashmir

The Jihadist Vision

#### **Chapter 2**

Personal Narrative

Army Widow, Mother and Professional

#### **Chapter 3**

The Short Marriage

Family History

#### **Chapter 4**

Operation Gibraltar Details

Rediscovery of Letters

#### **Chapter 5**

War Widows Deal With Their Culture

#### **Chapter 6**

##### **The Great Game**

U.S. Military Aid, Pakistan's Special Services Group and the Cold War

Cherat and Badaber: American Bases bordering Afghanistan

Kent Regiment and British Colonial Interests in Central Asia

Gary Powers and the U-2 fiasco

#### **Chapter 7**

Creating the Taliban: The United States, Britain, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan

The Afghan Warlords

#### **Conclusion**

Rebuilding in Exile