

Work of the Expressive Arts in Areas of Conflict – A Journey (2012 – 2017)



Image taken from workshop in Candy, Sri Lanka. Workshop conducted by Peace Development Initiative (PDI). Titled the 'Masks and the Four Quadrants of Conflict'.



Image theatre on the changing faces of conflict (these images are of the oppressor, victim and rescuer), taken from workshop in Candy. Participants are from Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (including Tamils and Sinhalese)

It was here that the seeds of the vision to work in Kashmir were sown using the expressive arts

The Entry Point: Creating circles of trust and talking about flight/fight/freeze in Srinagar (Haiderpora Government School)



Talk circles of trust in Help Foundation School, Kupwara, on the border with Pakistan



- The last two slides are an entry point to the ruptured state of Kashmir where the framework of trauma was established.
- It was in this work with the students that the map of the mind and the body was first used and created.
- Here, we worked with the primitive responses, or the reptilian responses of the flight, fight and freeze.
- Herein, the talk circles of trust were used as an entry point to educate the students about trauma and its effect on the body and the mind.
- These workshops helped in creating new emotional pathways within the students.

Looking at closed institutions within the context of conflict –
Shehjar Home, a home for children of fathers killed in combat



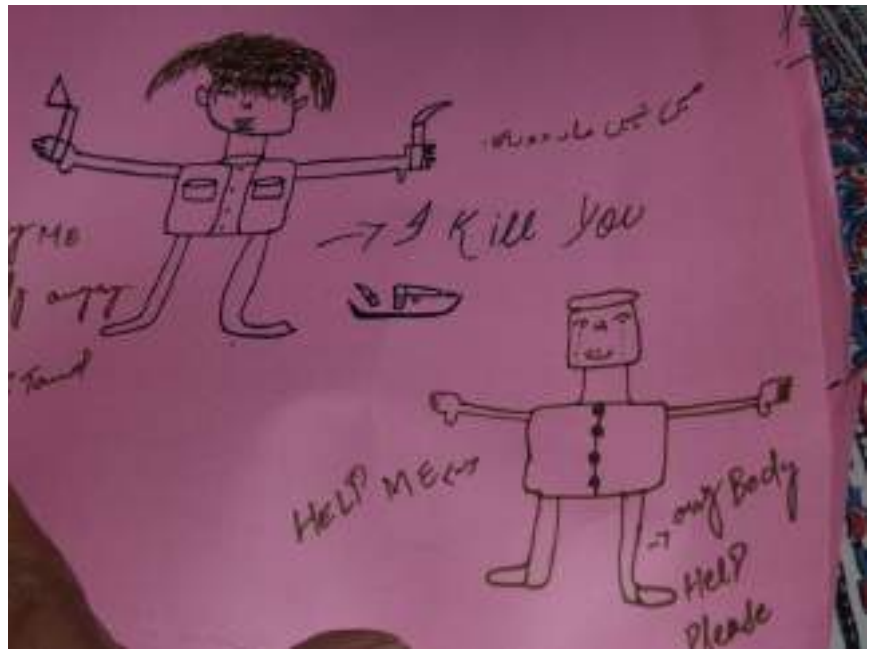
First visit to
Shehjar Home,
Indrahama, on
the outskirts of
Srinagar, in 2013



Children as they engage in the process of squiggling. Squiggling involves the random subconscious drawing of lines from which images and metaphors are seen and culled out, to be seen by them as metaphors that lie within their mind.

Discovering the subconscious
mind through squiggles





Images of fight,
representing
the seeds of
violence in
these young
minds

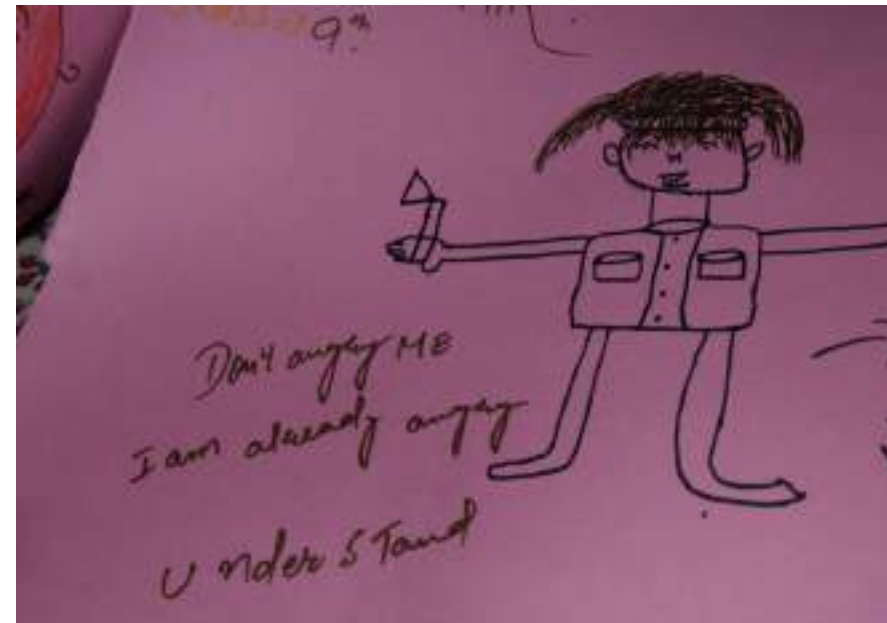




Image of Freeze

Snake attacking a child, where the snake represents something or someone.

Pictorial representations of flight, fight and freeze

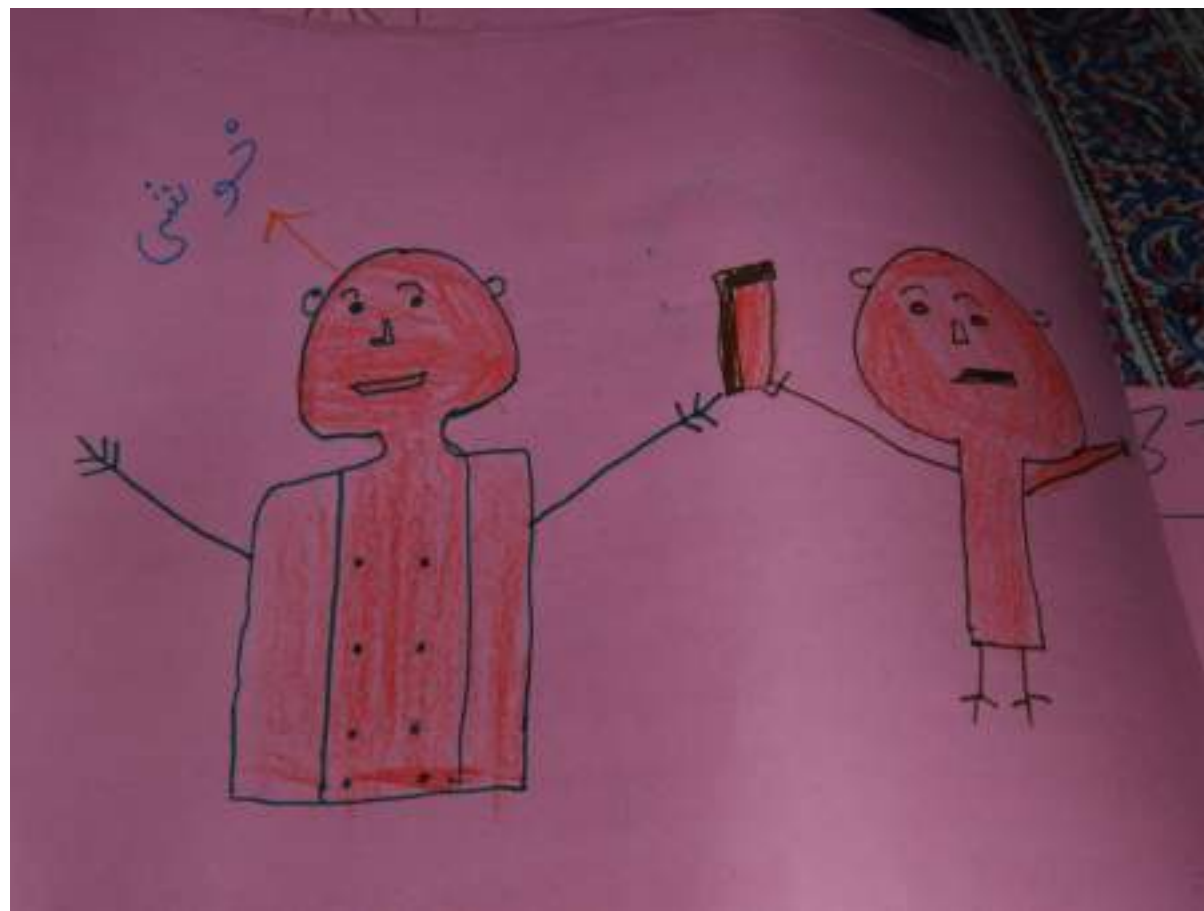


Image of Flight



Portraits of their self and its different faces and bodies

Note the disembodied figures that represent the hauntings and dismemberment felt by the fractured self



Creating Structures (containers that house our emotions): Building the place of *rest*; introducing the notion of a *restful* response (karavan-sarai)



During my second visit, in 2014, where we built houses and stick figures – *warriors/heroes who had castles of their own*

There are stick figures on the houses which represent the guardians and protectors of their places of rest.

During my visit to Shehjar Home in 2014

*Hero's journey begins as they
step out of their houses into
the forest of emotions*

Going to the dark forest to
meet our inner monsters and
angels, which represent
different colours

Blow straw paintings with the children
at the Home during my third visit to
Shehjar Home in 2015





Each colour represents a different emotion. Colours of rage, of joy, of sadness, and of violence expressed through paint on paper.





The *Hero's Journey* in Kupwara school, on the borders of Pakistan in 2015. Here I confronted the culture of silence, with children who refused to speak about their work



However, the images spoke for themselves...

Creative responses/Transformatory Work





The figurines shown here represent the children's heroes



They were asked to place the figurines on any part of their creations



Most of them placed their figurines at the edge of their *forests/creations*

Clowning work – Introducing the notion of ‘power over’ the masses; coming from the notion of domination response



Trying to grab the clown nose from the other person, introducing the ‘nose’ as the object of transformation

During my fourth visit to Shehjar Home in 2017

Kissa Kursi Ka – The tale of the chair

Introducing the object of power, i.e. the chair. A person sits on the chair and another seeks to remove him from the chair, using clowning techniques and movements



Introducing the concept of Creative Response:

Mural painting – Introducing the notion of *power with* (painting our emotions in the collective) through our creative responses





Working with vulnerable communities outside the institution – including individuals who actively participated in protests against the State



Telling stories through pieces of paper: spotting the metaphor. Still working with the idea of creative response, which leads into *compassionate* response (wisdom and compassion)

Painting the *River of Life* (introducing the concept of flow and intersections as a container) and placing our creations within

Using paints, putting their anger and pain onto the shared page – a container, carrying the metaphor of the *cross*. This cross served as a safe space, container to **hold** their emotions.



The process was to **listen**, **accept**, **mirror**, and to **affirm** the pain of their daily protests (compassionate response)

What led to this — arts as a process of psychosocial intervention which leads to psychosocial inclusion, interventions in total institutions and totalitarian spaces where identity is often effaced. This is often seen in jails, juvenile homes, asylums, far-off spaces which are locked up, where rewards and punishments are often the only ways to deal with inmates or residents.

A school in a small town in Manipur, north-eastern state in India close to the border of Burma; schools in Pulwama, a battered town in Kashmir, an orphanage in Cambodia; and juvenile homes in the suburbs of Calcutta (in West Bengal) — served as the field on which my work in Kashmir was based on.



Possibility of working with shadow puppetry with 2D images

Image of domination response

Dolphin school, 2018, making mask moulds

Image of creative response, stemming from restful response. Focused and sustained creations.



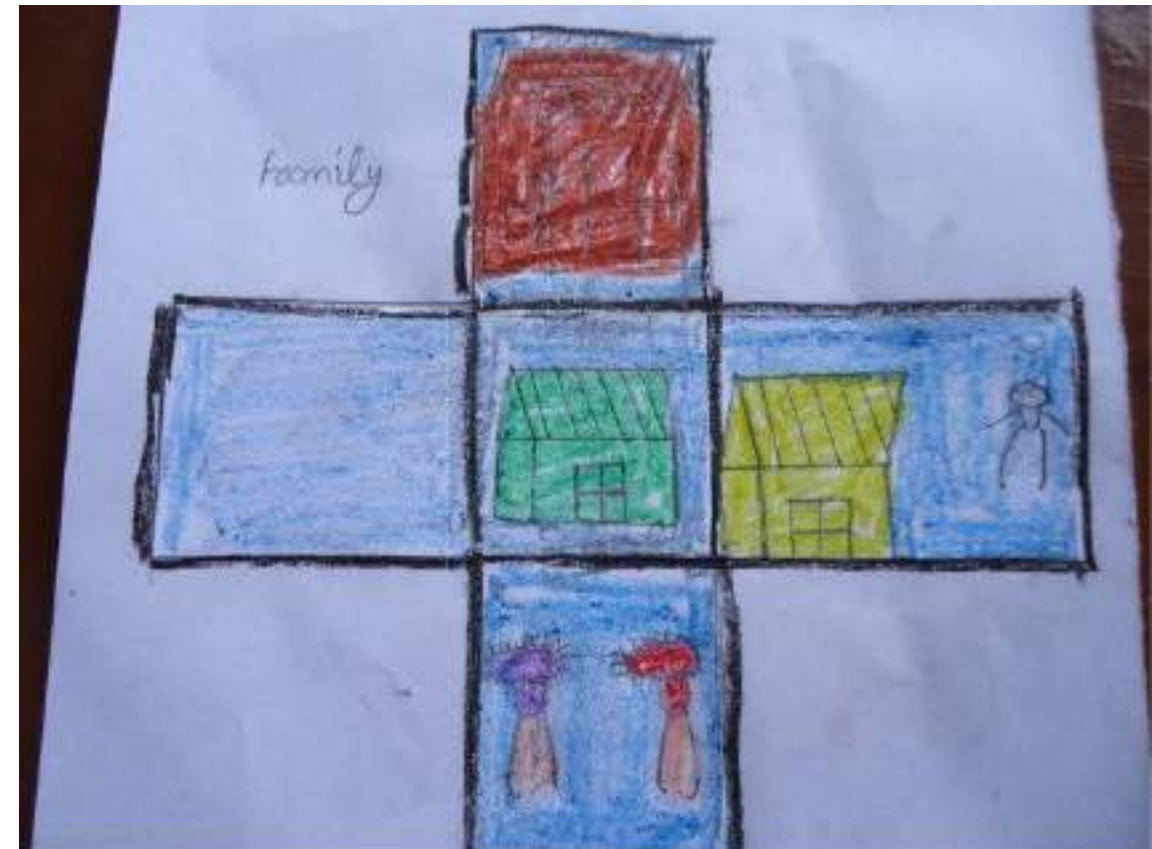


Work with children at the orphanage on the outskirts of Pnom Penh, Cambodia.

These children's grandparents lived through the Khmer Rouge. Most of their parents had died early.

Work with Dalit communities in a school for the lower caste in Khanpur village, next to the town of Navashehar in Punjab. This area saw a lot of violence during the militancy in Punjab, and is now a heroin infested village.

The image below acts like a futuring map, and the intersectionality of the image shows how past, present and future are all connected. Sometimes our beginnings are our ends, and our ends are our beginnings. It's a projective device to map out one's future visually and to see the interconnection of the images that they use through active imagination.



Work with Foundation School in Churachandpur, Manipur, in association with Standing Together to Enable Peace (STEP) Trust in 2014



Manipur is a north-eastern state of conflict. WWII was fought on its land (between the British and the Japanese), and it has been the hotbed of insurgency and interethnic warfare in the last few decades.

Here, I introduced the concept of fear as a wound/a *ghost* (traumas that are hauntings).



Above, the boy drew this mask on his own and *became* the ghost/haunting himself. This instruction was never given. However, in the safety of the contained space, this boy felt safe to assume his own ghosts.

In the images on the right, drawn by two different children, they show the fear of death as an act of self-harm and suicide. The school had witnessed a child in the past killing himself, and these images brought the Principal to become more alert to the mental health of children in the school.





On the second day of my work at Foundation school, I introduced the antidote metaphor of self-love through the inner child. As you notice, the circle of love and trust is projected onto the paper.

Early work in Dolphin School, Pulwama, in association with STEP Trust in summer of 2014



Working through the victim response:
Completing the process of mourning
and the loss of peace through Object
Theatre

In this image, the children of Dolphin school
are using object theatre and their topic is
peace. The bottles and the police caps are
crying in front of a picture of Gandhi, to
mourn for the lack of peace in Kashmir.

Victim Response: Lamenting about the historical and collateral damages

Using elements from the natural environment to build installations that represented the extreme militant past of Kashmir in the 1990s. This structure on the right represents how the militants blew the network lines up to cut Kashmir from the mainland. However, it is interesting to note that there is blood on the stones. At that time, stone pelting had begun and was very much a part of the landscape of Pulwama, as it continues to be today.





Victim Response:
Handcuffed to
history and to
geopolitics

This is how the children
viewed Kashmir, as a
piece of meat to be
sliced and torn between
the three political forces
controlling its destiny –
India, Pakistan and
China. Note the slash
marks on the paper.

This is how it the journey began...

My two year work with runaway children in the two juvenile homes in the suburbs of Calcutta, West Bengal, where I worked at the age of 24-26 years, between 1999-2001.

In my work there, I used arts as psychosocial interventions and psychosocial inclusion, as a preparation for these children to meet the outside world.

In these total institutions, their identity was taken away. They were nothing but names on a roll call, or random nicknames given by the staff and their peers based on their characteristics.



It is here that I saw the magic of the arts to transform their pain into their potential, turning their vulnerabilities into inner guidance, and their innate creativity into specific skills. And most of all, the arts restored their belief structure in themselves.

It is these closed spaces of the juvenile home which led me to conflict areas, where the State turns into the juvenile home. It is due to the heavily militarized spaces and the constant danger to their lives that people lose faith in themselves, especially children who start showing signs of delinquency, even if they are living with their parent.

Therefore, the intervention now is with the State as a prison and the people as its prisoners.

The way forward from here/The Vision

- In a state that is constantly sandwiched between the army and radicalised religion, the children often suffer from a **culture of silence** - which has been a consistent disabling force for the last 20 years.
- The expressive arts, especially work with paper, objects, puppets and the visual medium allows the children to **express the unsaid**. It allows the materials to be alive and give form to the unformed emotions and thoughts, leading to a catharsis on the inside.
- The expressions in these activities itself create **ritualised spaces for celebration and mourning** in the context of the death and disappearances that have taken place in Kashmir in the last 20 years.
- Grieving processes allow **psycho-social interventions** to take place, so the process is equally as important as the final creations themselves. It is these processes that allow a **critical consciousness** to emerge among young people who feel lost due to the ruptures.
- As an added implication, this work can serve to create a precedent for institutions to take culture and theatre to a more prominent space in Kashmir, and therefore institutionalize these methodologies in schools and in other educative institutions.