

# Feminist Journaling



**Log-in Gender**, an initiative of WISCOMP, called for submissions on the theme **Feminist Journaling** and received compelling poetry, essays, and reflections in response. The idea was to explore the many ways in which we reflect on our lives, the world around us and the institutions and processes that we are a part of. The winning entry by Shruti Balaji, titled “Feminist Journaling as Pedagogical Praxis”, explored how feminist journaling could critique and transform the highly structured and hierarchical teaching and evaluation systems followed in many higher educational spaces. Sarah Zia’s “Journaling as an Act of Rage” and Sheena Choudhary’s “Paradox” were some of the other insightful submissions.

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## Feminist Journaling as Pedagogical Praxis

Shruti Balaji

I walked into my Gender and International Relations course module during my graduate study at the LSE eagerly anticipating norm-breaking theory and insightful discussions. But little did I know that my professor had in store for me – my own weekly dose of feminist journaling. For one of the requirements for her class was a stream-of-consciousness blog post about the week’s reading material as an exercise in critical and reflective thinking. These privately posted blogs soon evolved into an internal journey as I was able to pen down thoughts free of trepidation and judgement. Indeed, as the weeks progressed, they grew into a collection of scattered thoughts, reflections, often even feelings of hope, frustrations and refuge. The words tumbled

out of me and it gave way to some of the most incisive questions I had in mind about feminist theory and praxis in international relations: why were feminist scholars uncomfortable with quantitative data? Why is there a frustrating lack of reciprocal dialogue between non-western and western feminist scholarship? What is the relationship between resistance and revolution in feminist theory? among many others. The emphasis was on reflection and expressing oneself by working through internal feminist dilemmas and contradictions in theory and praxis.

For me, this feminist journaling became a sharp critique of the highly structured and hierarchical classroom teaching and evaluation system in two important ways. Firstly, it allowed for the celebration of *difference*. Difference stemming from diverse educational experiences is often marginalised in western academic spaces. However, through our feminist journaling, my classmates and I were able to work at our own pace in coping with and exploring the depth of the reading material and contextualising it in knowledges we were familiar with. Secondly, in ensuring that our weekly blogs were counted as a part of the final grade, this exercise became, through its sheer existence, a critique of the highly formalised final-exam university practice. What made this uniquely different from other similar attempts was that in keeping with the spirit of our exercise – grades were not based on content, but merely submission: thus, there were no right or wrong answers, only reflections.

All in all, my own tryst with feminist journaling gave me hope as a young feminist scholar and future educator of potential ways to engender feminist journaling in pedagogical praxis and making it count.

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## **Paradox**

Sheena Choudhary

She is the fire,  
That burns and bakes,  
Melts and hardens.  
She is the water too,  
Weakening and strengthening.  
She is the blood so crimson,  
Thick as honey,  
Flooding the sewers.  
The plea,  
Of mercy and death.

That ink blot,  
Ugly yet meaningful.  
The sourness of cream,  
Distasteful and reality.  
Recurring nightmare,  
Scary but unreal.  
The wounded tigress,  
Vulnerable and ruthless.  
The star,  
Twinkling, diminishing and twinkling again.  
The rust,  
Killer, and waste.  
The skipped beat,  
Of Joyful and traumatized.  
She is a multiverse  
In the universe of people and places.  
A paradox  
Invisible and ever existing.  
She is, but the darkest sheen.

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## **Journaling as an Act of Rage**

Sarah Zia

One of the earliest books to influence me in my early teen years was the diary of Princess Jahanara. My favourite bit about the book was Jahanara expressing disappointment at adults not keeping her in the loop her in on important matters aka family secrets assuming that a 12-year old didn't understand much or anything at all. This sentiment bound me to this book which I often re-visited long after my pre-teen years. After all, sulking and reiterating that I understood everything were the only tools "misunderstood" teenagers had. Today, when I look back, I can safely conclude that this diary was the first feminist journal I read. It taught me to have an opinion of one's own even if nobody took you seriously. But I also wonder what qualifies as a feminist journal? Woolf's documentation of the need for one's own space in *A Room of One's Own*? Rosalyn D'Mello's record of being in love in *A Handbook for My Lover*? Or maybe a researcher's diary who is trying to document female participation in the electoral process? Or a doctor's prescription for medication to manage hormonal imbalance? Every little piece of paper that ascribes us an identity (like government records) or describes a milestone (like degree transcripts) contributes in creating an unstructured journal of our life. Thus, I don't maintain a diary or journal but do write about some uncontrolled emotions like rage and despair on rare occasions. It is not always advisable to explicitly express such

emotions and hence it works well to channel them through other outlets. And, thus rage becomes the key component of my feminist journaling.

Feminism is not an abstract set of ideas, it is how you live your everyday life. As someone rightly pointed out on twitter, feminism is not a hobby to be pursued on weekends. It is an everyday struggle for all of us and is often the metric in determining how far we have come in achieving the ever-distant dream of freedom. For some of us, it can be measured in the length of our skirts or in the number of years we have managed to evade marriage. There are other smaller victories too. When you successfully convince a family whatsapp group to condemn silly jokes about women as wives or you convince a co-worker that workplace sexual harassment is real. But like everything in life that comes in shades of grey, victories and struggles are also accompanied by lows. On the odd day, when you give in to patriarchy and wax your arms to perform the prescribed levels of femininity, the weight of the world's gaze feels a little heavier despite your fair, shining arms. Or when you avoid wearing a neon orange bra under a white shirt to a relative's place because you don't want to get into an argument about good girls from good families. You feel exhausted and worn out even though you didn't debate because that is so tiring. Or when someone congratulates you on being such a modern woman because you don't wear the hijab. You feel disoriented like someone smacked your face because you don't know where to begin your rebuttal from. How can a single sentence reply completely encapsulate the complexities of modernity, religiosity, womanhood and veiling? So, you just smile. Silently. Like a defeated person who knows there is no scope for victory, so why even try?

On days like these, you record and document to ease your sense of loss and regret. You realise that a lot remains to be done. You take charge of yourself and remind yourself of how far you have come. You create an inventory of feelings for reference so that the next time you feel defeated, you know this is your cue to not feel empty or alone. To acknowledge that sometimes the burden of troubles is too much for one to carry alone. To understand that everyone needs a break. And fighters too have days off. You sign off with the realisation that feminism is not an individual's fight and thus, it is not your individual loss. It is a collective battle and we are all persevering foot-soldiers. Fuelled by rage and bound by conviction.



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