



Fear and Anxiety: Representation of Women's Suffering Emotions in Select Texts

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Abstract

In the paper, I have examined how the select texts namely *So Many Hungers!* (1947), *Dawor Aru Nai* (1955) and *Mari* (2010) build a dimension of “emotional communities” among the women of the war-affected societies. Emotions such as fear and anxiety as employed in the paper attempt to delimit and map certain patterns and/or methods to negotiate the war-affected social environment and the affective dimensions of war (WW2) on the social bodies and the language used among the different typologies of relationships. Attempts have also been made to see how those emotions or their embodiment can also trouble the dominant narrative of war and invest a layer of meaning to its narratorial/generic functions of the texts. The paper attempts to analyze critically the emotions embodied in the characters of the select war novels by employing the empirical views on emotions and recent trends in emotions studies.

Keywords: emotion, fear, anxiety, cognitive, non-cognitive, causative

Introduction

“Emotions continue to play a role after one has chosen a book and begun to read, with characters and situations eliciting affect in several ways, including the evocation of personal, emotion-filled, memories. These emotions, once evoked, in turn, influence engagement with the text” (Mar et al. 818). However, instead of looking at emotions as affecting the reader, the paper looks at the

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elicitation of emotions in the narrative as an embodiment of the collective emotions of women during wartime. The study of emotions has turned into an entity which continues to baffle and attract scholars of different disciplines with its continuous application and development in theoretical methods as well as receptivity and scopes for multidisciplinary scholarships. The three World War 2 novels selected for emotion studies are *So Many Hungers!* (1947) by Bhabani Bhattacharya, *Dawor Aru Nai* (1955) meaning “clouds are gone” by Jogesh Das and *Mari* (2010) by Easterine Kire. While the novels by Bhattacharya and Kire are written in English, Das’s is written in Assamese. In the paper, I have chosen two different emotions namely fear and anxiety and their constructions; and the resultant emotional affect on a range of interpersonal relationships in the select war novels. Examining how these two emotions interact in the select novels allows a cohesive argument for the causative relation of war-induced or propelled political judgments and the human emotions, the responses of the civilians in the given societies. While the two emotions, fear and anxiety are correlatively and pre-eminently found in all war zones, the emotions in question are taken into consideration from civilian experiences to understand the language of the war’s affective dimension and the resultant transformation and/or non-changeability in human emotions. Emotions are ways that can bear a tag of both a method and an object. As a method, emotions allow us to probe deeper into the areas of negotiation where formal or traditional negotiation may not be possible in the specific discipline. Thus within emotion studies, social constructivism is a highly valued theoretical tendency for many scholars to explore a dimension of history in areas hitherto sidelined or lacking in an alternative perspective. Regarding the relationship between political judgment and historical change, William M. Reddy observes in his article “Emotional Liberty: Politics and History in the Anthropology of Emotions,”

One cannot endow human agency its place in history without simultaneously discovering that its operation has been both universal and good, both inspired by a sense of its own necessity and desirous of liberty cut to its measure. We must work to display that necessity and to second that

desire. To those who would reject any such conception of agency and history as folly or worse, I would simply reply, What else is there worth searching for? Why else study social existence? Knowledge without agents to employ it is a contradiction in terms. Oppression from which one cannot be freed is no oppression, only determination devoid of selfhood. (Reddy "Emotional Liberty," 263)

Emotions such as love, fear and anxiety as found in the texts are highly triggered and somewhat transformed by the war environment. The war has an unmistakable bearing upon the social determinism of both individual and collective emotions and resultant reactions embodied in the characters of three war novels. The theoretical anchoring in an emotional understanding of the civilians and their reactionary emotions during WW2 endows our vision with a possibility to map and reconstruct our understanding of the changes and traditions in the given societies from both historical and literary perspectives.

Notional and Real Emotions

Literary emotions as understood by the critics of literature insert language in a performative sense. Patrick Colm Hogan talks of "expressivism" (85) in emotions studies by relating it to the role of the implied author and the implied reader, and the actual recipient of emotions in the text. Hogan argues, "A normatively sad work or passage would be one that in some sense should produce a feeling akin to sadness in the recipient. Put differently, one could say that a normatively sad work is a work with a sad implied reader or implied recipient. Then there is the issue of what emotion is fostered in real recipients" (Hogan 83). Hogan argues that normative emotions "normative in intent" and "normative in actuality" in a particular text are exemplified by what he calls "notional" and "real" norms. "Notional" norms, according to Hogan, can create norms of producing certain emotions such as fear, whereas "real" norms help "identify" emotional responses as "misguided" or "insensitive" (Hogan 83). Keeping in consideration Hogan's notion of normative emotions in a text, the three novels *So Many Hungers!*, *Dawor Aru*

Nai and *Mari* open up an engaging theoretical negotiation to understand wartime emotions.

Situating the emotional embodiment of Mari in the eponymous novel will allow us to differentiate and foreground different sets of emotions of personal and collective experiences alongside the authorial interventions. Strikingly, *Mari*'s textual strategy is highly curtailed to simulate an experience of war that seeks to underpin an authoritative voice of the Naga people through a fictional imagination. Thus, fear and anxiety embodied in Mari are sanctioned by authorial intervention, which here in the case of emotions studies, one can choose to call the implied author. This implied author is focused on constructing a voice, that is suggestive of the processes of truth intimation linked highly with the genres such as docu-fiction. The novel of Kire, unlike Bhabani Bhattacharya's *So Many Hungers!* and Jogesh Das's *Dawor Aru Nai* conflates collective experience with fictive personal voices to simulate the intimation of knowledge production. This is where the balancing of emotions is overturned, unlike the other two novels by Das and Bhattacharya. Here, in the case of *Mari*'s emotions, appropriating Hogan's concept of "notional" and "real" norms will fortify the theoretical underpinning of emotional reactions/interactions as having roots in personal experiences. While negotiating the notional and real emotions, it would be relevant to ground our theoretical anchoring of emotions as something related to both the bodily responses and the reactionary emotions of both cognitive and non-cognitive nature. The paper though does not extensively dwell upon the emotions constructed by bodily reactions and brushes against this concept to filter and accentuate the emotional reactions as being channelled with, if not distanced from bodily ones. Mari, the protagonist of the eponymous novel in the first part describes her emotional state after her first encounter with the British soldier Victor, "... it was so unexpected that I blushed and cried out in surprise and held up my hands to cover my face. They both laughed. But he moved away until I calmed down. We didn't stay very long after that. I was so embarrassed I begged to be taken home" (Kire 27). Her first emotional upsurge in the novel is registered through her experience of love with Victor. When Mari meets Victor for the first time, the

embodiment of her emotion in the text suggests the bodily reactions and the resultant emotions of a young girl of sixteen when meeting a strange man. In this context her experience of fear and shame are conflated into the display of bodily emotions, the physiological one. The subsequent pages devoted to their meetups fall heavily under the trajectory of bodily and cultural reactions. William Lyons argues in his book *Emotion*,

An emotional state, then, is labelled as 'fear' rather than 'love' or 'grief' because the feelings, physiological changes and desires — and the ensuing behaviour if any - which form the state are believed to be the result of an evaluation that something is dangerous rather than that it is appealing (or good in the eyes of me, the lover), which would be the evaluation typical of love, or that it is a grave loss or misfortune, which would be the evaluation typical of grief. (100)

However, the subsequent images of fear and anxiety, and her uneasiness transcend bodily reactions and fall into the trajectories of environmental and social conditioning of emotions. *Mari* describes the emotional torment of both the collective experience and personal experiences of the eponymous protagonist. Mari's emotions are projected through the implied author's interventionist construction of a range of "objects" of fear emotions. Mari laments after she leaves Victor, her lover,

After fleeing Kohima, we were always on the verge of tears. We were so overcome by the hardships we had recently endured and the uncertainty of meeting our parents and brother again, the uncertainty of life itself now. But the incident with the bee was the final straw for me. All my fears for Mother and Vic came rushing in and I was certain that something terrible had happened to Vic. (Kire 79)

When Mari is consoled by Marina, Mari's reply to her shares a sense of complicit emotion which seems to arise from her objective fear of the bee which in turn leads to the process of experiencing a "quasi-fear" (Hyslop 294). However, the presentation of Mari's emotions is to be understood through the dynamics of how emotions

have been filtered through the perspective of a young girl of sixteen who has had the bitter experiences of war. This is where two different complications crop up in our examination of emotions in *Mari*. Firstly, the fact that she was a young girl of seventeen at the time of Victor's death, her experiences of fear become vulnerable to what Walton calls "quasi-emotions" (qtd. in Hyslop 294). Mari's experience of fear and anxiety over Victor's going missing is a projection of emotional reaction, the embodiment of which has its direct connection to the implied author's creation of "notional" fear, a fear that may not haunt at once or a fear, the norm of which is not of the degree as is described by the receiver, but the construction of that emotion nonetheless helps the implied author to form the subsequent events beforehand, that of Victor's death. This "notional" fear (Hogan 83) or "quasi-fear" (Hyslop 294) or quasi-anxiety may be termed as the foregrounding body of emotions that are yet to open up in full scale. Here in this context, the news of Victor's death may be put under our scrutiny to locate how affect is being handled by the implied author. The bee that catches the attention of Mari makes her feel that something ominous is going to take place and she starts thinking about it vehemently.

I suddenly felt alarmed and frightened. Was this bee trying to tell me something? Bringing me a message, perhaps? Our people say that if a bee does not stop bothering a person for a long time, it is because it has a message for the person. My heart went out to Mother and Vic – had something happened to them? Was the bee trying to tell me that Mother had been killed? And Vic? Where was he now? Still at Garrison Hill or had he moved away to Dimapur? Tears streamed down my face and I tried hard to fight them. I could not understand why I was weeping so uncontrollably, and I rushed to the back of the shed and tried to calm down. I was still sobbing when my sisters found me. (Kire 78)

Thus, when the actual news of Victor is conveyed to Mari, the reactionary emotion of fear in Mari does not seem to be tantamount to the degree of its former emotions. This is where the "quasi-

emotions” and “real” emotions come into play alongside different objects of wartime emotions.

Vic didn't feel any pain, Mari. There are terrible ways of dying on the battlefield, with your legs shot off or your stomach shot through. Vic had the most painless death of all. I am telling you this because you should draw comfort from it. The night before he died, he was telling me about his childhood. I know that after he met you, he was so happy and his life was fuller with you in it. He really loved you, Mari.'

Bob's voice was sad as he came to the last word. I was grateful to hear what he had told me and felt peaceful for the first time since I had found out that Vic was dead. (Kire 98-99)

The description rather than an experience of the notional emotion of fear touches on the embodiment of real norms of fear and anxiety. These anxieties at the most may strike as emotions propelled by a not-so-mature or somewhat gullible Naga village girl. However, under no circumstances, does Kire seem to be inserting the protagonist as a non-mature voice in narrating the war, rather she situates the figure of Mari as an agency that equips her to reconsider and reconstruct the historical and personal emotions at her best by cementing the same with intentionality of an implied author. *Mari* narrates, “I feared for Vic, where was he? Was he in the midst of those burning shells? When the firing died down, we returned to the house and others went back to sleep but I remained awake, sitting in the downstairs room. I sat there for a long time, half praying and half crying for Vic to be safe” (Kire 50-51). Mari's constant anxieties over Victor's safety renders her cognitive emotional reaction almost disjunctive to reality. The intensity of her suffering of separation keeps growing until the news of his death. This process of emotional handling in the narrative of *Mari*, follows a pattern of emotions transference from individual to the community, from subjective to the collective. Emotional vulnerability in Mari extends the parameters of emotional negotiation of the author herself to fit in the larger contexts of war's psychological effects on human emotions. “Emotions, in other

words, are partly culturally constructed, and this is where historical factors can be fundamental. Some emotions, like shame or guilt, have an intrinsic social component as well – they involve a real or imagined audience – which adds another potential historical dimension” (Barclay et al. 5). Kire shifts Mari’s reactionary emotions from her “family” space to the social space of war zones with a corresponding simultaneous shift to the construction of “real” emotions of fear from the notional ones. One such example of reactionary emotions which borders on real fear can be found in her encounter with blood-soaked bodies of soldiers. “Human life seemed so meaningless in the face of war. I felt nauseated at the sight of fresh blood on wounded men, their bandages soaked through. We had seen so much in such little time” (Kire 81). The description of Mari’s reactionary emotion on the sight of injured soldiers also hints at the physiological construction of emotion received through the human face, that is, ear, nose, eyes and mouth. Her receptivity to sight sensation would be different from that of her non-cognitive emotions about impending danger and her resultant fear emotion. Similarly, in *Dawor Aru Nai*, Anupama’s constant worries and anxieties arise from her constant stimulation of sensory emotion. Her dissatisfaction with Bakhar is a form of triggered emotion of both cognitive and non-cognitive nature that accrues to the visual reactions she experienced at the sight of luxurious materials at Giriwala’s home.

Social Conditioning of Emotions: Causative Emotions

Historical factors are fundamentally related to the operation and causation of different kinds of emotional responses among both the sexes. The social environment is another space that suffered along with the geographical landscape during the WW2. The cultural register of emotions points to the intimate relations between the norms of the social environment and individual responses. Easterine Kire’s *Mari* attempts to conflate that upsurge of emotions triggered during the WW2. The emotions of different norms are put into play to address bigger issues of historical, political, and cultural importance. A novel such as *Dawor Aru Nai* by Jogesh Das is highly focussed on the accentuation of war-induced values and their affect on the emotional communications in families and

relationships. Relationships are spaces in fictional negotiation of wartime emotions where the affective dimension finds its prime value in reciprocating/reactionary emotions embodied in conversations and individual thoughts. In *Mari*, “peace” (Kire 99) experienced by Mari after the news of Victor’s death through Bob’s voice is both a release of painful emotions as well as an outcome of reactionary emotions created and conveyed through a language of emotions that have an effect of consolation.

Similarly, in *So Many Hungers!* Rahoul’s emotional transformation is worth examining to understand the triggered emotional upsurge in his mother. Rahoul who himself was not considerate about the participation in the war was somewhat initially propelled by his non-cognitive emotions without any trace of reactionary objective emotions to the war efforts. In the novel, Rahoul’s desire to participate in war is a result of the causative emotion he experiences during his talk with his mother. The conversation between Rahoul and his mother about the conversation between mother and Kunal demonstrates the affect of “interactional regulation of emotion” (Anssi and Johanna 66). That mother’s emotion affects Rahoul is clearly visible in Rahoul. The mother narrates the entire conversation to his elder son,

And then he says, “Mother, I have something to tell you.” And his face is hot as if he has done some wrong and he takes me to his room and hands me a chair and he sits down on the floor at my feet, his head in my lap, and he says, “Mother, I am going to War. You mustn’t say, No.” I feel stunned. “Kunal,” I tell him, “when I am dead you can go anywhere, I shall not be here to forbid you. Wait, till then.” He lifts his face, he says, “Mother, you want to keep me stuffed up with cotton-wool? You will only break my heart.” I ask him, “What have they done to you, the German people?” And he says, “I have no high-sounding ideals to serve, Mother. I am going to War to serve myself, for my spirit, as it were” And he springs to his feet and paces the room, restive, and his heart seems to shine on his face, and then I know I must not be in his way, I know I must not hurt him within, so I tell him, “Kunal, do the right

thing. You have my blessing, my son.” (Bhattacharya 14-15)

Here, the mother’s reactionary emotion is one of specific judgement-sanctioned responses where the context affects the display of personal emotion. Later on, Rahoul’s intention to join the Army for the sake of revenging fascist rebels in Spain only becomes an excuse to join the Army whereas his past emotion was highly triggered by Kunal’s decision to join the Army and above all the emotive language of his mother. Rahoul’s subsequent emotions of restlessness and his anxiety about joining the British Army achieve a heightened intensity affecting his daily performance in conducting himself around. His restlessness affects his wife and mother vehemently. His wife, Monju dissuades Rahoul from any probable participation in the war.

‘All men are not made alike,’ she spoke with a joyous sigh because of her relief from shock. ‘Your true place is with your books, your mathematics, your strange instruments in the college room where you took me once. You have the stars. You belong to them. They belong to you. The stars and the unseen lights. You are not earthy.’ Her voice mellowed caressingly. ‘You are no more earthy than this little one we have.’

He was dumb for a time and then he said, dubious, ‘I must talk it over....’ (Bhattacharya 19, ellipsis in original)

Conversations however should not be taken as the only source of emotional appraisals. The individual thoughts have a profound agency alongside the embodied emotions between couples. The trails of thoughts manifested in the narrative of *Dawor Aru Nai* are intertwined with the social constructions of emotions. Values associated with the conceptions of justice and rightful living away from corruption and the war-induced emotions of desire for more money, for a luxurious livelihood are thrust into the same narrative to create a dialectical model of negotiation with the war’s psychological dimension. In the article, “Emotions are Social,” Parkinson regards emotions as highly social constructions. He argues, “... the specific manner of our interpersonal negotiations of

emotional significance depends partly on a background of socialized practices of interaction. Thus, cultural as well as interpersonal considerations make an important contribution to the social determination of emotion” (Parkinson 665).

William Lyons argues about the object of emotions having its implication in “dangerous” and “disagreeably so” (101-103). He talks about the nature of the evaluative model to the approach of the object of emotions (103). The evaluative nature of formal objects, such as objects of fear, according to Lyons, underpin formal grounding (Lyons 103). Lyons argues that a material object can determine an emotional state which a formal object cannot (Lyons 102). In *So Many Hungers!* Kunal’s argument for joining the British Indian army signals a same trajectory of emotional experience. Kunal utters, ““Live. We do not fear to live—dangerously”” (Bhattacharya 57). It is possible to surmise that Bakhar’s inability or his deep-rooted beliefs in his ideology of just and upright living carries a dimension of formal nature to one’s emotion apart from displaying the emotion as constructed in social determinism underpinned in Parkinson’s article. The outcome of emotional response towards the wartime developments and huge opportunities for money making is not given prime importance by Bakhar unlike his father and wife Anupama. The typology of emotions in the family, in this case, falls into a formal and objective model of emotions. The ideology of just and honest living away from any operative agencies of corruption is inspired from Bakhar’s innate adherence to the norms of one’s responses to desire, greed and money. In other words, Bakhar’s emotions can be underpinned by moral emotions as well. That Bakhar could not make up his mind to do war contracts regardless of how many times he had to hear from his business-minded father to earn wealth during war suggests a lot about his moral and “notional” fear towards war. What is crucial in *Dawor Aru Nai* is not Bakhar’s emotional state but rather the outcomes of his interpersonal emotions with his wife Anupama. Bakhar’s idealism becomes a barrier to Anupama’s fulfilment of physiological emotions, her love for luxurious life.

Sitting alone in the darkness he thinks, that this war has invited chaos in the world. Not only has this chaos operated

on the outside, it has also caused an agitation inside people's minds. The people are no longer the ordinary daily wage earner. Everyone else has turned unconcerned. Enchantments of two rupees, and scratching of a few notes have made them all mad. Will they be able to return to where they were? Can Bodhan return to his school? (Das, my trans.; 61)

The frequent mental conflicts embodied in the narrative perspective of Bakhar's thoughts result from a conflict between cognitive (Bakhar) and non-cognitive (Anupama) emotions. Even though there is no direct reference or even insinuation of the experience or apprehension of fear in Bakhar, there are moments that can be put under scrutiny to trace the mapping of fear in *Dawor Aru Nai*. Emotions of fear are related to the social construction of emotions which can be displayed by recognising its traces within the narrative framework, particularly in the implied author. Jogesh Das's novel incorporates an omniscient narrator which under scrutiny provides us with scopes for the appraisals of the characters' emotional states. Parkinson's ("Emotions are social") conception of emotions as rooted in social bodies can be jettisoned with our probing tools for examining the source of emotions. As said earlier, Das's novel does not foreground enough conversations to initiate discussions on the emotions of fear and anxiety. In such scenarios, the examination of the language and the narratorial positions of the implied author in response to the implied reader can offer us insights into the performative dimensions of embodied emotions.

Das's novel describes, "The society Bheem was born in, the society which had made a deep impression on him, does not allow people to be at ease with having patience. In that society, everyone knows that people work with their bodies and spend with their hands. There is no need to think over, no time for it. People need to only work out orders" (Das, my trans.; 50). This description suggests a lot about the reactionary emotions in Bheem in the text which will open up in the subsequent pages. Bheem is a character besides Bakhar who does not completely lose himself to the environmental circumstances during the war. The implied author bears consideration to locate Bakhar's emotional crisis just before

the shifting of the narratorial gaze to his love relationship with Gauri. Bakhar's emotions of love and grief cannot be discounted as having a direct connection to war as his ideals are something that precedes the coming of the British Indian Army in Assam. The localization of Bakhar's emotions, then, is the only way to construct an appraisal of his conflicting emotions of love and frustration if not grief, fear and courage. Bakhar's fear does not have an objective norm in causative emotions. In other words, his reactionary emotions maintain a connection rather than the pre-war cultivation of value judgments. Judgments in this context can be regarded as methods in the cognitive level of Bakhar's wartime thoughts that enable him to take a stand and remain unchanged unlike his wife Anupama.

Social Environment and Emotion

To accentuate the affect of foregroundingly constructed Bakhar's mental states, the implied author inserts contrasting images of the social environment. At a time when war meant for many a source of wealth and fame, many grabbed and yielded to the opportunities of the war including Bakhar's father in *Dawor Aru Nai* and Rahoul's father in *So Many Hungers!*. They are quite similar in holding opinions about war and making the most out of the war. In both the novels, though different in geographical localities, their responses to the war share the same interest of earning money during the war to the detestation of their sons.

The emotional states in the relationships of husband-wife, and father-son immediately change, after being exposed to the war's excitements with money and wealth. The emotional typology to a great extent can be exemplified through the married couples of Bheem and Gauri, and then Bakhar and Anupama (Kuki). After marriage, Gauri goes to work in the construction field of war. The working zone can be regarded as a space of emotional changes that foreground the psychic dimensions of war and its affect on the emotions of the characters.

In *Dawor Aru Nai*, unlike Gauri who happens to see the thrill of easy money in the construction field, Anupama's emotional states are triggered particularly by her coming into contact with the riches

of war earned through war contracts. Her emotional sufferings of unfulfilment are not solely related to the riches of war alone, nor with Bakhar's non-engagement in war-contracts, rather it has more to do with the affective emotions she encounters during her frequent ride with Giritwala. Giritwala often comes to Anupama's home in cars and takes her for rides in places such as Dibrugarh, Tinisukia is a turning point in her life and emotional experience with her husband (Das 59). Anupama's contact with Giritwala triggered certain innate human sensitivities to the luxuries of life. Her dissatisfaction becomes a reaction of physiological emotions which furthermore creates more conflicts within the inter-personal relationship between husband (Bakhar) and wife (Anupama). In this context, Anupama's emotional responses can be conflated with the "non-cognitive emotional responses related to innate sensitivities and emotional memories, plus cognitive monitoring, which includes simulation" (Hogan 82). Centred around the trajectory of emotions in *Dawor Aru Nai* are the dimensions of both cognitive and non-cognitive emotions which weave the experiences of emotional environment in the two familial relationships of Bakhar and Anupama; and Bheem and Gauri in ways that are both transformative and resilient.

Distinguishing the different emotions of both sexes leads to the possibilities of underpinning the negotiation with notional and real emotions with different norms, environmental and socio-cultural, personal and collective etc. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Jogesh Das and Easterine Kire straddle both the familial and cultural experiences of the war, which is why their authorships locate agencies of cultural registration of different emotions in their central figures. Experience of subjective emotions experienced by Mari in the eponymous novel and the hungry woman with the child in *So Many Hungers!* can be seen as extensions of their individual selves which communicate with the larger bodies of the shared communities leading to the build-up of emotional communities, or a sense of the collective history of the processed memories. In this context, the emotions of the characters become overlapped with the reconstruction of the historical emotions. Thus, the hungry mother in Bhabani Bhattacharya is a testament to the sensitive emotional memory of the famine that struck the Bengali people. Her emotion becomes a

miniature embodiment of the collective sufferings of the famished Bengalis in the 1940s.

Conclusion

To conclude, the range of emotions displayed and embodied in characters of both men and women are staged in ways that bear a larger negotiation with the historical, collective emotions where the fictive emotions are staged to signal a political spectrum and thereby a social commentary. Historical emotions, or past emotions manifested in female bodies of the three war novels have the potential to address the contemporary debates regarding the postcolonial negotiation with the historical emotions of the war years. While the emotional norms in men have been formed conservatively, compared to the women, the ordinariness or vulnerabilities of women's anxieties and fear form a potentially socio-cultural affective gesture to draw the attention of the general public or the recipients of the texts to the past experiences through vulnerable/varying emotions of fear and anxiety.

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