

# The Creative Launcher

Journal URL: <https://www.thecreativelauncher.com/index.php/tcl>

ISSN: 2455-6580

Issue: Vol. 8 & Issue 1, (February, 2023)


Publisher: Perception Publishing

Published on: 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2023

Peer Reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access: Yes

Journal DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.53032/issn.2455-6580>

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**Article History:** Abstract Received on: 18<sup>th</sup> December 2022 | Full Article Received on: 25<sup>th</sup> December 2022 | Revision received on: 29<sup>th</sup> December 2022 | Plagiarism Checked on 30<sup>th</sup> December 2022 | Peer Review Completed on: 10<sup>th</sup> February 2023 | Article Accepted on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023 | First Published on: 28<sup>th</sup> February 2023

## Research Article



## Narrating Tales of Displacement: Fragmented Memory and Partition Stories

**Dr. Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry**

Assistant Professor of English,

The Centre for English Studies

Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, India

Email Id: [ishmeetkchaudhry@gmail.com](mailto:ishmeetkchaudhry@gmail.com)

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4208-1448>

 <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2023.8.1.07>

Pages: 57-71

### Abstract

For the children of families that have experienced partition, relating to roots and a place of belonging is never without complications. They tend to relocate themselves multiple times in physical places as well as mental spaces. Unfortunately, the final settling never takes place for them, neither in the new place, where the family relocates to, nor in the mind that is a storehouse of experiences of migration. They remain 'in-between' and continue negotiating between the past and the present through fragmented as well as tormented memories. This paper attempts

to study the complexity of belongingness for those who have lived the experiences of the Partition and how this complexity continues across generations. This will be done through a methodology of writing personal narrative and reviewing testimonies of those who experienced the Partition, along with the members of their families. The primary sources for this paper are personal testimonies of the family members, community magazine *Pothohar*, the short story 'Bhenji Parmeshri' based on the oral tales narrated by the researcher's grandmother, films *Sardar Mohammad* (2017) and *Eh Janam Tumahare Lekhe* (2015) and a testimony of Mohinder Kaur in the newspaper. The paper will evaluate the experience of those who suffered owing to Partition by connecting the contact points, like experience of migration, displacement of families, killing of daughters by their fathers etc. as depicted in the texts and testimonies taken for the study. Personally, the researcher's grandfather, Harbans Singh lived for 102 years witnessing and participating in events around the Freedom Movement, the Partition of India, the 1971 war with Pakistan, the Emergency, the 1984 anti-Sikh massacres, and finally the recent pandemic (COVI-19). At all major incidences he suffered personal losses. While throughout his life, he kept narrating his experiences of the Partition and the eventual victims' migration to India, but towards the end of his life, he refused to talk about it anymore. He became very selective in his choice of subject for a conversation. Nevertheless, his village and place of birth, never skipped him. Even in his dementia, any reference to his birthplace would attract his attention. The paper is an attempt to study how physical places become permanent fixtures and sites of memory that surface at a slightest trigger. These incidences are the deepest traumatic sites that never recover.

**Keywords:** Partition Studies, Traumatic Memories, Selective Memories, Displacement, Migration, Trauma, Life-Narratives, Oral Testimonies, Personal Narratives, Life-Stories

Memories of the Partition remain an integral concern for the families who have witnessed the displacement that followed. These experiences revisit the present times and again. The present continues to bear the burden of the past and the contact between the present and the past mars the transition of time and space. In this sense, the present can never have an identity without the impact of past on it. Past, therefore, makes its inquiry into the present in several ways, sometimes through material and external objects, for example, utensils, keys, house, clothes, jewelry etc. or by creating a sense of nostalgia, loss, or memory internally. Externally, the struggle to survive, re-settle and readjust to the new locale is always simultaneously accompanied by an internal struggle to acclimatize to the new transformation. This results in continuous negotiations with the past that often lead to distress and discontentment.

Urvashi Butalia describes Partition of India as:

...the most cataclysmic event to have taken place in the country's contemporary history. In terms of its scale, its wide-ranging impact, and its many resonances and ramifications in the lives of Indians today, Partition remains singularly important. Just the bare statistics are staggering, roughly ten to twelve million people are said to have

moved, within the space of a few months, between the new, truncated India and the newly-created Pakistan. Between 500,000 to one million people are believed to have died, hundreds of thousands of children lost and abandoned, between 75,000 to 100,000 women raped and abducted (Butalia, 'An Archive with a Difference: Partition Letters' 208).

The realization of the fact, that one's ancestors were amongst those who experienced the aftereffect of this migration, and how relatives and families lost their children, killed their daughters, how women were raped, doesn't allow the generations to move away from the grip of memories that keep haunting them.

Memories of the partition survivors and their families relate stories of resettling, struggling in a new land, contemplating the material loss vis-a-vis human loss, moving on and negotiating with the loss of culture, and language. The major challenge faced by the survivors and the scholars is regarding "mode[s] of representing" (Saint 178) of the experience of the Partition. Though, there has been ample work on the Partition in various contexts, be it political or socio-political writings, or representations through literature, but the question is whether all aspects have been covered or is there much remaining still?

Looking at the magnitude of the overall violence and mass-migration there is still a further scope of expansion. Scholars have repeatedly revisited various ways in which the Partition per se can be narrated. They inquire into various methodologies ranging from collecting oral narratives, interviews, critical research, analyzing documented historical accounts, writing experiential accounts, working with empirical data and other ethnographic methods. In the present paper focus is being laid on archiving family histories that becomes an important tool of anthropological research to address, question and critique the past with a lens of alternative history available through personal experiences.

### **Archiving the Experience:**

It would be apt to begin with questions echoed in Antoinette Burton related to archives: What counts as an archive? Can private memories of home serve as evidence of political history? What do we make of histories that domestic interiors, once concrete and now perhaps crumbling or even disappeared, have the capacity to yield? (Burton 4)

Though Burton asks this question in the context of positing a response, he builds a counter-narrative to the histories of colonial India. The same question becomes relevant in the context of experiences of the people who have experienced this conflict. Therefore, the oral narratives and personal histories of the Partition survivors<sup>1</sup> brings to fore, an alternate perspective of history, from the survivors and their family's points of view. Rather, it would not be wrong to suggest that official histories written around the Freedom Struggle and movements related to the Independence of India have treated violence around the Partition indifferently. The lack of official records at the time of partition suggests the callousness of institutions towards the citizens on both sides of the country. It seems to be a matter of grave ignorance even though the Partition came to be recorded as "the largest single migration in the world" (Bhalla 19).

Finally, the Partition archive that began collecting oral interviews of the people who had scattered around the world due to the Partition of India emerged as a massive database. The quest, for the founder of the archive, Guneeta Bhalla, emerged from a personal sense of loss, having belong to one such family. She began recording experiences not just of her family but of all the survivors of the Partition 1947 across the world. The importance of these interviews lies in the fact that they serve as an important source of evidence, while the official evidence has been missing or were never recorded. Burton later also asserts that “the word “archive” [is used], also to indicate [that] the “Family History” is itself an enduring site of historical evidence and historio-graphical opportunity in and for the present” (Burton 5). The family accounts become testimonial evidence to the truth that never gets formally placed. The importance of these accounts and their presence in an individual’s mind has been articulated by Alok Sarin and Sanjeev Jain in their first ever psychological study of the Partition as they say that “...the individual’s mind became one’s own private space...” (Sarin 5). These spaces give rise to the psychological fear or a sense of freedom. The impact on the mind of the survivors at times carries incomprehensible experiences. For example, multiple narratives that emerge from the Partition archives are replete with honour killings, mass-suicides, multiple rapes, and humiliation of women. Mostly, women are more vulnerable in times of conflict. These accounts become most authentic when narrated by the survivors themselves. The survivor is considered the witness to the situation. While, all this is extremely complicated, Giorgio Agamben suggests that the survivor cannot be a “complete” or primary witness. Primarily, the experience of the one who was killed can never be told, can never be known as the survivor also does not know the complete account. Therefore, according to him there is a lacuna in every testimony. He quotes Wiesel who says that “[t]he past belongs to the dead” (qtd in Agamben 33). Therefore, history is always accompanied with that what is “lost in the past”<sup>iii</sup> (qtd in Agamben 33). What actually remains is the filtered remnant of the remains which may be termed as “fragmented”. Thus, the survivor’s accounts are the “fragmented”, incomplete or the partial accounts leading to the actual truth.

The macro-histories or the family histories are often custodians of these “fragmented” memories. Children of such families are not just simple receivers of these stories, or mere audiences, but they grow up with the tales of displacement, dislocation, and relocation, they are active participants and bearers of the after effect of these experiences. In the whole process of dislocation to relocation, complete relocation or permanent settlement is never possible. The experiences are carried on from generation to generation and every time they restructure in a new way, with different identities and new subjectivities. The children become the storehouses of these experiences, of the tales, and narratives.

### **Modes of Representation**

The Partition experience, apart from political or historical writings has been dealt with in other genres and forms. Several films, television serials, novels, short stories, poems, plays and academic essays are some ways in which scholars and researchers have engaged with the subject.

Though it is true that literatures around the Partition experienced a decade of silence. These silences depict, first and foremost, the intensity of the violence and trauma that was, in a way, very difficult for the survivors to document. Secondly, the survivors were perhaps engaged in either resettling or in a process of recovery, therefore there was hardly any time to document or write it, in turn the first decade witnesses an eerie silence. The only writer who wrote on the subject in the early years was Saddat Hasan Manto. For others, it took writers time to find space to address the concerns related to violence with utmost responsibility. After a decade, one sees an outburst of different forms of writings in which the writers address the concerns of violence around partition. At the same time, these silences were broken in the inter-generational communication process. One of the modes of representation was these personal conversations between grandparents and the children of their families.

My grandmother would often talk to us about her days spent in her village Kahuta, in Rawalpindi, now in Pakistan, the place was in the linguistic belt of Pothohar. Even after moving to India, in March 1947, she continued to associate with the past, through her memories, and the stories of her experience. She fondly remembered her childhood days.

Alok Bhalla associates this connect to home, and community (*basti*) for the ordinary characters of the Partition fiction as something innate. Though he refers this to the characters of fiction, the statement stands true for people who migrated themselves. He opines:

For as long as they can remember, they [ordinary people] have lived side by side in settled communities. The beginnings of each of their private biographies are connate with the origin of their bastis. It rarely occurs to most of them that, as members of different religions or sects, their cultural differences are so radical that their lives have followed historically different and antagonistic paths since the beginning of their encounter with each other. (Bhalla, *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home* 15-16)

In the same connection, my grandparents, till the end of their lives could never dissociate with their village that has no existence in the world now. Throughout, they wanted to return to their homes. Therefore, they could never settle completely in the new places they migrated to and always felt that they were outsiders. Their lives were completely transformed.

The Partition turned my grandmother's fate from riches to rags. She belonged to a prosperous family, but the Partition turned them into a pauper. Moving to India they had to start from a scratch. They moved away from their home empty handed. Before her marriage, she was known to be a dainty damsel who carried a little silver pot to the well just to accompany her friends for fun. "The boys around them wondered, as to, who would marry her to bear her tantrums and pamper her so"<sup>iii</sup> reports my paternal grandfather, who had known her from their village from the pre-Partition times. Then finally, he got the news that she was engaged to the richest man of the village, that is my maternal grandfather Daulat Singh. But time brought everyone to test. She had 2kg gold at the time of her wedding which she left behind in a dry drain and moved to the Gurudwara to protect herself and her a year and half old daughter when



the riots broke in the city in March, '47. In Kahuta, the riots had begun much before the actual Partition was announced. The only object she carried along was a small glass to feed her child.

On the other hand, my paternal grandfather, Harbans Singh belonged to a relatively poor family, though very respected. He was one of the few men to graduate from his village and he remembers that drums were played when he graduated. After the Partition, Harbans Singh worked hard and was given a job as a political agent with the British Government.<sup>iv</sup> He rose from poverty to a decent middle class. At the same time, the financial condition of the rich also met a set back and therefore, Daulat Singh had to start all over again: he was reduced from high class to middle class. He often told us his tales of struggle yet a success story of re-starting in India, cutting stones on the road, buying a second-hand bicycle, to collecting milk and eggs from the surrounding villages and then selling them in the city, to turning into a furniture merchant, once again successful and rich both in pocket and belly. He held an identity of being “the fat aarewale (sawing-machine) Sardarji” (*Uh mote aarewale Sardarji*).

Eventually, my mother was married to my father. My paternal grandfather opined practically, that if they were still in Kahuta, perhaps it was impossible for this marriage to take place owing to the financial differences or class status between the two families, but time had played a crucial role in transforming people's situations. In the same vein, my maternal grandfather remarked about another relative Jagat Singh, who was now famous for the money he owned after partition, and how his money was eaten by termite in his locker. Often, Daulat Singh remarked, that Jagat Singh was a mere worker in their shop back in Kahuta. The Partition had affected people differently.

### **Pothohar: the 'Biradari' Magazine**

My maternal and paternal grandparents belonged to the same village and once they were relocated, they decided to marry their children within their own 'biradari' as was the case with many others. Though it is a common fact that people married their children in similar clans and castes, in the case of my grandparents it was an affinity to the village irrespective of their castes. Moreover, many Hindu families in this village had been converted into Sikh in the past by Bhai Attar Singh, my grandparents being the third generation; my mother's grandfather's grandfather, Bapu Budh Singh was the first, and we are the sixth generation of the Sikhs in this family tree. Interestingly, having relocated in India, people spread to different parts. How could this tradition of marrying children within 'biradari' have continued, if the people were scattered and no more in touch? Generally, people gathered information about their relatives from the camps. Seeing any Sikh man, respectfully called Sardarji, anywhere, on the road, in a restaurant, in the train or in a shop, someone who wore a slightly tilted and well starched turban called “Pothohari pag” (turban) and spoke “Pothohari language” was definitely contacted and some common reference that linked them to us was always sought. Sometimes, it would be a happy coincidence to find a copy of 'Biradari' magazine/periodical (referred to as periodical hereafter) titled “Pothohar” (refer figure 1 and 2) either from someone's shop or at someone's house. The periodical has been a very ingenious idea and its significance is immense. It became a source of information and served to connect the people

who had now scattered to different places in India and around the world. The readership of the magazine is across the world, though limited only to the ‘Biradari’ members. A nominal membership would get a monthly copy to the members at their home address. A 24-page periodical carries news about the welfare of people, their success stories, news related to marriage and birth of the new-born, also obituaries and some religious as well as ‘Biradari’ related articles. The periodical was started in the year 1960 and this is the 59th running year. Around 800 total registered members receive a copy every month, out of which 387 are based in Delhi alone; 61 families in London, USA, Finland, and Australia; others scattered in other states of India.<sup>v</sup>

The cover-page of the periodical carries two labels for the title word ‘Pothohar’ in bold letters; one written in Punjabi on the top of the page; and the other in English. The English label carries a sub-title “Pothohar Formerly, and now as Territory of Pakistan.”(refer figure 1 and 2) Meaning, what earlier was Pothohar is now a territory of Pakistan. Interestingly, Pothohar for the displaced community has become an idea of “a living”, now lost in the past. Pothohar has now become an intangible notion of a place which existed once, but it is now inaccessible to these people and is just a territory of Pakistan.

Unfortunately, the Pothoharis are disgusted with the new development on their land of birth, as the Pakistan Atomic Bomb energy power has been constructed in the exact place of their dwelling of the people of Kahuta. Therefore, the entire area is sealed for foreigner’s visits. My grandmother often remarked “the place where we lived and loved; stands the most disastrous instrument of hate.”<sup>vi</sup> “Pothohar Formerly” also connotes a cultural space where language, food cultures, and attire, and other ethnicities were common and shared. For these communities ‘Pothohar’ is now reduced to just a territory. Moreover, the other phrase “now as territory of Pakistan” is a more Political statement as it indicates that the political boundaries of the new nation are drawn and redefined only in terms of nation than the living cultures.

The periodical is written mostly in Gurmukhi script but at times some articles appeared in English too. It is rare that an article in Hindi would be published in the magazine. The reason for this perhaps was that the elders who were the founders of the periodical acquired education in the pre-Independence era, and were well versed in Urdu, Gurmukhi and English rather than Hindi. Hindi as a subject had not gained prominence in their region, that was a Muslim dominated area, as it became an official language later in India only after the Independence of India in 1947. Moreover, though the script of the language was Gurmukhi, it was different than standardized Punjabi and often words of pure Urdu appeared in the Punjabi script, for example, the use of the word “Hizrat”, “Hifahzat”, “Hamla Awar”, etc in Gurmukhi script. Though the spoken language has been the Pothohari dialect, much closed to Dogri language. The language is still alive in Pakistan but there are, some elderly, but few speakers left in India.

The earlier cover pages of the periodical were black and white, 6 inches by 8 inches. In the last decade, the size was enlarged to 7 inches by 9.5 inches, and the cover, changed to a blue-coloured magazine; this was later followed by a more colourful edition. The recent editions employ different colours in sync with the colours of the photograph.

The cover page of the periodical carries a religious picture every month except for the month of the Independence. It is interesting to note, how the nostalgia around nation rebuilds itself, visible in the August, the month of the Independence of India and also one of the editions of March 2018 had a different cover. This was the month when the community celebrated the “Biradari Samagam” to commemorate the past as the mass migration from the region took place in the month of March.

The cover page of August 2016 issue is an Indian flag flowing freely and in continuity with a white dove flying around it. This is accompanied with a greeting “Wishing you a Happy Independence Day!” (“Cover Page” Pothohar Punjabi (Monthly)) While the August 2017 issue’s cover-page has a photograph of the Red Fort and the Indian flag flowing freely on it, with greetings for the Independence-day, printed in Punjabi (“Cover Page” Pothohar Punjabi , Monthly) (refer figure 1).



Figure 1: Pothohar Biradari Magazine August 2017

The idea of free and Independent India seems to be central to the community. These images signify that the community derived a meaningful definitive sense of self in the establishment of a liberated and independent India, where they found shelter when they were driven out from their village. Though, the people of Kahuta identify with Sikhism, the nation remains central that ties the loose threads of the scattered family members, or the displaced members of the community. While the March 2018 image is that of a painting of Saka Panja Sahib in Hasan Abdal (refer figure 2).



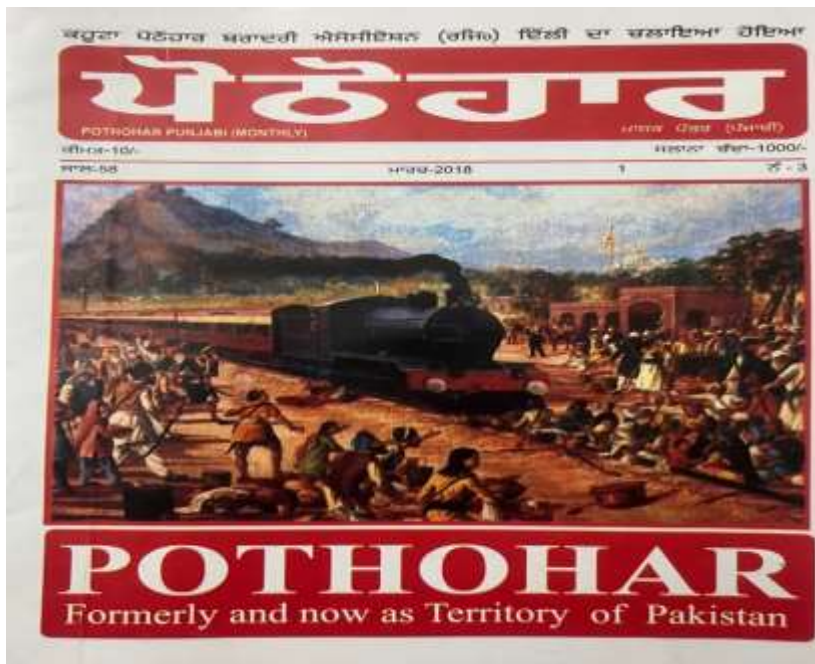


Figure 2: Pothohar Biradri Magazine, March 2018

The cover pages in a way also suggest how the community struggles with re-establishing their identity in the new space and the new nation. Ravinder Kaur suggests that identity-making is one of the crucial concerns for the migrants:

The identity debates arise on a similar exploratory plane like many other conceptual themes, for example, memory, that move constantly within and across multiple levels of individual, community, nation and society. While it is usually accepted that identities are multi-dimensional, it is still debatable as to what aspects of an individual's and social group's life history constitute identities (Kaur 219).

Therefore, a never-ending struggle for migrants is visible in an attempt to negotiate and create their identities. The mass movement brought with it a wide-spread transformation of the community. People of the community live with a sense of loss of culture, language and the day-to-day eidos of life. This is more closely visible in the cultural divide between the generations of these families themselves. For example, the older generation spoke a certain dialectic Pothohari Panjabi, while the new generations took to a more standardized Panjabi or even Hindi and English. Within the magazine itself, articles in English were being included to involve the younger generations who seem to be getting detached from their past with time and challenges of their own world.

#### **Literary and Other Modes of Representation:**

Literature written by some eminent writers like Saddat Hasan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Ismat Chughtai, Joginder Paul, Gurbaksh Singh or the father of Panjabi novel, Nanak Singh portrays the agony of the common people who witnessed the Partition. Many of these writers provide a fair estimate of how people belonging to different religions lived together in their villages before the seeds of hatred were sowed in their hearts resulting in the gruesome

violence followed by the Partition. Though the freedom movement demanded Independence from the Britishers, unfortunately it ironically resulted in Indians killing Indians. Those who had lived together, participated in festivities, had shared a heritage were now fighting amongst themselves.

The situation of women was even more peculiar. The worst was that several women were led to commit suicide by jumping into wells to save their honour; or fathers killed their own daughters so that they were not raped by other men. Mohinder Kaur experienced occasional depressions all through her life as a scar on her throat indicated perhaps her father had tried killing her with a sword as all women of her family were killed by their spouses or fathers. She was just 9 years old then. She speculates that since she was the youngest, perhaps her father's hand trembled while hitting her. Though, she fell unconscious as the stroke may not have been hard enough to have killed her. Later, she was rescued by the military. ('70 years on, Scars Remain- On Body and Soul') Her family bore the brunt of her depressions from time to time. They never had mirrors in their house as whenever Mohinder Kaur saw herself in the mirror, she was reminded of her past and would fall into depression for days together. ('70 years on, Scars Remain- On Body and Soul')

Also, many a time, such symptoms are found in generations after generations. Siddhartha Mukherjee in his book *Genes* describes how survivors of the Partition had become schizophrenic and how it was carried on, along younger generations. He says, "Both my father and grandmother believed that Jagu's and Rajesh's mental illnesses had been precipitated--even caused, perhaps-- by the apocalypse of Partition, its political trauma sublimated into their psychic trauma" (Mukherjee 4). Therefore, we are made to realise that the impact of such events continues and travels across generations.

### **Fragmented Memories and the Creative Writing Process**

The children of the families that have experienced the Partition face a different sort of dilemma. They sway in between their present and past. Having listened to the tales and narratives of their grandparents, these experiences find a fixed space in their psyche, while any attempts to express them are not without complications. The children of such families try to express the experiences of their grandparents in different forms. A larger category called life narratives is used as an umbrella term to include the different patterns of expression in which the children express them. Life narratives evolve as a separate category today that is inclusive in nature as it accepts various ways in which writers explore questions of personal experiences: self and memory. It may not be wrong to say that life narratives are mostly experimental in form. Interestingly, there are different sorts of complications involved in describing the past experiences. Even though, sometimes, fiction is used as a medium to depict the past, it is often authenticated with experience. Since the younger generations of these families are the third persons, they distance in time from those who have experienced 'the truth'<sup>vii</sup> as first person. When the experience is reproduced by the third person, the distancing complicates the closeness to the facts which gets messed up as the tales travel from one generation to the other

upcoming generations. For example, in my conversations with my grandmother, she'd bring in a lot of names, but whenever I wrote accounts of these experiences, I would mess up the names.

My grandmother often talked of a woman who was a sex-worker and how she was married during the mayhem. She opined that this disruption had proved beneficial of her particularly, as in the so-called normative structure of society, this would have otherwise never been possible for that woman.

A fictionalized short story 'Bhainji Parmeshri' (Chaudhry np) was based on this conversation. The names of the characters in the story despite conscious effort to refrain from reproducing the actual names, were reproduced from the unconscious memory. With the result, all characters were jumbled up. The most respected teacher of the locality was posited as a sex-worker who later became the wisest and most learned elder women. On the one hand, where women had no voice and were at the receiving end of violence, Parmeshri had a choice to move with her beloved visitor, a Muslim Nawab. Owing to her religion as a Hindu, she refuses to move to Pakistan and chooses to stay back in India, when her circumstances lead her to finally get married and lead a settled life. On one hand, where there was a mayhem, people being uprooted, on the other hand, for Parmo (Parmeshri) it is the other way. In a situation where the honour of women is at stake, it is Parmo of the so called "dishonorable profession", who acquires "honour" in the terms of a normative society. Parmeshri's settled condition is a compromise much against her wish just like the unnamed protagonist's grandmother who had developed a strong liking for her Muslim partner while she was left behind before being rescued. The back door is also a metaphor of how domesticity limits the freedom of women. With the back door being "removed and a brick wall erected", the power and patriarchal prominence prevails over the musings of love bond shared between the Nawab and Parmo. Interestingly in the conversations, Parmeshri and the grandmother are sharing the "woman's space"<sup>viii</sup> where they share their individual minds, in terms of Sarin and Jain's contentions, their individual minds are their personal spaces where they construct their notions of freedom and emancipate themselves from societal shackles or limits (Sarin 5). This is the true moment of their existence for them. Nothing else in the whole life has been as liberating as this revelation of the truth in their emancipated space.

Therefore, it is important to read these disruptions from the perspective of the margins, like women, children, old, diseased, physically handicapped or specially-abled people; and the discourse on sanity and insanity. Manto's story 'Toba Tek Singh' brought to light the experience of the insane vis-a-vis the insanity of the institutional agency. At the same time, in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* in one of documents of the incidences when a mad woman is raped by someone. Though this is further knitted into a communal conflict as Puro, the protagonist adopts her child but the child is taken away from her, on the pretext that the mad woman was a Hindu by birth, therefore the child could not be brought up in a Muslim family. Incidentally, Puro is Hindu by birth but she is forced into marriage with a Muslim man. The child is made a scape-goat in the gambit of communal tension. This incidence in the novella is placed just before the breaking out of the Partition violence. In a way, Pritam is positing women as equally

vulnerable in normal as well as times of conflict. At the same time, *Pinjar* is one such novel where space has been created for the woman's voice to prevail. It is ultimately Puro's choice whether to return to her family to remain with her husband (Pritam 122). Similarly, in another story by Rajinder Singh Bedi's 'Lajwanti', Sunderlal's wife, who is left behind is brought back but much to the disappointment of her husband, who is ironically a preacher, an activist counselling people to accept their women, who were left behind in Pakistan. Sunderlal is thoroughly disappointed to see his wife's glowing face and her improved health. He elevates her to a position of a devi but never accepts her as a normal woman, who keeps craving for her husband's beating, thereon, as a sign of acceptance. Therefore, it is important to address certain questions, whether these women had their will, is it quite possible that 'Lajwanti' was happier where she was left behind. And did she really want to come back? Or did women continue living on accepting their circumstances as they were? Did they have a choice? (Bedi 32) Urvashi Butalia's book the *Other Side of Silence* highlights many such cases when women did find their husbands or families after many years. These women had children from their first and second husbands, while many had to live a dual life and had both Muslim and Sikh/Hindu children, depending on the family they were born into before or after the Partition (Butalia 7).

Recently, a Punjabi film, *Sardar Mohammad* (2017) made after the real-life incident of a boy who was lost during the Partition violence and was adopted by a Police Officer. The film depicts that the officer nurtures this child as his own son. As the son grows up and realizes that his mother was left behind, he returns to Pakistan to search for his mother. With great difficulty, he finds his mother, a blind woman living in dire poverty. Still, she identifies her child with her touch. After this the boy stays behind to look after his mother. The film has been made by the family that looked after him in India. The title of the film 'Sardar Mohammad', in a way, conjoins the two religions and reduces any religious divide, how a boy is both Sardar and Mohammad, yet separation of the two families across borders can never be bridged.

Unlike the discourse on madness and psychological impact, there has hardly been a study on the handicapped, the diseased, and old people. A documentary *Eh Janam Tumhare Lekhe* (2015), on the life of Bhagat Puran Singh, who came to be known as the 'Mother Teresa of Panjab', brings this concern to fore. He was the only man who gathered those people, particularly the physically handicapped, diseased, and old people who were left behind without any support and his establishment in Amritsar, named as *Pingalwada* (The home for the handicapped) housed hundreds of men and women. But academia, in a way has not yet dealt with this subject.

### **Conclusion:**

The Partition of India is accompanied with violence, universal suffering, psychological trauma, displacement, and dislocation. Many of these experiences were lost to memory despite the impact it had always had upon the people. Partition, no more, is an Indian subject, with the widespread migration of people across the world, the Partition of India, today has a larger global magnus.

My paternal grandfather lived till 103 years; he died in Jan 2022. At an age of 97 he was recorded by the Partition archive, unfortunately the archive lost his recording. Sometimes, disappointed with this experience he would resist speaking about this experience. As he aged, he hardly wanted to speak about this issue. He became very selective in his choice of the subject and many a times when we reminded of some of the worst experiences that he had always narrated to us, he began blatantly denying that any such event never occurred. For example, all his life he told us how he had boarded a train from Lahore to Amritsar in August 1947. The train was full of dead bodies and there was no place to stand. He remembered spending that journey balancing on one foot and how some people had thrown a few bodies out of the train to make some place to stand. We, as young children, had always found this tale very fascinating. But around 99-100 years of age, he denied if any such thing ever happened. Moreover, he would stop talking for days if we pressed upon him with such incidences. Gradually, he lost sense of place. He began saying that the house he stayed in at Shimla was the house that he had built in Lahore and at present he was located at Lahore. My grandfather's first job was in Lahore. He had never got an opportunity to build a house there. Maybe this was his unfulfilled dream that he must have seen as a child. These memories continue to haunt people no matter how selective they become in choosing their subject. Such life narratives counter the official histories and provide alternate histories, they speak a language unheard, a language of the other side of Nation's freedom and the price common people paid for it. Tarun K. Saint explains the significance of such life-narratives:

Such life-writings in many cases tend to be fragmentary and subjective, as emotions otherwise repressed came to the fore and tinged the description of extremely painful events and aspects of this experience usually deemed unspeakable. Nonetheless, significant memoirs did bear witness to the event, uncovering hidden and untold stories that were often lost to memory, thus performing an important testimonial function, even as South Asia continues to be haunted by the specters of this traumatic history (Saint, *Exorcizing the Ghosts of Times Past: Partition Memoirs as Testimony* 73).

Though the macro-narrative addresses a limited group of people, they also relate to those who have similar experiences. There is need to preserve these narratives lest they be lost forever. But the main challenge that lies in front of us is the question: "Can there be a closure to the Partition experience?" The first generation has never been able to recover from their loss and it seems to have been carried on across generations. Like the Jews have not met a closure to their traumatic experiences of Holocaust in Germany, the Partition too seems to be a continual never-ending discourse. The ever-widening gap between communities based on identity would keep alive this critical concern of crisis and conflict. Recovery, therefore, is an ideal notion, a fantasy, a haze. The only optimistic hope that arises from this discourse is that people may learn lessons from the past for future, if they may!



**End Notes:**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/>

<sup>ii</sup> Often historical accounts focus on the official narrative, on documentary evidence and the recorded accounts but history also has an alternative reference which is sometimes lost in time as it is either ignored, erased, or forgotten.

<sup>iii</sup> Raj Kaur belonged to a family that was very rich. They had servants at home, there was no need for the women to go to the well to fetch water, but Raj carried a small pot just to accompany her friends and spend time with them. The villagers thought that she was very pampered and wondered as to which man would be ready to marry her! The class divide between my maternal and paternal grandparents' family would have never allowed marriage of members of these two families. Partition reduced this gap. My paternal grandfather never forgot the class difference and would mention this statement repeatedly.

<sup>iv</sup> He started his career as a political agent with the British, for six months their office was at Lahore and for the remaining six months it was at Shimla. Post-independence, the secretariate was set up and my grandfather shared stories of how they all set up different administrative departments in the now new Indian government. He retired as an Undersecretary.

<sup>v</sup> Details acquired through email from Pothohar magazine office at New Delhi.

<sup>vi</sup> This statement was often repeated by my grandmother, Raj Kaur, who visited Pakistan in the year 1964 though she couldn't visit Kahuta, as my grandfather went to see their ancestral place. He came back hurt as the construction of the Atomic Plant of Nuclear Energy was on and their houses and other buildings had been eradicated. After this they were never able to go back again throughout their life. She passed away in the year 2006.

<sup>vii</sup> Truth here relates to experience of times; what the first-person experiences can never be the reality of people from the second or the third generation. They would only reproduce the narrative but the first-person will be able to delineate the experience authentically.

<sup>viii</sup> Often women would find space to sit and talk to each other. Generally, in Indian households' women were accustomed to working together, helping each other, sitting, and conversing about various matters. They shared secrets with one another, these were spaces where men were often absent. These spaces are also visible in festivals, culturally in Panjabi households' women would gather during celebrations and sing songs, dance, and perform incidences from experiences with family and men. They would also perform mimicry of patriarchal men or in-laws or act on songs containing sexual content. During these gatherings men were not allowed. These were purely 'women spaces.' In the story Parmeshri and the grandmother share this personal space in the absence of men and talked their heart out to each other.

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