Down the Memory Lane: Re-Writing Partition History through a Personal Memoir

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The present paper focuses on how memory plays an important role in reconstructing the narrative of partition that emerges from personal histories of individual experiences and family units. As the generations are passing away, the people who experienced partition first-hand are on the verge of disappearance. What remains is second-hand information from the younger generations who are the storehouses of the experiences, stories and tales narrated to them by their parents and grandparents. Largely, a sense of amnesia, forgetting and erasure challenges the articulation of these experiences. As a third-person narrator, belonging to one such family, the researcher has made an attempt to document her family history.

The paper lays focus on revival and re-membering the family eidos that reveals the veil of forgotten or hidden histories. One of the motives is also to recapture the momentous moments that defined the life of the people who left their homes and moved to other parts of the country. Remembering has been considered as a methodological tool to understand partition from the common people's perspective and create alternate history that examines the official accounts and their authenticity regarding partition. The fragmented memories have enabled writers to engage with literary forms that narrativises partition through short stories, novels and others forms of writing. The paper also discusses the challenges and limitations of fragmented memories and the complications involved in the creative process while engaging with real life experiences and fiction.

Introduction

Families have histories. They have their own memories and narratives embedded within the psyche of individuals. The experiences of forced displacement, migration and movement remains engrossed within the minds of people for a lifetime. These smaller units of memories within the psyche of individuals together build up to make histories of a larger macrocosm called the nation.

The present paper focuses on how memory plays an important role in reconstructing the narrative of partition that emerges from personal histories of individual experiences and family units. As the generations are passing away, the people who experienced partition first-hand are on the verge of disappearance. What remains is second-hand information from the younger generations who are the storehouses of the experiences, stories and tales narrated to them by their parents and grandparents. Largely, a sense of amnesia, forgetting and erasure challenges the articulation of these experiences. As a

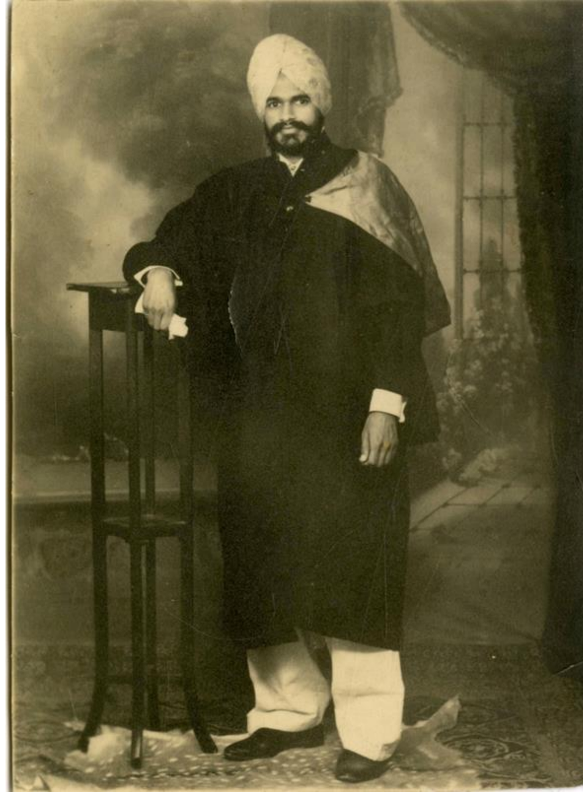
third-person narrator, belonging to one such family, the researcher would focus on the limitations of articulation and expression of the partition experience and for sure on the need to articulate this experience. Radhika Mohanram in an essay 'Specters of Democracy/The Gender of Specters' suggests that there are two types of collective memories one 'a nationally orchestrated memory that can bring about cohesiveness to a society and one that is open-ended, non-fixed, and non-politicized that can critique and question the former.' (Mohanram, 2016: 9)

To address certain concerns, as to why do we need to remember now after seven decades? Is 'remembering' voluntary, or is it involuntary? Did we ever forget that, what we need to remember now? Urvashi Butalia's suggests that 'over years, its [partition's] memories have become more complex, acquired more nuances and layers, and been seen differently, depending on the particular circumstances of the moment of remembering.' (Butalia, 2015: 7).

The present paper lays focus on revival and re-membering the family eidos that reveals the veil of forgotten or hidden histories. One of the motives is also to recapture the momentous moments that defined the life of the people who left their homes and moved to other parts of the country.

With the passing away of the oldest member of our family, 103-year-old Harbans Singh,[1] who experienced partition when aged 28 years, the living memory of partition experience is lost forever. In addition, the effect of scattering and displacement is felt with the loss of *Pothohari* language, his mother-tongue that has altogether disappeared from the family as there are no speakers of this language anymore. *Pothohar* is marked as a linguistic belt consisting of Attock, Chakwal, Rawalpindi and Jehlum districts in Pakistan. *Pothohari* is a language spoken by people of Kahuta Biradari (clan) hailing from Rawalpindi district. Some of them moved to India during partition. They settled across different states in India but all these years they identified each other with *Pothohari* language. The *Pothoharis* also tied their beards and wore a peculiar style of turban, often printed and starched.

Eventually, what remains after passing away of Harbans Singh is only reminiscences of the past, fragmented recollections that flow down the memory lane as critical inquiry of a gruesome violence during partition and mass-migration. This memory continues to haunt the present.



Harbans Singh after completing his degree. One of the few members of the village who acquired education from Panjab University, Lahore.

Photo in a Studio at Pakistan, most probably at Lahore.

A Question of Belonging

Those people who migrated from Pakistan to India and vice versa have never been able to introduce themselves without reference to the eventful saga of their life. The answer to the question, 'Where do you belong?', has always been complex followed by a long introduction. Any mention of an urban city where one had migrated to was never sufficient until the roots were disclosed, until the native village's name was revealed. Therefore, the introduction always had a brief component of the history of partition and connections being drawn to pre-partition association with the native village, now left behind in the other country.

In addition, the suffering intensified everytime one had to elaborate on the precise location in Pakistan. For our family, it was the place where Pakistan's Nuclear plant stands today. Our village is at same site where Pakistan's Nuclear

plant was installed. This brought with it a sense of loss and pain, particularly for those people who belonged to Kahuta and had migrated to strange lands.

Moreover, reference to the place of our belonging raised eyebrows of our friends. A lot of friends exclaimed to this as 'Wow! What an address.' Moreover, in case you happened to share it with any of your professional or peer rivals, the immediate response received was 'Oh that describes your quarrelsome nature well!' Interestingly, this introduction became more complex with our entry into present, away from 60s and 70s, into 90s and post 2000 as partition experience had now become a thing of past and fewer and fewer people related to it. The early 2000s raised a sense of hope amongst citizens of both countries when Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government initiated a dialogue with Pakistan through a program '*Aman ki Asha'* meaning a 'hope for peace.' This program initiated a dialogue with Pakistan and to start this a lot of programs were organised where people began sharing expereinces with each other on different platforms including social, cultural, trade, academically and medically too. The political dialogue ended up without reaching a reasonable consensus. Gradually, the gap between two countries began widening again.

Life was about aquiring technichal skills, adapting to new technologies and cheering for India during the India-Pakistan cricket or other sports matches. Anybody who cheered for Pakistan with the sportsmanship spirit or even with an involuntary emotional attachment to the country of their birth or their forefather's births, were declared traitors. Hatred towards the people of the same land from where the same genes were acquired was paramount. The passing years led to detachment and the prevelant enemity between the two nations increased rapidly. Raj Kaur, my maternal grandmother who expired sixteen years back often remarked that the place where they had lived and loved, stood the most disastrous instrument of hate i.e the Pakistan's Nuclear plant.

This concern, in a way, incites the politics of the present, where the countries have become enemies, but for the displaced, their affiliation to their native land, to their past, was beyond borders. Jasbir Jain aptly ponders over Heidegger's contention that inhabiting and dwelling are different; dwelling includes 'the whole of our being encompassing our activities and the changes in our growth, the way we are on earth. The three processses of building, dwelling and thinking are interlinked' (Jain, 2016: 25). Though my grandmother inhabited India in her twenties, she still dwelled much in her past, in the home that she had left on one, 'not so fine a day.' Her painful memories of her past and the present with 'the barbed wires and sealed borders' disintegrated both the past and the present. Jasbir Jain contends that 'The task of integrating involves both the outside and the inside worlds. It is difficult to arrive at a satisfactory equation between political and personal space' (Jain, 2016: 31). Similarly, my grandmother was never able to arrive at this kind of a satisfactory equation: between the outside/inside and the political/personal space. Anam Zakaria reports the sentiments of a Pakistani Zorarstian family, of how a woman became a Pakistani citizen overnight, the in-between-ness between being a Pakistani or an Indian. Anam reports that

> Like millions of others, she was to become a Pakistani overnight. Her home, her childhood, her ties were now in another land, a land which could not become foreign despite its best attempts to separate her, to deny her, to cast her out. But it was one that she could no longer claim either (Zakaria, 2015: 147).

My grandmother, too could never settle in the new land as her mind and thoughts were always in the hinterlands of her past. Her present dwelled on her inseparable memories of the past. In fact these memories constituted her identity in the present. She died with this pain of separation and remorse that she will never be able to revisit her native place ever again.

Personal Memory and the Past Experience

Remembering does not merely recollect an experience rather it is a process that creates a 'relationship between oneself and a remembered event' suggests Shaw (Shaw, 2007 : 8). This statement draws attention to a very important concern on the position of the narrator with time, both in the past, (in the situational time)[2] and in the present.[3] In this sense, memory is not understood as a storehouse of information, nor is it accurate, but at the same time, it authenticates the experience. It is that experience which has an impact on the mind of the narrator in the past sometime, that she/he retrieves in the present. Everytime the narrator recollects the past, she/he creates a relationship of the past with the present. For example, my grandfather migrated from Kahuta, Pakistan to Shimla, India. His recollections of his time spent in Kahuta and his time in Shimla have a deep relationship. He recollected that in Kahuta, the Sikh community lived together as a family, people were very religious and they all visited the Gurudwara having taken the morning abulations before sunrise around the river Ling. The day began only after everyone had visited the Gurudwara but now in Shimla, he was disconnected with his family members and the Sikh community. Having arrived in Shimla primarily because he had been appointed in the office of the Political Agent, Punjab Hill States in 1946, Government of India. His headquater was in Lahore and Shimla in winters. During partition his office was at Lahore. After Independence all states were merged under Himachal Pradesh government in 1956 when it became a Union Territory.

Viceroy's house from the British Capital Shimla, now Indian Institute of Advanced Studies. Photograph taken in 1964 at Shimla.

My grandfather often explained his state of confusion and bewilderment for a period when he was not aware of the whereabouts of his people, until he heard about them through the letters he received after about four to six months of partition. He realised that his parents and other family members had settled in Patiala where he went to meet them and saw that a government minister, Hukam Singh, a distant relative who too belonged to Kahuta, had provided shelter to his displaced family members. The family was eventually alloted a house in Patiala by the government and they moved in there.

The house at Patiala that was allocated by the Government. My grandfather's mother is seen in the photograph that was taken in October 1964

Harbans Singh moved away from his family members who had spread across Punjab and Haryana to Patiala, Ambala, Kurukshetra and Delhi. To him, his job was the most important as he needed to survive and make a living having lost his house and belongings, left behind in Pakistan. Since, then he always felt disconnected and alienated. The relationship between the past and the present is created primarily as his recollection of the past life at Kahuta, prefixes him in the past. Moreover, in the present he kept comparing his present with his past. He recollects how his *chacha*[4] Nand Singh, performed *kirtan* in the Gurudwara and all of them attended the religious sessions. He also complained about his inability to visit the Gurudwara on regular a basis and missing familial association with the Gurudwara, as was the routine in his native village being in Shimla now. This relationship juxtaposes the past and the present memory. Richard Terdiman coins this concept of memory as ‘present past’ (Terdiman, 1993: 8). He explains the paradigm of memory activity and the complicated ‘rationalist segmentation of chronology’ as :

> Memory thus complicates the rationalist segmentation of chronology into ‘then’ and ‘now’. In memory, the time line becomes tangled and folds back itself. Such a complication constitutes our lives and defines our experience. The complex of practices and means by which the past invests the present is memory: *memory is the present past* (Terdiman, 1993: 8).

Thus, how do we eradicate past from the present? Past is integral to the present and the agent of construction of past is memory. 'Memory is the modality our relation to the past' (Terdiman, 1993: 7).

At 98, five years before his death, Harbans Singh was prone to forgetting, although he made lot of efforts to remember, but was unable to recollect and articulate the events that he had narrated to us a number of times when we were children. There is no denying the fact that memory is accompanied by forgetting. Forgetting may not necessarily be an absence of knowledge as suggested by Dhooleka Sarhadi Raj (Raj, 2000: 31). Forgetting may also be intentional, an instrument to escape the suffering or the very rememberance of a traumatic past; an escape from a terrible thought or a horrific experience. It may be a choice of parents not to share with their children or to rid the children of the pain of the past and allow them to move on, to experience their own life and not a life of their parents. No doubt that this may lead to a complete loss of experience sharing in the family, but in no way does this eradicate the memory of experience, nor can this be considered ignorance. Nevertheless, subsequent generations do not live with an ignorance of their parent's experiences, rather in all likelihood, these experiences return to them is several forms, sometimes in sickness (schizophrenia etc),[5] recurring situations of riots, violence etc. As examples, during 1984 Delhi carnage a lot of Punjabis remembered the violence around 1947),[6] dilemma of cultural affiliations like identifying with a community language,[7] traditions or other cultural forms (music, art, dances) and even marriage, birth and death customs and rituals.[8]

Harbans Singh moved on to make a living with a feeling of dislocation in the newly formed hilly state, disconnected from his relatives and community members. Consequently, the post-colonial situation of his family also led to loss of cultural nuances and the sense of tradition. His loss was dispacement from his native village, followed by a loss of Punjab after Himachal was declared an independent state, a sense of language and culture. The following generations gave away speaking the Panjabi language, particularly *Pothohari* and were more urbanised and cosmopolitan. He measures the success of displaced families in terms of their capital gain but reassures us that people recovered largley because they were hardworking, sincere, amicable, helpful and self-determined. This, he recounts, was due to the progressive environment of their native place. The conducive ambience had merged with the positive attitude of people. He remembers how Kahuta was a plain land surrounded by mountains on one side, with a stream called the Ling river running across it. According to him the stream Ling was central to every life. He recalls that the dead were cremated along the Ling river, and how men and women bathed there every morning before going to the Gurudwara. My maternal grandmother often remembered her excursions with other women on the banks of River Ling. The women planned a day in advance, collected the dirty clothes, went to the river, alighted fire, warmed water and soaked clothes in the water. Washed them, dried them around the river and then arrived home having completed the task. This was a kind of community gathering for women, where they got together, worked and

gossiped with each other. This also offered them a me-space. As people moved away, such community gatherings were lost, recollects my mother from memories of her conversations with my grandmother. Harbans Singh grieved how he got seperated from his relatives and could not meet many of them as there wasn't any contact with them. He says:

> I don't even remember the face of my real *Massi*[9] Purni w/o Daulat Singh, they lived in Kashmir, Srinagar; I don't even know where she went; I had two more Massis, Massi Parmeshwari w/o Dr Mukha Singh who had a private clinic: Massi Maya w/o Ranger Mohan Singh. My mother's name was Ramrakhi (Interview 7 May, 2017: 8pm).

These names prompted a new inquiry in me. Were these women Hindu, as none of these names seemed to resemble Sikh names? With this, a new inquiry started and what evolved was another history of the pre-partition times as to how the entire Hindu population of Kahuta converted to Sikhism. Thus, there is a pastness of the past as past is contained in another past, just like layers of an onion. This statement tests true to Nicola King's evaluation of the Freudian model which she explained as, 'by means of an analogy with archeological excavation, assumes that the past still exists 'somewhere', waiting to be rediscovered by the remembering subject, uncontaminated by subsequent experience and time's attrition' (King, 2000: 4). The past enters into its 'pastness'. What was retraced was that Harbans Singh's parents were the fourth generation Sikhs after conversion of their ancestors from Hinduism into Sikhism. Harbans Singh recalls that his parents had told him how Sant Attar Singh[10] had visited their village and preached Sikhism. He consulted and convinced Bapu Budh Singh, the village elder to convert into a Sikh.[11] My mother recalls that it is believed that Bapu Budh Singh read *Ramayana*, the Hindu scripture the whole night, until he encountered the episode when Ram visits Ahaliya and she washes his feet and drinks the water. A sudden thought struck his mind that Ahaliya's devotion led her to drink the water with which she washed his feet, and here is a man who is going to 'put water in their head'. With this phrase, he referred to the amrit ceremony as the sugary water (amrit) is sprinkled on to the head and eyes of those people who embrace Sikhism through initiation ceremony known as Amrit sanchar. [12] That was an important turning point for the people of Kahuta. He ordered the Hindu population of the village to adopt Sikhism. This is how Harbans Singh's ancestors adopted Sikhism. Since Harbans Singh's *massis*[13] held Hindu names, it is fairly evident that Hindu influence was continuing within the families, although he also recalls that people were devout and regular followers of the Sikh faith. Interestingly, post-partition, many members of the community became keepers of the faith by following religion more strictly[14] and conforming to religious ideologies. Thus, the memory process is continuous and ever changing. It has an ability to translate and trans-create knowledge of the past in the present, to the knowledge of the past, in the past. Similarly, it is interesting to note how history is a witness

to a series of changes. These changes are temporal though they are random but they influence the future in a linear pattern for some time, until the new event disturbs its linearity, and once again registers those changes randomly. This pattern of linearity and non-linearity continues across centuries. These changes prompt formation of new identities that may be subjective, cultural, ethnic, religious and even sexual. [This is my personal view, therefore reference is not required]

Retelling the Narrative: The Second-Generation's Accounts Reproduced

The new generations carry with them experiences of the past into the present. These experiences of the past frame identities in the present, that can never have meaning without the past. As suggested above, the generations carry with them identities that are determined on the past, no matter how detached they may have remained from their histories. The past is bound to return in several forms and one such form is self-identification. Perhaps roots also determine an individual's identity. Every time an individual may attempt to identify him/herself, he/she is bound to be reconnecting to history or to his/her past. This experience is pertinent to the migrants and those displaced.

Even after having moved into India and born in Indian Territory, association of the second-generation partition survivors is related to their movement away from Pakistan into India. Thus, Pakistan for them is a pivot of their existence. Interestingly, for this generation, this is not contemporary Pakistan, it is an idea of a nation from pre-partition times, around which many a times a utopia may be created. What remains is what one wishes to remember. This memory is also constructed vis a vis the contemporary times in the present. Often, that what is lacking in the present is sought after in the past. For example, lack of roots in the present creates an image of a past which is someone else's (often the parents) reality. Nevertheless, this new creation/construction of the past in the present is born out of memories of the parents often shared with their children. These children are both witness to and participants in the aftermath of the experiences in the past. Thus, they carry on as storehouses of memories of the past. They are also the bridge between the present and the past. For example, interestingly, when my grandfather failed to remember names, as he had entered a phase of amnesia, my mother picked up names and supported him, reassuring all the connections she could draw between the past and my grandfather's memory lapses.[15] Every time, she recollected his lapse, it functioned like a trigger for my grandfather who recollected life events and people.

The second-generation accounts are at the threshold of reality and imagination. They are real as this generation is also a participant in the aftermath of partition experiences. My mother recalls how her father, once a very established businessperson, from a politically connected family, was reduced into dire poverty, after partition. He left his house in the clothes he was wearing, never to return.

It was the occasion of Holi, on the day, when the Sikh community was attacked by the Muslims in Kahuta. Even though, factually, partition was

announced in August, 1947, communal violence had already begun even before the actual announcement. These attacks took place in March, 1947. My grandmother narrated to my mother that they had warmed the tandoor to bake *rotis*[16] and were just about to have lunch when a loud crowd was heard approaching them. Someone came shouting suggesting that the Muslims had come and women with their children were asked to run to the Gurudwara[17] and take shelter there, while men sat on the *morcha*[18] to defend the mobs from entering their vicinity. My grandfather handed over a brass glass to his wife so that she could offer water to her one and half years old daughter. This was the only object they carried with them from Pakistan to India.[19] My grandfather joined the morcha while my grandmother handed her box of jewellery to my grandfather's cousin brother *Taya* Darshan Singh recalls my mother.[20] He took his wife's jewellery and hers and put it in a dry drain covering it with a mortar. They left behind the empty tandoor until the last wood burnt itself. That moment they left their houses, never to return. They stayed for a couple of days at the Gurudwara using the stocked food that exhausted in a couple of days. The mobs could not enter the Gurudwara as it was made of iron bars. Though, the water supply to Gurudwara was already cut-off, consequently people had immense trouble cooking food, access to drinking water and for washing themselves. Incidences of offering urine to thirsty children were reported in many cases but my mother is unable to confirm if this were true for my grandparents too. After a fortnight or so later, military came and shifted the people to Wah camp about 80 kms from Kahuta. My mother comments that if this Gurudwara were not there in Kahuta, not a single Sikh would have survived.

Photo of Harbans Singh's Marriage with Harbans Kaur in the Gurdwara where people took shelter before they were shifted to the Wah camp. This picture was taken by Swarup Singh in 1943

My maternal grandmother shifted with others from the Gurudwara to the Wah camp, while my grandfather continued to sit with other men at the *morcha.* At the Wah camp, my grandmother was informed that my grandfather had collapsed to a bullet shot. In fact, a man who much resembled my grandfather was killed, leading to such a confusion. My grandmother was convinced that she had lost her husband, when, one fine day, almost a month and a half later, my grandfather came searching for her in the Wah camp. My grandfather was wearing a *kurta* and a Sikhi *kachaira*.[21] When the mob came to attack the Sikhs in Kahuta, he was just about to wear his *payjama*[22] that he hung on his shoulder. Most probably, he lost it somewhere.

The family was reunited at the camp where they lived in dire circumstances. There was no water for washing and bathing in the camp. They were infected

with hair lice, followed by skin infections etc. Their clothes tore off, until finally people were distributed with cheap *Malaysia* cloth.[23] They didn't have the machines to stitch clothes, so they used needles and thread to stich them with their hands. They used this cloth for a long time. They spent almost two months at Wah camp. The military brought them back home to Kahuta to collect their belongings. As people returned, they realised that their houses were completely burnt and nothing remained. *Taya* Darshan Singh searched for the drain in which he had hidden the jewellery. He was fortunate enough to find his belongings there. He returned the jewellery to my grandmother in the same state it was given.[24]

After about a few months they moved forward from Wah camp, boarding a train that was heading towards India without any destination, until they reached Joginder Nagar in Himachal Pradesh, which happened to be the last station for the train. They stayed in a temple in Joginder Nagar for a year. It was in this temple that my mother was born. The climate of Joginder Nagar did not suit my grandmother and the relatives around them did not co-operate with them, thus they decided to move to Kurukshetra, where there was a refugee camp and many of her relatives were also staying at that camp.

The relatives at Joginder Nagar did not cooperate primarily because they had stolen my great grandfather's share of money and jewellery. This episode predates partition. Since my great grandfather, Sadhu Singh, had gone for his wedding, his old and ailing father, on his deathbed due to the plague, told his daughter the whereabouts of the jewellery and money that is it was buried under the floor in a particular room. She cleverly told her brothers that their father had bestowed the room upon her and stole all the gold. This family carried the entire money in gunnysacks to India and settled at Joginder Nagar. A tale of love also accompanies this story of theft. As Sandhu Singh's sister delivered the news of Bapuji's demise to her mother, she is believed to have said, 'What! Has he gone away? But he had promised to take me along. I am also going', breathing her last that very moment.

Thus, it is seen how there are interconnections between histories of history, revealing the past, opening it layer by layer. The family betrayal by Sadhu Singh's sister accounts for the continued distrust between the families even in the post-partition times.[25]

Moving to Kurukshetra a different struggle awaited my maternal grandfather until he stood on his feet once again. At Kurukshetra they occupied a Muslim *haveli*, that had been designated evacuated property of a family that moved to Pakistan. Sikh symbols, like *Khanda*,[26] *Ik Oankar*,[27] and *Waheguru*[28] were inscribed on the outer fences of the roof top. These fences were deliberately constructed to indicate that Sikh people stayed in the house to protect them from being attacked at times of conflict. Perhaps these fences carried Muslim verses from *Koran Sharif* which must have been replaced by my grandparents after they occupied the houses. Could this be an act of 'Sikh-subject formation'[29] (Mishri, 2011: 1) that builds a narrative for itself and continues to haunt the pre-partition divide and violence based on communal identities? These inscpritions, continued to narrate the tales of identity-crisis that people faced during this

period of trauma. The refugees travelled in communal groups and preferred resettling in groups where their colonies were established communitywise. The Sikhs preferred settling with the Sikhs, likewise the Hindus with Hindus and the same was true for the Muslims. These insignias on the roof tops depicted the communities residing these colonies.

Creative Process and Re-accounting Reality as Fiction

The children of the families that experienced partition, have never grown listening to fairy tales, tales of kings and queens or the folkloric legends in any positive way. It doesn't mean that these children have grown up without stories. Rather, such children have grown up listening to the tales of loss, survival, violence, and displacement from their grandparents. Along with these tales, stories of religion that seemed to provide a sense of security vis a vis the real experience of life filled the air that they breathed. The partition tales were episodes that our grandparents loved narrating to us repeatedly. There was an effortless outflow, word after word accompanied with passionate silences and gaps. Perhaps, every time they narrated; they also visualized the scenes. They never missed a single detail, and we loved listening to the tales of these incidents repeatedly as they also became the fixed sites of memories for us. Then, one fine day, all was lost, lost to the hands of destiny, as death takes away with it, the experience, the narrator, and the tales. What is left behind, are memories, that slowly and gradually fade away with time to acquire their luster only after generations begin to seek their own identities. This is the moment when stories are born out of the fragmented memories. These memories are like fossils of the generations who were the victims of their times. The third generations become storehouses of evidence of these pasts and continue to haunt the present as well as the future in the form of news stories: that of the widening enmity between the two nations and the rising conflict between the minority and the majority communities. The continuous re/formations of nation-image with the rising discourse of nationalism are built on the past experience of violence and trauma represented as a perception of singular experiences. The abstract and the family histories, seldom considered, open up varied experiences, yet common and shared experiences on both sides of the border. The communities revisit these experiences and recreate a narrative of nationalism. Deepti Misri in this connection suggests that:

> Theorists of nationalism have frequently suggested that the reproduction of nations and other imagined communities is contingent on the performance of regular acts of memory that draw upon the community's shared past to propel it into the future (Misri, 2011: 4).

Interestingly, when these accounts go missing on the pretext of age as the generations experiencing the event first-hand is on the verge of disappearing, the third generations seem to be the custodians of whatever is left. However,

these fragmented memories seem to provide information about the past, it is not the whole and complete accounts, rather there are gaps. These gaps are addressed perhaps, through a reconstruction of a story in which subjectivities (particularly of these families) can find home (Kabir, 2013: 4). Kabir addresses them as 'points of convergence' (Kabir, 2013: 4). These points of convergence in a way also bridge the gaps between the past and the present. Thus, the stories constructed, as a result of fragmented memories, in a way authenticate the experience irrespective of it being fiction. Fiction attempted to relocate the reality of the past by also examining in the present and thus, offering a new perspective to the readings of partition stories. For example, my grandmother always refered to a woman who had been a prostitute before partition. Beyond this bleak reference, I, the third-generation carrier of memory, have partial knowledge of relations and details. But, such references to women alluded in the mind for nearly forty years resulting in a short- story based on 'Bhenji Parmeshri'[30]. This story was knitted around a prostitute who was able to enter a more formal institution of marriage. The story voices the feeling of women as maybe the prostitute was content as she was and entering into marriage was an obligation for her as that was much against her wishes. Another woman in the story, the narrator's mother was also rescued from a Muslim family, and reunited with her own family. She seemed to be happier with the Muslim man she was left behind and remembers him fondly as if he had loved her more than her own husband. In both the cases, the women are the subjugated subjects and remains voiceless. It is the conversation between Bhenji Parmeshri (earlier as prostitute and now a respectful married woman in the neighbourhood) and the narrator's mother that reveals their inner feelings. The setting of the house is the same as was occupied by my grandparents after partition. The Mulsim architecture and the renovated Sikh symbols merged together indicates the change from pre-partition to post-partition and the present. Identities are relocated and re-constructed with respect to their positions in past and present. The refusal of Bhenji Parmeshwari to accompany the Nawab to Pakistan since she is a Hindu is a conformation to her religious identity which in her professional life had remained concealed or diluted but with partition what emerged is a communal identity. The same identity gets diluted when Bhenji Parmeshwari agrees to marry a Sikh man as Sikhs were being accepted as larger part of India than Pakistan. On the contrary, for the narrator's mother, she remained least bothered about her being left behind as her experience with the Muslim family was probably much better than with her own husband. She continues to live on with this feeling hidden in her heart and confides only with her friend who in return, also shares an equal bonding with her. In another story,[31] the brothel, where the narrator's grandmother takes shelter is considered to be safer than the outside world.

Fiction and reality collide at this point as the setting of the story is around the real house of my grandparents but the story is fictious. Interestingly, a cousin who read the story alluded that the fact was more exciting than the fictious story. The fiction tends to offer a feminist position by bringing to fore the concern or issue of honour by addressing the binary between the so called 'respectful' and

'non-respectful' spaces as constructed by the society. Nicola King aptly suggests the significance of narrative and its relationship to memory and the narrator stating that '…the processess of memory are reconstructed in narrative, and the construction of the self who does the remembering' (King, 2000: 11).

The narrative, thus serves as a site of memory, a 're-transcription' of memory.[32] In the biographical reconstruction, the images of the self are created and destroyed continuously. The events (comprising the *fabula*) and the recollection of events (*szujet*) results into a narrative reconstruction of a much complex matrix of the event, memory and its narration.

To conclude, fiction or personal memoirs aim at responding to the past. They built on social, communal and political conflicts. It is not just a study of relationship between the past and the present, rather, it is a critical examination of the political situation on which the present and the future is determined. It discloses the contact and conflict of the times. It emerges as an examination of the self and the social, which impacts the past and the pastness of history. The family histories, in a way, question the responsibilty of the state as an institution to its citizens. Rather, during partition, there was a complete breakdown of the state machinery. There are no offcial accounts of this event. What remains are such memoirs.

However, the post-partition amnesia and the fragmented memories posit an unaccountable sense of loss of history. This is accompanied by the narrator's willingness to move on in life and to accepet whatever has happened in the past, which in itself may be analysed as a volunatry act of 'let-go' and 'let-me-be'; an act where the narrator doesn't want to revist the past as she/he may want to get rid of it. The narrator wishes to stay in amnesia and uses selective memory to remember or forget the past. The temporal distances and the inablity to recall register the silence of the untold and perhaps, of the 'untellable'.

Notes

[1] All the names have been retained with the permission of the concerned persons. However, wherever there was an objection, names have been changed. Harbans Singh was born in the year 1919.

[2] The point in time when the event occurs; here the narrator is the victim/survivor who is a witness and locates himself/herself to the situational time in the past.

[3] The narrator reproaches his/her past from his situation in the present at a time when he narrates the past.

[4] *Chacha*: Father's younger brother.

[5] Siddhartha Mukherjee (2016) in his book, *The Gene: An Intimate History,* describes how survivors of partition had become schizophrenic and how this carried on in the following generations, even among those who had not experienced partition but belonged to these families.

[6] Many survivors' of 1984 carnage in Delhi, recall how their parents, who had witnessed Partition violence in 1947, related the similarity in the two. A carnage survivor in Delhi, Karnail Singh (name reproduced with permission) remembers

how his father identified that they were in danger, as the intention of their neighbor was malice. His father could only sense that as he was constantly associating the happenings of the day with those during the 1947 violence.

[7] A lot of people who were dislocated continue speaking the Pakistani Punjabi, *Pothohari,* the language which is not spoken in Punjab in India. The individuals belonging to these communities identify each other with the language they tend to speak. Sooner or later the language connects the people/generations together.

[8] Marriage customs, particularly, vary from community to community and the refugees, or the displaced communities still practice customs of the pre-partition times. For example, in the *Pothohari* baradari, the bride has to wear a dress gifted by her in-laws and has to leave her house in her own clothes but for the non-*Pothoharis* it is the other way round. The bride is also not allowed to see the auspicious set of bangles (called *Choora*) before her uncle (*Mama*, mother's brother) gifts her ceremoniously. Some of these customs were influenced by the majority communities around them. If the Muslims were in majority, the Sikh families had appropriated a few Muslim cultures amongst them. Marriages within the family amongst cousins was very common in our baradari, while for many Sikhs who lived amongst the Hindu minorities appropriated their customs. For examples many such families fasted on *Karva Chauth* that is a Hindu custom in which women keep a fast for the long life of their husband.

[9] *Massi* is mother's sister.

[10] Sant Attar Singh is a notable saint who dedicated his life for the cause of Sikhism.

[11] Sadhu Singh, son of Bapu Budh Singh, was given the title of '*Kursinafiz*' as he was one of those Indians who used to share a chair with the British in their court. Being affluent and highly influential, Bapu Budh Singh was highly respected by the villagers. He also happened to be my mother's great grandfather and my paternal grandmother's and my maternal grandfather's (who were cousins) grandfather.

[12] During the initiation ceremony (baptism) called *Amrit Sanchar*, the *Panj Pyara (*five beloved Singh, often five priests) sprinkle the sugary water on the hair and eyes of the Sikhs and ask them to adorn the five k's out of which one k is Kesh meaning hair. The other being *Kara*, *Kanga*, *Kirpan*, and *Kachaira*.

[13] Massi: Mother's sisters.

[14] Some people were fanatic and wouldn't tolerate or allow their children to cut hair or disrespect the religion in any form.

[15] There was common tandoor (an earthen oven) to bake wheat bread for about four five families that lived in close proximity to each other.

[16] 4-5 families had a common *tandoor* (earthen kiln) used to bake *rotis*.

[17] Gurudwaras at these moments functioned as community spaces used as shelters in times of crisis.

[18] *Morcha* is an organised rally to prevent the mobs from entering their vicinity and provide protection to their people.

[19] This glass was in possession of the family for about 40 years until a servant stole it away from their house in Kurukshetra.

[20] *Taya* Darshan Singh was my grandfather's elder cousin brother. *Taya* is the elder brother. He was my grandfather's father's sister's (*Bhua's*) son.
[21] Long underwear made of cloth.
[22] Pant worn with a *kurta*.
[23] This cloth was dark grey in colour. The texture was pure cotton. My mother suggests that this cloth was used to cover the poor people.
[24] Only one earring was missing from the box, which my mother suggests, my grandmother must have misplaced it.
[25] The word 'post-partition' locates the situation with respect to partition rather than calling it post-colonialism despite the fact the partition was itself a consequence of colonialism.
[26] *Khanda* is a symbol that has a double edged sword symbolising belief in one God; a ring symbolising a full circle, idea of completion and God as a whole having no beginning or end; and two crossed kirpans symbolising the concept of *Piri* (Spirituality) and *Miri* (Physical strength)
[27] *Ek Onkar* meaning God is one.
[28] *Waheguru* meaning praise the Guru.
[29] Phrase borrowed from Deepti Misri 'The Violence of Memory: Renarrating Partition Violence in Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers' *Meridians*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2011), pp. 1-25.
[30] 'Bhenji Parmeshri' was published in Muse India: The literary e-journal, Issue 74, in the July-August 2017.
[31] '*Haveli*' *Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and Language*. June, 2016
[32] The word has been adopted from Nicola King who uses it to explain the 'Freudian use of the analogy between the recovery of the buried past and the excavation of the archaeological site; the second by his reference to the 'retranscription' of memories and … 'afterwardsness' (King, 2000: 11).

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