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Writing Personal Memories; Re/Writing Partition History

Families have histories. They have their own memories and narrative embedded within the psyche of individuals that experience either forced displacement, or migration by choice. These smaller units build 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 experience and family units. As the generations are passing away, the people who experienced partition first hand are on the verge of extinction. What remains is second-hand and third-hand information (from the proceeding generations) through the family struggle over years. 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 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 memory “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, 9)

With the last member of the family, 98 year old Harbans Singh¹, who experienced partition at 28 years of his life, the information will be lost forever after him. In addition, with the passing away of his daughter-in –law Gurnam Kaur, the *Pothohari*² language, will extinguish from the

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

² *Pothohari* is a language spoken by people of Kahuta Biradari (clan) who belonged to the region Pothohar near Rawalpindi in Pakistan. Some of them moved to India during partition. They settled across India in different regions but all these years they had been identified with the language they spoke. The Pothohari’s also tied their beards and wore a peculiar style of turban, often printed and starched.



family with no more speakers. Eventually, what will remain is only reminiscences of the past, fragmented recollections that flow down the memory lane as critical inquiry of a gruesome past, meddling with the present and often influencing the future. In an attempt to address certain concerns, as to why do we need to remember now after seven decades? ; Is “remembering” voluntary, or is it involuntary? ; or even, did we ever forget that, what we need to remember now? Urvashi Bhutalia’s suggests that “over years, its [partition’s] memories have become more complex, acquired more nuance and layers, and been seen differently, depending on the particular circumstances of the moment of remembering.” (Bhutalia, Kindle Edition)

Instead of focusing on the loss, which can never be overlooked, as loss is incessant and cannot be ignored, the present paper will lay its 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 these people. These people have never been able to introduce themselves without a reference to the eventful saga of their life. Each member of the family and all children, continuing over generations, faced the same complexity. The answer to the question “Where we belonged to?” has always been complex followed by a long introduction. The mention of the urban city, where we lived in the post-partition times 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 left behind in Pakistan. In addition, the suffering gained magnitude, if one had to elaborate on precisely where in Pakistan, it was a place where Pakistan’s Nuclear plant stands today. A lot of friends exclaimed to this as “Wow! What an address.” Moreover, in case you happened to share it with one of your 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 60’s and 70’s, into 90’s and 2000 as partition experience had now become a thing of past and lesser people related to it. Life was about acquiring technical skills, adapting to new technologies and cheering for India during the India-Pakistan matches. Anybody, who cheered



for Pakistan with the sportsmanship spirit or even the involuntary emotional attachment to the country of their birth or forefather's births were declared traitors. Hatred towards the people of the same land from where the genes were acquired was paramount. The passing years led to detachment and the prevalent enmity between the two nations increased rapidly. Raj Kaur, my maternal grandmother who expired eleven years back often remarked that the place where they had lived and loved, stood the most disastrous instrument of hate i.e the Pakistan 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 processes of building, dwelling and thinking are interlinked." (Jain, 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 words about her past and what came of it in the future, "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, 31) Similarly, my grandmother was never able to arrive to this kind of a satisfactory equation between the outside/inside and the political/personal space. Anam Zakaria reports the sentiments of a Pakistani Zorastrian family, how a woman became a Pakistani citizen overnight, the in-between-ness between being Pakistani or 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, Kindle Edition)



My grandmother, too could never settle in the new land of her habitat 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.

Re-memorising Memory: 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,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)³ and in the present⁴. In this sense, memory is not understood as a storehouse of information, nor is a reliable medium of accuracy 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 s/he retrieves in the present. Everytime, the narrator recollects the past, s/he creates a relationship of the past with the present. For example, my grandfather’s recollection of his time in his village Kahuta in Pakistan and his present stay in Shimla have a deep relationship. He recollects 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 only began after everyone had visited the Gurudwara but now in Shimla, he was disconnected with his family members and the Sikh community. Having arrived to Shimla primarily because he had been appointed in the office of the Political Agent, Punjab Hill States in 1946 , Government of India. His headquarter was 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 . He explains his state of confusion and

³ 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.

⁴ The narrator reproaches his/her past from his situation in the present at a time when he narrates the past.



bewilderment for a period when he was not aware of where his people were 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 Minister Hukam Singh, a distant relative who too belonged to Kahuta had provided shelter to the displaced family. The family was eventually allotted a house by the government and they moved in it. He moved away from his family members who had spread across Punjab and Haryana (to Patiala, Ambala, Kurukshetra and Delhi). To him his job was most important as he needed to survive and make a living as he had lost his house and belongings leaving them 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 that he compares with the present. The present being a consequence of the past. He recalls how his uncle⁵ Nand Singh, sang in the Gurudwara and all of them attended the religious sessions. He also compares his inability to visit the Gurudwara on regular basis and the missing familial association with the Gurudwara in his native village being in Shimla now. This relationship juxtaposes the past and the present memory. Richard Terdiman coins this in the concept of memory as “present past” (Terdiman, 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, 8)

⁵ Chacha: Father’s younger brother



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,7).

At 98, Harbans Singh is prone to forgetting, he makes a lot of effort to remember but is unable to recollect and articulate the events that he had narrated to us, as children, a number of times. 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 (31). Forgetting may also be intentional, an instrument to escape the suffering or the very remembrance of a traumatic past; an escape from that which is a terrible thought or a horrific experience. It may be a choice of parents to not to share with their children or to rid the children of the pain of past and to 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 is this ignorance. Nevertheless, the subsequent generations do not live with an ignorance of their parent’s experiences, rather in all likelihood, these experiences return to them in several forms, sometimes in sickness (schizophrenia etc)⁶; social events such as riots, violence etc. (during ’84 carnage a lot of Punjabi’s remembered the violence around ’47)⁷; cultural affiliations like identifying with community language⁸, traditions or other cultural forms (music, art, dances); even marriage, birth and death customs and rituals.⁹

⁶ Siddhartha Mukherjee in his book *Genes* describes how survivors of partition had become schizophrenic and how it was carried on in the following generations, even those who had not experienced partition but belonged to these families.

(Raj)⁷ Many survivors of ’84 Carnage in Delhi, recall how their parents who had witnessed Partition violence in ’47 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 ’47 violence.

⁸ A lot of people who were dislocated still continue speaking the Pakistani Punjabi or the language which no one else speaks 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.

⁹ 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 the Pothohari biradari the bride has to



Harbans Singh moved on to make a living with a feeling of dislocation in the newly formed hilly estate, disconnected from his relatives and community members. Consequently, the post-colonial situation of his family also led to a loss of cultural nuances and a sense of tradition. The following generations gave away speaking Punjabi language, particularly *Pothohari*¹⁰ and were more urbanised and cosmopolitan. He measures the success of the displaced families in terms of capital gain but reassures that the people recovered largely 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 that 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 a stream called 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 to go 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. As people moved away, such community gatherings were lost, reaccounts my mother from memories of her conversations with my grandmother. Harbans Singh grieves how he got separated from his relatives and could not meet many of them as there hasn't been any contact. He says:

I don't even remember the face of my real Massi Purni w/o Daulat Singh 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

wear a dress gifted by her in-laws and has to leave her house in her own clothes but in other customs it is vice versa. The bride is also not allowed to see the auspicious set of bangles (called *Choorā*) before her uncle (Mama, mother's brother) gifts her ceremoniously.

¹⁰ Language of the Pothohar region. Though the language is still spoken in that area but is lost in the family.



had a Private clinic: Massi Maya w/o Ranger Mohan Singh. My mother's name was Ramrakhi (Interview 7 May, 2017: 8pm)

These names incite a new inquiry in me. Were these women Hindus? As none of these names seem to resemble the 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 into Sikh. Thus, past in itself is contained within another past. This statement tests true to Nicola King's evaluation of the Freudian model explained, "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,4) The past enters into its "pastness" and retraces that Harbans Singh's parents were the fourth generation of the Sikh after conversion of their ancestors from Hinduism into Sikhism. Harbans Singh recalls that his parents had told him how Sant Attar Singh had visited their village and preached Sikhism. He consulted and convinced Bapu Budh Singh, the village elder¹¹ to convert into a Sikh. My mother recalls that it is believed that Bapu Budh Singh read Ramayan, 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 drink the water with which she washed his feet, and here is a man who is going to put water in their head.¹² That was the turning point. He ordered the Hindu populations of the village to adopt into Sikhism. This is how Harbans Singh's ancestors also adopted Sikhism. Since, Harbans Singh's aunties¹³ held Hindu names, it is evident that the Hindu influence was still continuing within the families, though he recalls that the people were devout and regular followers of the Sikh faith. Interestingly, post-partition

¹¹ Sadhu Singh, son of Bapu Budh Singh, was given a title of "Kursinafiz" as he was one of those Indian's 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 conversion ceremony called Amrit Sanchar, the *Panj Pyara* (five beloved Singh, often five priests) pour the holy water into the head of the Sikhs and ask them to keep the five k's out of which one k is Kesh meaning hair. The other being Kara, Kanga, Kirpan, and Kachaiyra.

¹³ Massi : Mother's sisters



many members of the community became the keepers of the faith by following the religion more strictly¹⁴ and conforming to the ideologies. Thus, memory process is continuous and ever changing. It has an ability to translate and transcreate the knowledge of the past in the present to the knowledge of past in the past. Similarly, it is interesting to understand 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.

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

The new generations carry with them the 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, the roots determine an individual's identity. Every time, an individual may attempt to identify him/herself, s/he is bound to be reconnecting to history or to his past. This experience is pertinent to the migrants and those displaced. Even after having moved into India and born in Indian Territory the association of the second generation of the partition survivors relates having moved away from Pakistan. Thus, Pakistan for them is a pivot of existence. Interestingly, for this generation, this is not contemporary Pakistan, it is an idea of a nation from the 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, the 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

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



out of the memories of the parent's often shared with their children. These children are both the witness 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 bridge between the present and past. Interestingly, when my grandfather failed to remember names, as he has entered a phase of amnesia, my mother picked up names and supported him reassuring all the connections she could draw between past and my grandfather's memory¹⁵ lapses. Every time she recollected his lapse, it functioned like a trigger for my grandfather who recollected different phases in the life of people he just remembered.

The second generation accounts are at the threshold of reality and imagination. They are real as they are also participants in the aftermath of partition experiences. My mother recalls how her father, once a very established businessperson, from a politically connected family, was reduced to 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, the 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 rotis¹⁶ 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 Gurudwaras¹⁷ 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 a half year old daughter. This was the only object they carried with them from Pakistan to India.¹⁹

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 yrs until as servant stole it away from the house in Kurukshetra.



My grandfather joined the “morcha” while my grandmother handed her box of jewellery to my grandfather’s cousin brother *Taya* Darshan Singh²⁰ recalls my mother. He took his jewellery and her 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 already cut-off, consequently people had immense trouble cooking food, drinking water and washing themselves. Incidences of offering urine to thirsty children were reported in many cases but my mother is unable to confirm if it were true for my grandparents too. After a fortnight or so 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. My 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 confusion amongst my grandfather and him. My grandmother was convinced that she had lost her husband, when, one fine day, almost after a month and a half, my grandfather came searching for her in the Wah camp. My grandfather was wearing kurta and a Sikhi kachaira.²¹ When the mob had to come to attack the Sikhs in Kahuta, he was just about to wear his payjama²² that he hung on his shoulder. Most probably, he lost it somewhere. The family was united at the camp where they lived in dire circumstances. There was no water for washing and bathing in the camp. They were infected with lice in their hair followed by skin infections etc. Their clothes tore off, when finally people were distributed cheap *Malaysia* cloth.²³ They didn’t have machines to stitch the clothes so they used the needles and thread to stitch them with their hands. They used this cloth

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 (Bua’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.



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 my grandmother her jewellery as it was.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 that was the last station for the train. They stayed in a temple in Joginder Nagar for an year. It was in this temple that my mother was born. My grandmother shared with my mother that the priest of the temple came from the back door to eat non-vegetarian food whenever they cooked it. The climate of Joginder Nagar did not suit my grandmother and the relatives around them did not cooperated with them, thus they decided to move to Kurukshetra, where there was a refugee camp and many of her relatives were 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 pre-dates partition. Since my great grandfather, Sadhu Singh, had gone for his wedding, his old and ailing father, on his deathbed due to plague, told his daughter the whereabouts of 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 she stole all the gold. This family carried the entire money in gunnysacks to India and settled at Joginder Nagar. This story of theft is also accompanied by a tale of love. 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 as if the onion peels one after the other. The past needs to be understood only through a reading of past-ness of the past. The family betrayal by Sadhu Singh's sister

²⁴ Only one earring was missing from the box, which my mother suggests that it my grandmother must have misplaced it.



accounts for the continued distrust between the families even in the post-partition²⁵ times. The families continued to struggle and fell prey to the times. 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 evacuated property of a family that moved to Pakistan. Sikh symbols, like Khanda²⁶, Ek onkar,²⁷ and Waheguru²⁸ 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, 1) that builds a narrative for itself and continues to haunt the pre-partition divide and violence based on communal identities. These inscriptions, continued to narrate the tales of identity-crisis that people faced during this period of trauma.

Creative Process and Re-accounting Reality as Fiction

The children within the families that experienced partition, sort of, have never grown listening to fairy tales, tales of kings and queens or the folkloric legends. 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

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 made of a single ring and two swords.

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



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 the store-houses of these pasts evidences and continue to haunt the present as well as the future in form of news stories, 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 is built on the past experience of violence and trauma represented as a perception of singular experiences. The abstract and the family histories, seldom taken into account, 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, 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 perishing, 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, 4) Kabir addresses them as "points of convergence" (Kabir, 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. The stories attempt at relocating 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 referred to



a lady who had been a prostitute before partition. Beyond this bleak reference, I, the third-generation carrier of memory, does not remember anything at all. But, this reference to the women alluded in the mind for nearly forty years till a story “Bhenji Parmeshri”³⁰ was knitted around how a prostitute was able to enter a more formal institution of marriage, may be much against her wish, vis a vis, the narrator’s mother who was rescued from a Muslim family and reunited with her own family despite the fact that she was happier with the Muslim man. In both the cases, the woman is the subjugated subject and remains voiceless. It is the conversation between the prostitute, now a respectful neighbour, and the narrator’s mother that reveals their inner feelings. The setting of the house is the same as was occupied by the grandparents after partition. The Muslim architecture and the renovated Sikh symbols spell the narrative of time moving 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 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 story³¹ the brothel, where the narrator’s grandmother takes shelter is considered to be safer than the outside world. The 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 fictitious. Interestingly, a cousin who read the story alluded that the fact was more exciting than the fictitious 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

³⁰ “Bhenji Parmeshri” is being published in Muse India in the July edition.

³¹ “Haveli” *Interdisciplinary Journal of Literature and Language*. June, 2016



and the narrator stating that “...the processes of memory are reconstructed in narrative, and the construction of the self who does the remembering.” (King,11) The narrative, thus serves as a site of memory, a “re-transcription”³² of memory. 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 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 both. The family histories in a way question the responsibility of the state as an institution to its citizens. 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 content with whatever has happened in the past, which in itself may be analysed as a voluntary act of “let-go” and “let-me-be”; an act where the narrator doesn’t want to revisit the past as s/he may want to get rid of it. The temporal distances and the inability to recall register the silence of the untold and perhaps, of the “untellable”.

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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, 11)



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