

**PARTITION FOR POSTERITY:
THE PROSTHETIC MEMORIES OF THE PARTITION THROUGH
MUSEUMS AND ARCHIVES**

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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DECLARATION

I, Gourab Goswami, hereby declare that the thesis entitled, “Partition for Posterity: The Prosthetic Memories of the Partition through Museums and Archives”, submitted by me towards the partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in English of Jadavpur University, is based upon my own original work and there is no plagiarism. This is also to certify that the work has not been submitted by me in part or in whole for the award of any other degree/diploma of the same Institution where the work is being carried out, or to any other Institution. A paper out of this dissertation has also been presented by me at a seminar/conference at Jadavpur University, thereby fulfilling the criteria for submission, as per the M.Phil Regulation (2017) of Jadavpur University.

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

On the basis of academic merit and satisfying all the criteria as declared above, the dissertation work of Gourab Goswami entitled “Partition for Posterity: The Prosthetic Memories of the Partition through Museums and Archives”, is now ready for submission towards the partial fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Philosophy (Arts) in English of Jadavpur University.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to understand the ways in which the memories connected with an event of trauma can be preserved and transmitted through the creation of oral narrative archives as well as memorial museums. The specific focus of the thesis is on memories connected with material objects and the kinds of prosthetic memories¹ these objects breed in turn. Narratives dealt with the specific event of trauma in this thesis pertain to the Indian Partition of 1947.

Before getting into an overview of the chapters and the methodology of this thesis I would like to briefly discuss the inception of this project. Working as a citizen historian for the 1947 Partition Archives, I interviewed my maternal grandmother who had migrated from Mymensingh of erstwhile East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1947. While conducting this interview, I realised that her memory about the migration itself is underlined often by a comparative discussion of pre and post Partition material conditions. While the memory of the home and the surroundings remain vivid in her memory, she was more concerned about the things that were lost due to this forced migration in the first place. But she also talked about the post-Partition life of struggle with a sense of pride, focusing on the way she and her family have been able to survive the entire ordeal with flying colours.

¹ Alison Landsberg. *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. New York: Columbia University Press. 2004.

To my surprise however, the conversation never shifted towards the sense of trauma that I was hoping to talk about in this interview. I had hoped to get through to the narratives or memories she would normally not divulge to anyone. Instead, I was already familiar with most of the events narrated by her one way or the other. While I primarily blamed my lack of experience as an interviewer for not getting through to the more silenced parts of her memory, while going through the interview questionnaire and her answers again, I realised that her responses shifted in tonality in terms of the sorts of memories she associated them with. The questions that stayed with me as a result of this interview are questions like- what kinds of memories are normally silenced about an event of trauma and what is the politics that goes behind this process of silencing? What are the differences between processes of narrating that has its grounding solely in memory on the one hand and a process of narrating underlined by the presence of an object related to that memory on the other hand? What are the processes of archiving such narratives within museums as well as digitally? How is the process of archiving the Indian Partition different from the process of archiving other such events of trauma? And finally, what kinds of responses do these narratives evoke within the generation that is temporally far removed from the Partition and as a result is not aware of the immediate effects of this traumatizing event?

Overview of Chapters:

In my attempt to deal with these questions I have focused on how Partition as a social event has bred a sense of silence about the individual narratives of the survivors in my first chapter. In this chapter, I have tried to focus firstly on the differences of approach in the

literary representations following the Partition in Punjab and Bengal. It is important to focus on how the Indian Partition must be viewed through a plurality of approach as the Partition happened on two fronts in India- the West and the East. The literary and artistic responses to the Partition in both these regions differ vastly. It is more so the case because the type of Partition that these two provinces experienced also differ vastly in nature. But the one common underlying thread between the responses in these two regions is the lack of narratives of and by ordinary people. By the term ‘ordinary’ here I refer to the narratives outside the realms of power and the upper class.

Through a focus on literary texts in both Punjab and Bengal, I have tried to focus on firstly, how there was an initial phase of relative silence following the Partition about the violence and bloodshed relating to the Partition itself (some literary works emerged in the 1950s, 60s and 70s). The shift, as has been discussed in the chapter in detail, can be understood to have happened in the 1980s and 1990s mainly due to two reasons. Firstly, about 50 years had already elapsed by this time. This enabled everyone to view the Partition from an objective distance. Secondly, the focus in the Indian academia, decisively shifted towards the process of writing ‘history from below’ following the creation of The Subaltern Studies Circle by Ranajit Guha and others. Also, quite significantly, several Women’s Studies departments and schools were established during this time which played an invaluable role in documenting women’s narratives and histories. This ensured a phase in Indian history where scholars and historians like Urvashi Butalia², Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon³, Jasodhara Bagchi⁴ tried to

² Ed. Urvashi Butalia. *Partition: The Long Shadow*. Zubaan: Delhi, 2015.

³ Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin. *Borders and Boundaries*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998.

⁴ Eds. Jasodhara Bagchi and Shubhranjan Dasgupta. *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*. Kolkata: Stree, 2009.

establish a connection with the past by focusing on the memories of the past of individuals who inhabit the present. This ensured a turn towards the large influx of the process of collecting oral narratives as testimony to an alternative history.

It must be remembered that the literary representations did try to talk about this alternative history through an artistic impulse. Many of them have been extremely successful in doing so as well. But they could not ensure a large scale influx of individual narratives of ordinary people. An archive created out of such narratives opens up many possibilities not focused on earlier. It opens up opportunities for future researchers to get access to ordinary stories alongside the 'official' narrative about the Partition. It is important here to qualify the term 'official' in line with the way this term has been used in this thesis. This term is used in this thesis to denote the way governments of both nations tried to shift the focus of the general public away from the trauma associated with Partition by focusing on 1947 more as the year of independence of both the nations. This focus is subsequently followed by the implication that we must look at the future with a new found sense of optimism.

Coming back to the literary representations, it is true that these narratives paved the way for the production of alternative histories about the Partition. But there remained certain gaps and silences that these literary representations could not address. I have discussed in detail the gaps addressed by the literary representations in the first chapter and also the gaps that have remained unaddressed. The collective memory of a society is not created by the collective. It is rather created by a shared sense of affiliation to one version of history. The advent of the digital age and the creation of oral narrative archives have ensured that an alternative historiography might be created through the narrative of the collective.

Going back to the ‘silences’ left unaddressed earlier, I argue that a focus on material memory has the potential of shifting our focus towards a yet unconsidered binary between ‘people’ and ‘things’. I have looked to establish that these two ideas do not remain in a binary opposition through the process of memorialisation through objects. They rather merge into being the part of one whole that essentially enables the survivor to remember the uncomfortable parts of the traumatic past.

As is evident from the title of my thesis, I have tried to focus on how these narratives will be represented to and remembered by the present generation and the generations to come and how a focus on material memory might feed into that process. I have taken the ideas of ‘postmemory’⁵ and ‘prosthetic memory’ to try to understand this. The postmemory of an event of trauma breeds memories within the observer/viewer that can be removed from the original implications of a particular object or image. Prosthetic memory on the other hand stands for the way an object or an image reaches the observer with their original social and narrative connotations to breed a new perspective within the viewer about that very event. The idea of prosthetic memory from this standpoint, becomes central to my thesis in understanding how the narratives relating to the Partition, when archived in accompaniment with certain tangible objects, will enable a process of breeding prosthetic memories that will possibly give vein to newer narrative as well as artistic endeavours within the viewer/ observer who has not experienced the trauma of the events in the first place.

In the second core chapter of my thesis, I have tried to look at the processes of archiving a marginalised past. The focus of the chapter is to look at the various possible

⁵ Marianne Hirsch. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*. New York: Columbia University Press. 2012.

approaches taken so far and the ones that are being undertaken now in order to accentuate the process of memorializing. The Amritsar Partition Museum is at the centre of this chapter. While establishing the difference between a digital archive created on Aby Warburg's atlas and a project like Aanchal Malhotra's *Remnants of a Separation*, I have tried to look at the process of creating these mediated memorial projects where the observer is educated by the researcher through a set of commentaries. The aim of the chapter is to look at the way these commentaries differ in nature by analysing these two projects. I have also tried to look at the way the advent of the digital age has opened up new possibilities in the world of commemorative projects.

In the second part of the chapter, I have looked at the kinds of artefacts collected in the Amritsar Memorial Museum established in 2017. This museum stands as the first Partition memorial museum in the world. Through this discussion, I have tried to address questions relating to the politics that has gone into the creation of this museum, how the museum is essentially focused at creating a space that enables a plurality of narratives and how the museum stands as ever-evolving, without a stringent approach taken towards any one pathway. The aim of any museum dealing with a historiography that has not had a space like this before is to place these erstwhile marginalised narratives alongside the official narratives about the event. The Amritsar Museum has tried to do that in essence. The aim of this part of the chapter is to understand how this museum has worked towards archiving these narratives and where it stands when compared to efforts taken by other such museums in the contemporary museological scene.

In my thesis, I have tried to chart a trajectory from the past to the future in terms of the way the ordinary narratives about the Indian Partition has had an exposure in the Indian

subcontinent. Hence in the third chapter I have tried to focus on Aanchal Malhotra's book by analysing the interviews taken and the way these interviews have been represented for the reader. The aim of this chapter is to understand the response of the observer when faced with narratives that are connected to certain everyday objects. These objects acquire significance only through their association with the traumatic past of the survivors and when associated with the narratives of the survivors. This becomes more evident when examining the narratives archived by Malhotra some of which are narratives of people within her family while others are narratives of people with whom she does not have any familial connection. Malhotra gets immersed in this project primarily because of her awareness that her own family members were bearing the baggage of such a traumatic past. The school book/text book history of the Partition in our country fails to capture these narratives. Thus Malhotra was initially unaware about the presence of such a past. The fact that such a past not only exists but it exists within her family made her go deeper into other similar narratives and to archive the prosthetic memories evoked within her. During many of the interviews, we see that the survivor is overwhelmed while reminiscing about the past. Malhotra on the other hand is left grappling with the reality of the narrative and the fact that these narratives have always existed so close to her.

It is important to note here that my dissertation fundamentally takes the Partition and the process of archiving the memories as its primary text. The Partition of India can be situated at the intersection of postcolonial studies and memory studies. The advent of the digital age further problematizes the matter. The Partition, when seen through the lens of memory studies and digital humanities ventures like oral-history archives does make explicit the narrative gaps. This makes it even more important to focus on the newer ways in which

the Partition is being looked at now and has the possibility of being looked at in the future. And the primary medium, I have tried to argue through my thesis, for these kinds of ventures to succeed have to be the creation of newer kinds of archives. After all, the archive is the closest we can get to the “vestige or trace of the origin”.⁶ In order to focus on these processes I have taken up the contemporary discourse on memory studies and have tried to locate how the Partition narratives can be understood in terms of the 21st century ‘turn towards material memory studies’⁷. I have also taken the examples of the Amritsar Partition Museum and the Aby Warburg online Atlas as examples that help in a comparative study of the different processes of archiving. I have further taken Aanchal Malhotra’s *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition Through Material Memory* and the artistic response of Charles Reznikoff following the Holocaust as examples of artistic responses to an event of trauma and the way a response to the Partition and the process of archiving the prosthetic memories subsequently created differ from other such events of trauma.

My formal conclusion, I hope, will bring all the elements of my research together to present a final comment on the analyses I have undertaken of the narratives I have focused on. I hope to make a comment on the importance of the process of archiving these narratives that I have focused on. I also hope to make a comment on the ways in which the dissemination and archiving of prosthetic memories will be central in grasping and dealing with the memories of the Partition as a nation at the macro level as well as to generate newer artistic and non-fictional responses by individuals at the micro level.

⁶ Richard Vosloo, ‘Archiving Otherwise: Some Remarks on Memory and Historical Responsibility’. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*. Vol. 31, No. 2 (October 2005).

⁷ Cangbai Wang. “The ‘Material Turn’ in Migration Studies”. *Modern Languages*. September 2016.

Critical Influences:

The Partition as a social event is removed from us by many decades now. But the memory of such an event remains embedded within the public imagination through many cultural markers. My focus in the thesis is however on how private memory has come into focus in the last couple of decades. I will try to focus on the critical attention on this issue that has aided my research in the following part.

The primary focus of my thesis is the ordinary narratives related to the Partition of 1947. The discipline of memory studies is central to the theoretical approach of my thesis. The work⁸ by Julia Creet and Andreas Kritzman is divided into four sections. This book at its outset, tries to focus on the correlations between the sites of memory and the objects associated with them. The four sections contain 15 essays. The third section-“The Smell of Flowers and Rotting Potatoes”- focuses on sense memories and bodily sufferings through the three essays. The fourth section entitled “Architectures of Memory” talks about the ways in which personal collections attain archival importance after a certain point. These discussions have shaped my understanding on the indexicality of the site of the memorial museums and how this site attains centrality in the process of the dissemination of prosthetic memories.

The need to archive the narratives of the ordinary people has stemmed from the fact that there has been a striking silence regarding the trauma of ordinary people following the

⁸ Ed. Julia Creet and Andreas Kritzman. *Memory and Migration: Multidisciplinary Approaches to Memory Studies*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004.

Partition. Louise Harrington's idea of 'fragmentary evidence'⁹ becomes extremely important from this standpoint. In this article, Harrington focuses on the silence and lack of discourse following the event of Partition. The ensuing silence is in a sense equated to the silence following the event of the Holocaust. Central to this silence is the therapeutic aspect attached to it. From this standpoint, Harrington tries to focus on the ways in which these silences are dealt with in creative as well as research practices. Harrington tries to arrive at a point where these fractured or incomplete narratives give in a sense a more complete understanding of the event than a fluid or a structured narrative. This idea will act as one of the central standpoints of my own research.

The website¹⁰ and the book¹¹ of Aanchal Malhotra act as the end-product of Malhotra's search of stories hidden in objects brought by the immigrants during the Partition of 1947. Malhotra, through focusing on a host of narratives related to everyday objects belonging to the immigrants, tries to understand how these narratives are received by a generation who have not experienced the effects of the Partition directly. Aanchal Malhotra seeks to understand the event of Partition through a collection of everyday objects that have acquired a certain cultural and historical importance due to their connection to the Partition and the mass displacement/migration following the event. The text and the web resource will

⁹ Louise Harrington. "Fragmentary Evidence: The Struggle to Narrate Partition". *South Asian Review*. Volume 31. No. 1. January 2011.

¹⁰ <https://www.aanchalmalhotra.com/work/remnants-of-a-separation/>

¹¹ Aanchal Malhotra. *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory*. New York: Harper Collins. 2017.

work as an example for the issues that go into making of an archive that represents memories relating to objects.

The book of essays in Bengali edited by Manankumar Mandal¹² indicates in many ways the way Partition narratives- both fiction and non-fiction has taken shape in the last 70 years both in Bengal and Punjab. In its tri-partite editorial division the book tries to explore the literary, the temporal and the aspects of memory pertaining to the Partition. The essays within the sub-division of ‘Smriti-Satta-Swar’ will be especially relevant for my understanding of the voices following the partition relating to the memory of the event as well as the various identity markers created subsequently.

The website created by the researchers of Cornell University on the unfinished atlas of Aby Warburg also serves as an important reference point for my discussion on the creation of digital archives. This website¹³ contains 12 panels of the unfinished Mnemosyne Atlas project of Aby Warburg. The website has ten panels of Warburg archived within it. The panels are essentially an ensemble of various images put together in a single panel. Warburg’s project was to find inherent connections between these images to create a complete picture. The most interesting part about this project is the fact that no explanatory notes or commentaries are provided by the creator himself. It is here that the Mnemosyne archive sets in. The website provides guided pathways through the various images in the panels. The functioning of this

¹²Manankumar Mandal. *Partition Sahitya: Desh- Kal- Smriti*. Kolkata: Gangchil. 2014.

¹³ “Panel B”. *Mnemosyne: Meanderings Through Aby Warburg’s Atlas*. Cornell University. <https://live-warburglibrarycornelledu.pantheonsite.io/image-group/panel-b-introduction-1-3?sequence=944>

website has proved pivotal in shaping my understanding of the ways in which the idea of Prosthetic Memory works.

The advent of the digital age also brings in front of us a different kind of memory- the digital memory. Although this idea has not directly contributed in the writing process of my thesis, it has enables me to look at memory through a completely different lens. The book by Matthew G Kirschenbaum looks at the working mechanism behind the computing system and the way every action within that system leaves trace.¹⁴ This trace in turn makes the forensic imagination of the recovered memory of these traces as the most vivid one in our digital age. This book has been central in my understanding of the reasons behind the centrality of digital archives in the 21st century. The fact that the memories relating to material objects are being best archived in their representative aspects through digital archives in the 21st century can be seen as a testimony to this reading.

The idea of prosthetic memory is central to my thesis. Alison Landsberg puts forward this idea in her book of the same title. In this book, Landsberg propagates her idea of Prosthetic Memory as the newest addition to the long vocabulary within the field of memory studies. In Landsberg's understanding of the idea of prosthetic memory, she states that the memories connected with a particular object or image is specific to the context of that object or image itself. But when that same object is viewed by a third person, the context of that specific individual creeps in to her understanding of that specific object. The memories instigated within that individual adhere to the same context. Although Landsberg establishes

¹⁴ Matthew G Kirschenbaum. *Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press. 2012.

her idea through events specific to the American history and culture, her discussion on the formation of migration narratives and how these narratives have fed into the culture of 'difference' will prove central to the theoretical dimensions of my study.

Anne Whitehead's book on the history of memory studies and the ways in which memory has been an important issue for many of the thinkers throughout ages has been central to my understanding of the discipline of memory studies. In her book she attempts a chronological development of the notions of memory that have existed since the classical times.¹⁵ Starting from the mnemonic dimensions of memory, she brings her discussion to the understanding of the collective memory in Halbwachsian sense. Essential to my study will be her discussion on the art of forgetting with which she concludes the book. The relation of forgetting to the notions of voluntary and involuntary memory will also be useful for my understanding and reading of the interviews/ accounts that I hope to focus in the course of this study.

¹⁵ Anne Whitehead. *Memory*. New York: Routledge. 2009.

CHAPTER II: ORAL HISTORIES AND PROSTHETIC MEMORIES

When we talk about Partition in the context of the Indian subcontinent, we must start off by recognising the fact that this is not an event that can be seen through a singularity of approach. Geographically, there have been partitions on two fronts. The Partition of the Western part took place in the province of Punjab in 1947. On the Eastern front, there have been several partitions- the 1947 and the 1971 partitions being the prominent ones. The process of migration, as a result, has not happened through one giant crack. Rather the process has happened through porous borders and it still keeps happening till the present day. The Partition of Bengal has complex ramifications in itself with the formation of Bangladesh in 1971. The case of Sylhet and Assam makes the Bengali experience even more complex. It is not the focus of this thesis to go into a detailed discussion on each of these events. But one must begin by acknowledging the multifarious nature of the Partition experience in the Indian subcontinent.

The undertones of a Partition have been there within the social narrative for a few decades before the Partition. The planned Partition of Bengal in 1905 bears testimony to this fact. But 1947 is quite surely taken as the most definitive point with the independence of the country coinciding with drawing of the Radcliff line and the subsequent Partition of the nation into two parts along religious lines. It has been more than 70 years since this event. It is the aim of this chapter, to decipher the ways in which we can deal with this in the present.

If we begin with the process of distinguishing between history and memory, we will see that memory is often seen as a tool of recapitulating the marginalized past. This view of

memory can be connected with the notion of individual memory as opposed to collective memory. The collective memory of a community can be invoked or formalized through construction as well as through focusing on certain discourses or narratives with more importance than others. The natural question that follows from this notion is the one about the nature of collective memory about the Partition that the peoples of this area have. Manankumar Mondal, in his introduction to the book *Partition Sahitya: Desh-Kaal-Smriti* states that the Partition does not have any social history¹⁶. The narrative of the Partition has come down to us according to him mostly through literary representations, memoirs and individual memories. There are many brilliant studies on the ever growing canon of Partition literature. Works like *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia and *Borders and Boundaries* by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin enables us to have a dialogue with the past through literary representations.

But going back to the idea of understanding the history of the Partition and the collective memory of it, we can focus on Benedict Anderson's idea of 'Imagined Communities'¹⁷ here. Anderson in his seminal work focuses on how the idea of nation is a comparatively new one and the way this idea is essentially a political formation. Anderson's work goes into a profound linguistic study and the centrality of language in the creation of these imagined communities. Anderson states through this study that the idea of a nation is inherently a limited and imagined one because most of the members of a nation will never know each other on a personal level. But they will have a shared sense of nationhood, the idea of which is essentially created by a focus on a shared reality. This reality is a socio-material

¹⁶ Mandal. Introduction to *Partition Sahitya*.P.13

¹⁷ Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 2006.

one created by the governing discourses which are essentially political in nature. As has been already stated, it must be remembered that the Partition also resulted in the independence of India. But the result was two nations who sought at looking forward rather than going back towards the traumatic past. Thus we find a social history of the independence of India and Pakistan and later Bangladesh. But we do not find a social history of the Partition.

It can be questioned from this standpoint whether the Partition was viewed as an essential collateral damage for procuring independence in the first few decades following the event. The question of geographical effect of the Partition also becomes important from this standpoint. Muslims from all over India migrated to Pakistan. But the migration in the other direction was undertaken mostly by Bengalis and Punjabis. While everyone was aware of the horrors being inflicted on both sides of the border, looking forward would logically seem a viable way of taking the nation forward. Mandal's idea of the Partition lacking any social history can be understood to stem from these reasons.

If we think along the lines of the Partition lacking a concrete social history, we will need to think along the lines of finding alternative ways of remembering as well as representing the narratives of the Partition. I will show in the two latter chapters of my thesis how the erstwhile marginalised narratives about the Partition find legitimacy through oral narrative repositories, memorial museums and how the Partition subsequently is represented through the eyes of the observers, readers and viewers of these narratives. But it is first important to acknowledge the fact that the Partition as an event had been relegated to the realm of unspeakable immediate afterwards. It can be argued that any event of trauma will inevitably make it impossible for the survivors to narrate their experience before a considerable amount of time elapses. This time is essential for the survivor as well as the

society in general to view the events through an objective lens. This time is also required to enable the survivor to narrativise the traumatic experience. While this notion is true, what I am more concerned about here is the way there has been a social silence regarding the trauma relating to the Partition.

The Literary Silence: A Case in Point

A passing glance at another similar social event of mid-20th century- the Holocaust- will make the point more clear. After the Second World War culminated in a catastrophic consequence for the Hitler led totalitarian regimes, the entire world looked forward to a new beginning or a new dawn. But this optimistic vision was not to last for long. As the trials of the war criminals began, it became increasingly clear that the perpetrators of a mass-murder project were in fact clear to their own conscience. As Adolf Eichmann stood in front of the three judges in a courtroom in Jerusalem, the entire civilization saw with stunned silence the ‘fiend’¹⁸. But this fiend was not a monster nor did he speak like a villain. He rather appeared as a self-assured individual was placed on trial as a consequence of his own belief systems. The accounts of the survivors of arguably the most devastating genocide shook the world. The holocaust witnesses did not speak with an optimistic vision of a new beginning. It was impossible for them to comprehend and express the experience in language. The gap between experience and representation was visibly a gap that was impossible for the survivor to bridge. In the case of the Holocaust the process of institutionally giving voice to this survivor reality started right after the end of the Second World War with the advent of the Nuremberg trials. In the case of the Partition, on the other hand, we see a striking lapse in this process of

¹⁸ Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. London: Penguin, 1977.

institutionally giving voice to the dispossessed. It is not my claim in any sense that the Partition and the Holocaust experiences were entirely similar in nature. Rather both of these events differ vastly in nature. In the next chapter I will look into how this difference has rather made the process of institutional intervention difficult. But it is also important to acknowledge the fact that both the experiences resulted in a deep-seated sense of collective trauma both within the community of survivors as well as outside it.

The survivor reality in case of the Holocaust can be clearly seen through one specific literary example. Charles Reznikoff's poetry can be taken as a case in point in this discussion. As Robert Franciosi points out in his essay on Charles Reznikoff's poetic response to holocaust:

*“Reznikoff's immediate poetic response, ‘In Memoriam’, 1933, suggests that he understood, perhaps because of his own legal training, the serious implications of these laws for Germany's Jews. But the book also demonstrates that he, like most, could not fathom the ultimate significance of these initial anti-Jewish actions.”*¹⁹

Franciosi points out how Reznikoff's responses to the holocaust were essentially focused on seeing the oppression of the Jews by the Third Reich as a phenomenon of historical continuity. Reznikoff was residing in USA and was in fact somewhat detached from the immediate experience of the concentration camps. But the glorification in his poetry of the Jewish upsurge in the face of adversity shows his inability to grasp the holocaust as a phenomenon that must be understood by itself, separately, from the historical violence perpetrated on the Jews. In a poem like ‘A Compassionate People’, written in the spring of

¹⁹ Robert Franciosi. “Detailing the Facts”: Charles Reznikoff's Response to the Holocaust”. *Contemporary Literature*. Vol. 29. No. 2. Summer, 1988. P. 241-264.

1944, Reznikoff valorizes the notion of one individual survivor carrying on the Jewish tradition. His poetics in this period is directed at showing how the process of writing has itself acted as a resistance for the Jewish people during past experiences of calamity. His optimistic vision of one survivor anticipates a similar resistance from the historically oppressed Jewish community through literary output and documentation of that oppression by those sporadic survivors. This, on the one hand shows the fact that Reznikoff had to an extent grasped the situation of the ghettos where survival itself was a challenging feat to achieve. But he was as yet unable to grasp the uniqueness of this project that was directed towards a complete eradication of the entire Jewish community from the surface of earth.

Before going into further discussion on Reznikoff's later response, one must first deal with the issue of possible responses to such an event. We have already seen how Reznikoff's initial response to the Holocaust was shaped by an optimistic view of the future. Ilse Aichinger published her novel *Herod's Children* in 1948²⁰. This novel is written in a dreamlike narrative and criticizes the fascist use of oppressive language through the narrative. She regarded the end of the Second World War as liberation from fascism and the beginning of the restoration of sensible, spiritual society. But the subsequent Holocaust survivor accounts were filled with a sense of destitution. They spoke of nothing but the emptiness and meaninglessness of spirituality and life. It took Reznikoff 30 more years to come up with his collection of poems on Holocaust in 1975. These poems were aimed at recording the tales of the witnesses. He found his subject in the testimonies of the survivors from the Nuremberg and Eichmann trials. These tales were more horrifying than anything he had ever come across. There have been criticisms of Reznikoff accusing him of having accepted the centrality of the

²⁰ Ilse Aichinger. *Herod's Children*. New York: Atheneum, 1963.

court trials and the fact that justice could be given to survivors of the Holocaust through institutionalized punishment. But Reznikoff in fact tries to deal with the lack of language in dealing with the event through this method. As Francoisi points out in his essay, Reznikoff goes through all the accounts only to zero down on the one he finds suitable for poetic representation. Then he subjects that testimony to various stages of editing and rewriting before preparing the final poem. His agenda was, in Reznikoff's own words:

*"In telling about a minor incident or a great catastrophe like the Holocaust in which six million Jews lost their lives - how is it to be told? In the conclusions of the facts? The way many histories - generally out of necessity because of the absence of details - are written? Or in detailing the facts themselves? As, for example, the way law cases are tried in court. A witness in a court, for example, cannot say a man was negligent in crossing a street: he must testify instead how the man acted: the facts instead of a conclusion of fact. So, in reading or listening to the facts themselves, instead of merely [coming] to conclusions of what happened in the life of a person or to a people, the reader or listener may not only draw his own conclusions but is more apt to feel actually what happened as if he or she were - fortunately - only a spectator."*²¹

But the problem of representation does not end here. Rather questions are raised regarding the ability of the reader of the poetry to grasp the holocaust experience through such factual details. Francoisi rightly states that the reality of the ghettos was probably no more realized by the reader than what Reznikoff himself understood of them. The frustration of the

²¹ Charles Reznikoff. "A Conversation with Charles Reznikoff." With Janet Sternberg and Alan Ziegler. *Montemora* 2. 1976. P 113-121.

outsider in his/her inability to understand the reality of the holocaust is seen firstly, in the 30 year silence of a poet like Reznikoff on the Holocaust issue, and secondly, in the subject of his poetry that valorises the factual details of the experience rather than fictionalizing. Reznikoff strikes off place names and temporality from the accounts to give them a notion of universality. One description serves as the microcosm for the entire brutality perpetrated on the Jews. Reznikoff's notion is altered by his view on history and representation. His earlier notion of emancipation of one victim serving as the promise for the emancipation of the entire community is rendered as vastly questionable. The individual accounts in Reznikoff's poetry now accounts for the destruction of not only the race in question but the entire humanity.

Literary Response to the Partition:

When we look at the vast amount of literature being written after the Partition we will see a sense of silence regarding certain uncomfortable tropes. But it is important first to focus on the differences between the Indian Partition and the ways in which the Holocaust has been perceived in the 50 years after the events. Anna Bernard in her work "Forms of Memory: partition as a literary Paradigm" points out the way in which Partition lives on in the post-colonial times to such an extent that these times might well be called 'Partitioned times'²² as opposed to 'post-colonial times'. This re-emergence of focus on the field of Partition studies is caused according to her due to certain social events in the last few decades like the reunification of Germany and the breaking up of former Yugoslavia. But the focus on Indian

²² Anna Bernard and رزارد آندا. "Forms of Memory: Partition as a Literary Paradigm". *Journal of Comparative Poetics*. Volume 30. 2010. P.10.

Partition studies has seen resurgence in the last twenty five years especially after the re-
 invigoration of communal violence in the 1980s and 1990s. The focus according to Bernard
 however needs to be on the notion of ‘social justice’ rather than being on policy studies as it
 has been for quite some time now. The idea of social justice becomes especially problematic
 in the context of the Indian Partition. As has been stated already earlier, the Indian Partition
 coincides with the Indian independence. This has consequently engendered an optimistic view
 towards the future without glancing backwards too much. But such an event does not allow
 this process to continue for a long time. In case of the Indian Partition survivors, the violence
 has always been meted out by a part of the society that has seen peaceful co-existence for
 centuries.

Manankumar Mandal in his introduction talks about this sense of disbelief about the
 incidents actually unfolding as they did. When we analyse the narratives of Partition survivors
 in subsequent chapters, we will see that the survivor accounts talk about the trauma of the
 violence and bloodshed. They talk about the hardships they faced during the entire process.
 They also talk about the ways in which they ensured their survival and looked forward to a
 brighter future. But very rarely do we find a survivor putting the blame on one community or
 the other along the lines of religion or social class. The shared history of Partition probably
 calls for a shared blame as well. The blame can possibly be put on the British rulers,
 contemporary Indian political leaders or one community depending on which side of the
 border one ended up on. But contemporary newspaper accounts, as Haimanti Roy focuses on
 in her essay, “A Partition of Contingency: Public Discourse in Bengal 1946-47”, prove that
 the public discourse was tilted in favour of a Partition. All public referendums ended up

voting in favour of the Partition.²³ If the British rulers or the Indian political counterparts are blamed for patronising this discourse, the society as a collective must also acknowledge and take upon itself a part of the blame. Questions relating to the political autonomy of the people in the face of political decisions can be raised here. But it is the subject of another debate the scope of which goes beyond the realm of this thesis.

Keeping all of these implications in mind, it can still be stated that the Indian Partition happened along the line of communal tensions which was more or less imposed on the larger public. I use the word imposed in the sense that the larger public did not have a proper idea about the complete implications of the process. Even if there was a public support (in spirit) for a Partition, this support was a politically coerced one. As Gyanendra Pandey puts it, this was a victory of the stronger polity over the weaker polity. This gave rise to a ‘moment of nationalisation’²⁴ which in turn gave rise to newer forms of national identity according to Bernard. My argument in this part of the thesis is that the Partition survivors are largely comprised of this weaker polity that lost out to the stronger polity. Thus the experiences of the trauma faced by the survivors had to be silenced by the stronger polity in order to prove that the decision to Partition India was wise and had positive effect on the two nations. The newer forms of national identities that were bred from this process had no place for the alternative narratives. This is not to say that the alternative narratives were forcefully subjugated. But the attempt has always been to situate the survivors within the mainstream optimism for the future. The survivor rehabilitation narratives show that this agenda has been successful to a

²³ Haimanti Roy. “A Partition of Contingency? Public Discourse in Bengal 1946-47”. *Modern Asian Studies*. Volume 43. No. 6. November 2009. P 1355- 1384.

²⁴ Gyanendra Pandey. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. P.17.

large extent in making them believe that the solution to the entire situation lies in the ability to look forward. But the narratives also show how the events of trauma have remained within the survivors in an extremely vivid manner.

In this attempt of placing the Indian Partition within the broad scope of Partition Studies and Comparative Partition Studies, it is also important to establish the disciplinary stance required to establish certain boundaries. Bernard in her study talks about how in comparative partition studies, when approached from the disciplinary stance of Political Science, International Relations or Peace and Conflict studies, the focus tends to be on a policy-oriented discussion. These disciplines broadly focus on the feasibility of the Partition and whether the Partition has been productive or counter-productive in nature. This essentially gives rise to two sets of ideas, one being pro-Partition and the other against it. It is not the case however that one study takes one specific stance throughout the study. But the pros and cons of a Partition are understood by keeping in mind the policies espoused as a result. The aim of these kinds of studies ultimately is to provide a prescriptive form for resolving the ethnic conflicts that was the cause behind the partition or that caused the partition. The literary and cultural studies in the immediate context focus on the material as well as psychic traumas induced by the event through literary, artistic and narrative analysis according to Bernard. She states through an analysis of a vast corpus of works by Indian writers that this perspective has been undertaken through the reference point of the Holocaust and trauma studies by many scholars. This sort of a comparative study is not the aim of this thesis. But I will take the route of the humanities scholars in focusing on the psychic traumas through material objects. It is important to note here that the existence of material objects reminds us, as well as the

survivors, about the vast material loss suffered. Each presence talks about hundreds of absences.

While I focused on the case of Reznikoff as a specific example that is emblematic of the artistic response to such an event of trauma, I will talk about the Indian literary scene in broader terms, not discussing specific texts, but rather the objectives achieved by many of them. The most compelling form of literary type following the Partition according to Bernard is the Bildungsroman. About Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* she states,

*"The pre-partition period, or the period before the awareness of partition, is identified with childish innocence, while the post-partition or post-awareness period equals adult disillusionment. Like the partition romance then the partition Bildungsroman is a pessimistic genre, in which the pre-lapsarian age before partition is-like childhood- irrevocably lost, and the dystopia of the present seems extremely difficult to overcome. At the same time, however, the nostalgia for that time of innocence is constitutively anti-partitionist, and so it holds onto the possibility of a different kind of future."*²⁵

She also talks about the example of *Cracking India* by Bapsi Sidhwa²⁶ where the protagonist can see the event from the vantage point of being an upper class girl in Lahore who can see the events from an objective distance and can extend help. About the use of the genre of Bildungsroman she states:

"Cracking India is in many ways a fairly conventional example of the Bildungsroman, following its protagonist-narrator's journey from an almost total innocence of all forms of

²⁵ Anna Bernard and رنارد آندا. "Forms of Memory"

²⁶ Bapsi Sidhwa. *Cracking India*. New York: Milkweed Editions, 1992.

injustice, including discrimination on the basis of gender and disability, to a level of familiarity with social, sexual, and physical violence that leaves her, if not traumatized, certainly far less capable of wonder or trust."²⁷

Bernard here mainly tries to focus on the way these literary representations about the Partition tries to posit the pre-partition reality as a pre-lapsarian one and the post-partition one as that of being faced with nostalgia for the pre-partition innocence. But if we go away from this generic focus and talk about certain other literary representations post-partition both in Punjab and Bengal, we will see an initial phase of lull. Arnab Bhattacharya in his essay states how the writers were initially unable to make sense of the vast implications of the event.²⁸ Sadat Hasan Manto's *Syah Hashiye Aur Anya Kahaniya*²⁹ and Krishan Chunder's *Hum Baishyi Hai* can be termed as the only literary representations in the immediate aftermath of the Partition. These are crude representations of the violence of the times. Alope Rai, in his essay goes on to term these literary representations as 'pornography of violence'³⁰. Alope Rai states further, "However, when the enlightened explanations break down in the face of a monstrous upsurge of mass violence, one is left with the horror- and the incomprehensibility of this horror, finally, infects the rational understanding, the aesthetic imagination as well. Among the crudest consequences of this process is a kind of literary indulgence in horror..."³¹ This literary representation of horror is more profound in the literary representations of Punjab

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Arnab Bhattacharya. "*Shahityer Darpane Bangla O Punjab Bibhajan: Ekti Tulonamulok Path*". In *Partition Sahitya: Desh-Kal-Smriti*. Kolkata: Gangchil, 2014. P142.

²⁹ Sadat Hasan Manto. *Syah Hashiye Aur Anya Kahaniya*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2007.

³⁰ Alope Rai. The Trauma of Independence: Some Aspects of Progressive Hindi Literature. In *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, No. 6. Delhi: 1984. P.30.

³¹ Ibid. P.31.

according to Bhattacharya. He gives the example of several texts written in the next 60 years in Punjab to drive through this point. But of specific importance to our study is the fact that almost all of these texts employ tropes in the attempt to make sense of the violence and the horror. Bernard terms the literary representations as counter-narratives and revolutionary in nature. Although the term revolution has several other implications, these literary representations ensure a revolution in progress.

The literary representations in Bengal are also marked by an influx of violence- for example in novels like Asim Roy's *Ekaler Kotha*. But Bhattacharya contends that the Bengali literary enterprises are more concerned about trying to find the roots of the communal tensions and violence that the Partition is underlined by. Akhtaruzzaman Elias' *Khwab-Nama* is termed as one such example among many where Elias is focusing more on the social implications of the Partition. His focus is more on the processes of how the decision of Partition adversely affected the vast majority of the population. Usually in Bengali representations, the focus is more on the way human lives dealt with the event of Partition in the post-Partition times. But the focus of Ilias' text is more on the social problems and the ways to deal with them. Another very important social reality that literature about Partition focused on was the plight of the women during these times. Jasodhara Bagchi points out how women were subjected to double-patriarchy in these times..."first by the male of one community who establishes his own 'identity' by exercising his territoriality over the body; second by her 'own' community which invokes compulsions of ritual purity to exclude her from ritually pure domains of hearth and marriage, and drinking water."³²

³² Jasodhara Bagchi and Shubharanjan Dasgupta. *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*. Kolkata: Stree, 2009. P. xii.

Jyotirmoyi Devi's *Epar Ganga, Opar Ganga* is cited by Bhattacharya as one such example where she sees the physical and mental torture on women during the Partition as an extension of the way patriarchy has functioned in the Indian society from time immemorial. Sadat Hasan Manto's *Khol Do* can also be cited as another literary representation. In this short story Manto focuses on the mechanisation of the female body on experiencing relentless violence. In this story, a girl's body has been subjected to so much systematic rape that the only response she is capable of now is unquestioning surrender to the male voice. While these literary representations do enable us to focus on narratives other than the official ones, they stopped short of representing the whole reality in the first 40 years after the Partition.

The Narrative Shift:

It is perhaps only fitting that we use the narratives on and of women's oppression as our departure point towards the focus on oral narratives. I have used the term 'official' narratives in the preceding paragraph. It is important to qualify this term in order to use it without the various problems that are associated with the term, or rather acknowledging the problematic nature of the term. I use the term 'official' here in the way Pippa Virdee uses it³³. These official histories were propagated on both sides of the border after 1947. These narratives mostly focused on 1947 as the year of independence. This was done with the agenda of mostly downplaying the traumatic implications of the Partition. The Indian side was trying to portray the Partition as a culmination of years of divisive politics undertaken by the

³³ Pippa Virdee. "Remembering Partition: Women, oral histories and the Partition of 1947". *Oral Histories* Vol.41.

British authorities. This narrative essentially downplayed the fact that there was peaceful coexistence between the communities for centuries. The Pakistani side on the other hand tried to portray the Partition as something extremely essential and important for the autonomy and survival of the Muslim community. These stands taken by the Indian and Pakistani state can be understood from works like *Stern Reckoning: a Survey of Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India* by Gopal Das Khosla and *Government of Pakistan, Note on the Sikh Plan and the Sikhs in Action* published in Lahore in 1950³⁴.

All this influx and focus on official narratives resulted in the ‘high politics’ in the immediate aftermath of the Partition according to Virdee. This resulted in a historiography that came down from the vantage point of the high society. This historiography was much dependent on the autobiographical details provided by people in power. It is true that the people providing these details did actually have a lived experience of the Partition. But that lived experience was vastly different from the lived experiences of the ‘weaker polity’ to use Bernard’s term. Both Khosla and Khan’s accounts listed above, in spite of their biases, are important for the historian according to Virdee. The narrative propagated is biased but the research process undertaken can, in a way, act as templates for future field-work. To come back to the narrative bias of these accounts, the need of the hour for the government of the both the countries was to establish a new sense of national identity. This resulted in the focus on ‘great men’ like Gandhi, Jinnah or Nehru as the guiding lights of both the nations. The Partition as a result was bound to take a back seat. According to Virdee, the official histories did not have any space for how the Partition affected ordinary lives. It was rather focused on

³⁴ Gopal Das Khosla. *Stern Reckoning: A Survey of Events Leading up to and Following the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1949. Reprinted 1989.

why the Partition happened. How the Partition impacted the ordinary citizens was not the subject of contention for the nation state. *Partition in school textbooks: A comparative look at India and Pakistan* by Krishna Kumar³⁵ further showcases how the official history of the Partition has been underlined by all the markers pointed above.

The narrative shift however happened in the 1980s according to Virdee with the advent of the likes of Ranajit Guha and ‘The Subaltern Studies School’. The focus of this school was to enable the process of writing history ‘from below’. The key objective of this school was also to enable the process of writing an alternative history. While the other disciplines had shifted their focus from national to regional studies already, this shift happened in the Partition Studies discipline in the early 1990s. According to Virdee, along with the change in approach, the striking similarities between the Partition violence and the anti-Sikh violence in 1984, the golden jubilee celebration year of 1997 and the fact that the Partition trauma could finally be viewed from an objective distance by the survivors were other factors that went into the formalization of this process. This presented everyone with an opportunity for ‘introspection and reflective writing’³⁶ on the horrors and trauma of the Partition. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin’s *Borders and Boundaries* and Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence* must be seen as landmark publications at the inception of this process of representing and remembering ‘history from below’ through the collection of oral narratives. The fact that this shift in focus happened primarily through feminist voices bears testimony to what Jasodhara Bagchi says about women being doubly marginalised in the Partition. The female voice

³⁵ Krishna Kumar. “Partition in School Text Books: A Comparative Look at India and Pakistan”. In S. Settar and Indira Baptista Gupta Eds. *Pangs of Partition Vol 2*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2002.

³⁶ Virdee.

articulating about Partition trauma was the scarcest one to find in the first fifty years. So it is only fitting that the alternative process started with the feminist voice in the centre of it.

It will be pertinent here to note what Gunter Grass said when asked about whether himself and other writers could represent the Holocaust experience in its entirety through their writings. Grass' reply was:

*“That is simply not possible. No matter how much we write and what we write, our creative configuration will not be able to capture those dreadful years. In the ultimate analysis, that Holocaust is far too demonic to be captured in words. Let us preserve and evaluate what has been produced.”*³⁷

Primo Levi also states about the Holocaust experience that survivor narratives are not in any way authentic representations of the Holocaust experience.³⁸ He states that the true experience of the Holocaust has already died. The ones who have survived have not experienced the fate of the ones who have died. While this stance borders on being absolutist in nature, it can be clearly seen that historians and writers alike agree on the fact that the true horror of the violence can never be captured in its entirety in case of such events of trauma. One can only strive towards getting close to the reality.

In this search of collecting narratives that are closest to the reality, the oral historian might choose to take an approach whereby one adopts processes through which these narratives can be legitimized. It is not the prerogative of an oral narrative to pass the test of

³⁷ Bhattacharya.P142.

³⁸ Primo Levi. *If This Is a Man*. 1947. Trans. Stuart Woolf. 1959. London: Abacus, 1979.

‘authenticity’ (especially where subjective representation is the prime driving force). A focus on the discipline of memory studies will enable us to understand the roots of this debate better. In her book Anne Whitehead- talks about the contemporary boom in the discipline of memory studies.³⁹ The aim of her book is to establish the fact that this contemporary focus on memory is nothing unique in the history of the way memory has been perceived by the human civilization through ages. But she discusses the factors behind this contemporary boom in memory studies. This boom is ascribed to the fact that the latter part of 20th century and the 21st century has seen ‘massive migration’ due to several reasons. These migrations have happened in various scales across states, countries and continents. This has resulted in the process of ‘sharpening of nostalgia’.

Another possible reason that Whitehead contends is the advent of the digital age. The entire human existence in the digital age is ephemeral and confined to the ‘here and now’. This, according to Whitehead, has resulted in a lack of historical consciousness for the society in general. The boom in memory studies thus can also be seen as a counter to this process where digital archives are used to create oral narrative archives. This in turn might eschew a sense of rootedness within the otherwise ephemeral existence of the netizens. But it must be acknowledged as well that the advent of the digital age has democratized the process of archiving as well. There has also been a worldwide focus on the emergence of the discipline of ‘Digital Humanities’. This has blurred the boundaries between the humanities and the sciences. More importantly, this has democratized the process of historical research through oral narratives. There has been an influx of the ‘public’ within a field that has been historically viewed as being only ‘academic’. The issue of influx of the public within academic or

³⁹ Anne Whitehead ed. *Memory*. Ney York: Routledge 2009. P.2.

institutionalized discourse will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on memorial museum.

But there is the other side of the spectrum as well. Charles Maier puts forward the idea that this focus on memory has made memory a site of contestation. Whitehead states, “Charles Maier has argued that the current obsession with memory, especially with the memory of the Second World War and the Holocaust, is ‘a sign not of historical confidence but of a retreat from transformative politics’. For him, memory work too often takes the form of group memories contending with one another for recognition of the group’s suffering, and ‘reflects a new focus on narrow ethnicity’”.⁴⁰ It is quite evident that Maier is talking from the standpoint of an observer of the Western processes of memory studies and he does not have the Indian Partition in mind while saying this. It is true that the same has not yet happened in case of the Indian Partition because the process is fairly new having just started in the last 15 years. But it has happened with regards to other events and epochs in the history of Indian civilization. The contemporary process of certain majoritarian groups trying to reclaim and rewrite history can be cited as example. But there is an essential difference between memories of other events in Indian history as well as the official history of the Partition and the oral narratives of the Partition. The oral narratives from both the sides tell an alternative history of this event underlined with tremendous terror and violence. This alternative history valorises the individual experience and talks mostly about the sense of loss on both sides of the border. This process gives voice to the ‘weaker polity’ who have nothing to do with the hero-worshipping and ‘nation-state’ forming official narratives of the governments of both the countries. If anything, these survivors are connected by a shared sense of loss and a shared a sense of relief

⁴⁰ Ibid. P.6.

about the fact that they could survive. They can be in this regard, properly termed as ‘citizens of Partition’ rather than being the citizens of a particular nation.

Returning to Maier’s idea of the contesting sites of memory, he goes on to equate history with a ‘desire to understanding’ and pits memory in the realm of ‘addiction’⁴¹. This notion of memory breeding a response out of the ordinary is seen in negative light by Maier. But a far more nuanced understanding of this process can be found in Marianne Hirsch’s book *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust*.⁴² Hirsch contends in her book that traumatic events affect the lives of those who were not present at the instance of the event through certain markers. These markers can be understood through literary and visual legacies. The postmemory of an event makes no claim to be authentic. It does not strive to be authentic either. Postmemory’s connection to the past is not actually mediated by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation.

Before going further into the idea of postmemory, I would like focus on another aspect of memory studies that has emerged in the last 15 years. Cangbai Wang, in her essay ‘The Material Turn in Migration Studies’⁴³ states that, the process of migration has been seen by various disciplines through certain sets of binaries. For example- local and international mobilities, mobility and immobility, skilled and non-skilled migrants etc. But one set of binary has largely been ignored- the binary between ‘peoples’ and ‘things’. Wang speaks of

⁴¹ Charles S. Maier. “A Surfeit of Memory? Reflections on History, Melancholy, Denial”. *History and Memory* Vol. 5 No. 2. Fall-Winter 1992. P. 136-152.

⁴² Hirsch.

⁴³ Wang.

these two notions in terms of binaries. It can be argued however that these two concepts/ideas are not essentially binary in nature. Especially in case of events of trauma, objects become a part of the fractured existence of the individual post the event. We can disagree with Wang in the way she pits these two ideas in a set of binary, but it is important to acknowledge the fact that there has been a turn towards the notion of material memory in the 21st century. This can be seen as a continuation of the process of collecting oral narratives to create an alternative historiography.

While narrating an event that has so much official history and official narrative attached to it, a survivor often inculcates the official narrative within the individual narrative. In cases like this, the person often believes the official narrative to be one's own narrative. But when the narrative is mediated by an object attached to the specific context, then the narrative often becomes truly personal and individual. When we analyse these kinds of narratives in the next two chapters, we will see time and again that the narration takes a different trajectory altogether while when they are mediated by objects that are connected to the event and has a sense of personal history connected to it as well. While enabling the narrator to delve deeper into the memories of trauma, these objects also serve a secondary purpose. They become artefacts for posterity. These objects, when archived along with the narratives connected to them, enables a future observer to get invested within the alternative history through a sense of belonging. The tangibility of the object itself makes an event far removed from the present accessible for the observer.

This brings us to the idea of ‘Prosthetic Memory’ by Alison Landsberg, espoused in her book of the same name. Landsberg primarily talks about mass media as having the potential to invigorate a public cultural memory. She is moreover talking specifically about the potential of the American society, through television and mass media, to have a shared collective memory of events that many people do not have the lived experience of. Landsberg perceives in her book that objects and images, when displaced from their erstwhile ‘worlds’, gives rise to prosthetic memories in the mind of the perceiver. The difference between the ideas of ‘Postmemory’ and ‘Prosthetic Memory’ lies in the fact that the former is not dependent on a specific artefact. A ‘Postmemory’ does not have the need to be rooted in the original idea on the primary level. ‘Postmemory’, like ‘Postruth’, can have its own existence while going beyond the immediate context of the originating idea. The notion of ‘Prosthetic Memory’ on the other hand is dependent on the fact that the idea evoked within the mind of the perceiver is in some way or the other a prosthetic of the original idea.

The alternative histories of the event of the Partition have been silenced for decades now. We will see in the next two chapters how the notion of the material memory has the potential to provide legitimacy to these alternative histories in the first place, and also how these objects and images could potentially engender a sense of prosthetic memory within the observers. Arjun Appadurai states how ‘commodities like persons have social lives’.⁴⁴ Taking a cue from this idea of Appadurai, one can attempt to trace the erstwhile silences relating to the Partition experience through a focus on material objects. Moreover, an object that has survived through time, not only makes us aware of the historical context, but also enables us to understand how the world around that object has changed.

⁴⁴ Arjun Appadurai. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986. Introduction.

CHAPTER III: ARCHIVES AND MUSEUMS

Before going into the processes of memorialisation related to the Partition and the ways in which these processes have unfolded in the last 80 years, it is important to go into a detailed discussion about the ways in which memorial projects and sites can be designed for such an event. We will look into the few endeavours outside literary fictions and memoirs that has been attempted in order to draw a trajectory. But the pre-requisite to understanding these processes is to take certain markers into account. We will take two primary markers as part of our discussion on this. First, the uniqueness of the event of the Partition and the trauma related to it and secondly, the advent of the digital age.

Ramachandra Guha understands creation a partition museum as a potentially disruptive process.⁴⁵ According to Guha, this urge to create a national museum documenting the partition narratives is a new one and is put forward by a new generation of intellectuals who have become rich through their own intelligence and entrepreneurial skills. None of them have inherited this fortune from their parents. Moreover, all the individuals who approached Guha with these ideas were Western educated. Guha connects all these background details to draw the conclusion that this idea must have been planted in their minds through their exposure to Holocaust museums in America and in many parts of Europe. Guha contends that memorializing the 1947 Partition is not similar to that of the Holocaust or for that matter most of the other events of trauma all over the world mostly because of the fact that ‘the violence

⁴⁵ Ramachandra Guha. “Memorializing Partition- The best memorial is one that reconciles, not disrupts.” *The Telegraph*. 10th August, 2013.

that accompanied the Partition of India was carried out by all the relevant groups'. In the case of the Holocaust on the other hand, the Jews suffered and the Germans inflicted violence.

Beth Kowaleski Wallace in her writing puts forward examples of exhibitions across Britain commemorating the 200 years of the abolition of slave trade.⁴⁶ In her essay, she talks about various exhibitions showcasing different aspects of the 1807 abolition. But she states at one point in her essay that “Another distinct trend reflected in all the exhibitions is the focus on enslaved Africans as agents of their own liberation. Every exhibition describes how the enslaved fought back against oppression: every exhibition features the story of the Maroons, for instance, several presenting the stories of specific Maroons, including ‘Nanny’ and Leonard Parkinson. All feature Haitian Independence in 1804 as a crucial historical turning point.”⁴⁷ While acknowledging how these exhibitions showcase the process of fighting back of the oppressed, she concludes her essay by stating, “One Sunday afternoon on a recent bank holiday, visitors of all ages, races, ethnicities and nationalities crowded the exhibition halls of the International Slavery Museum. If, as Paul Williams suggests, ‘museums serve as surrogate homes for debates that would otherwise be placeless’, then a national conversation is now voluble.”⁴⁸

Kowaleski talks about the importance of museums as opposed to mere exhibitions simply for the fact that they can be a tool for national debates for issues that are otherwise uncomfortable. It is important here to go back to Guha’s contention that a Partition museum

⁴⁶ Beth Kowaleski. ‘History at Large: Uncomfortable Commemorations’. *History Workshop Journal*. Issue 68. Autumn 2009. P. 223-233.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* P. 225.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* P.232.

will essentially reinforce the narrative fissures between both sides of the border. To begin with, Guha's article is a speculative one at the outset. Guha does not base his conclusions on any fixed set of researched documents or archives. But one cannot discard his arguments as completely lacking any practical basis. Saying that, Kowaleski's conclusion provides answers to some of the problems that Guha focuses on.

While the exhibitions that Kowaleski talks about in her essay do fall into the category of Guha's understanding of the perpetrator-sufferer narrative, what I would like to focus on here is the fact that the exhibitions do enable a conversation about an uneasy past. Similar exhibitions, archives and museums, it can be argued, have the potential to enable the Indian subcontinent to have a conversation about the uneasy narratives related to the Partition.

But it is important to focus on the differences between these two types of projects. The question that I seek to answer here is related to the notion of prosthetic memories⁴⁹ evoked through an image or object relating to an uneasy past. An image or object showcased in the exhibitions of the kind talked about by Kowaleski will necessarily enable a conversation about the uneasy past. But the moral standpoints of these narratives and the narrative regarding who suffered and in the hands of whom will not change. Whereas, in the case of the Partition, the perpetrator will change according to the subject-point of the individual. This subject point can vary on the lines of religion, nationality, social strata, gender and many more markers. So a subjective narration of each narrative becomes imperative to go with any image, object or art installation that is archived in a Partition Museum. Taking a cue from Guha's argument that the idea of a Partition Museum has stemmed from many similar Museums in the West, we will

⁴⁹ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*

look into the kinds of archives and museums that are prevalent- both digital and physical. The advent of the digital age becomes extremely important for this discussion.

Commemoration through Mediated Narrative:

Online archives become a big part of the process of commemoration in the digital age. Keeping this in mind, I will examine a website that is dedicated to unfolding the nuances of an unfinished project that had the narratives of memory at its core. In the first part of this chapter, I will look to examine how Aanchal Malhotra's process of commemorating the narratives associated with the objects of Partition differs from the processes followed by this website.

I will first like to discuss the website on Aby Warburg's atlas and the functioning of it.⁵⁰ The website has ten panels of Warburg archived within it. The panels are essentially an ensemble of various images put together in a single panel. They can be termed as collages in a sense. Although I am inclined to call them bricolage structures for the reason of them being an ensemble of images completely unconnected to one another at the outset. But Warburg's project was to find inherent connections between these images to create a complete picture. The most interesting part about this project is the fact that no explanatory notes or commentaries are provided by the creator himself. It is here that the Mnemosyne archive sets in. The website provides guided pathways through the various images in the panels. Sometimes individual images are focused on while on other occasions, two or three images are discussed in conjunction to provide a comparative as well as simultaneous study. I would argue here that the project in itself is a practice in the realm of prosthetic memory. In

⁵⁰ <https://warburg.library.cornell.edu>

Landsberg's understanding of the idea of prosthetic memory, she states that the memories connected with a particular object or image is specific to the context of that object or image itself. But when that same object is viewed by a third person, the context of that specific individual creeps in to her understanding of that specific object.⁵¹ The memories instigated within that individual emerge from the specific context of that individual.

From this standpoint, Warburg's project can be viewed as being directed at a future viewer to understand the ensemble through her/his specific context. But the aim of the archive somewhat goes against this understanding of the project. The website aims at giving a conducted guide to understand the way the panels are to be read. The commentators are highly learned and qualified professors and researchers of visual art and art history. Their commentary is guided by their scholarship and reading. To give an example, the commentary on Panel B is provided by Spyros Pappapetros, who is an Associate Professor of History and Theory in the School of Architecture at Princeton University. Pappapetros states that Panel B is a part of the three initial Panels of Warburg's atlas. These three panels, for him, make the central structure of the cosmology that Warburg wants to create. The Panel B is discussed in detail in the website. In this panel, various parts of the human anatomy are grouped together from differing perspectives and different ages in history. The panel is made up of nine structures arranged in three rows at the centre of which is the Vitruvian figure of the Renaissance master Leonardo. Panel B does not simply provide differing structures of the cosmos through the entire panel, but each image also provides a cosmos in itself. From these understanding, Pappapetros infers that the different panels combine many cosmic structures which are complete in themselves to in turn create a new cosmic structure. This cosmic

⁵¹ Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory* P.26.

structure that the panels are pointing at differ vastly from the original connotations of each of the cosmic structures individually. This panel, by uniting these cosmological structures, comes close to create an iconographic thread that unites all the panels. But Pappapetros also points out that there is an ideological part to this iconographic structure as well. This micro-macrocosmic structure essentially sheds light on the limits of ideology. It concerns with the way no ideology can be enough to create a universal ideology. For Pappapetros then, this atlas project proves the fallibility of such a project through its own failure to encompass the macro structure.

Pappapetros also charts out a linear progress throughout the nine images in Panel B. For him, the entire set of images can be divided into three parts. The first six images represent the world clad in the guise of the human body and in turn surrounded by the cosmological functions attributed to the human body. The images empanelled seven and eight still represent the human body, but focuses more on the geometric proportions of the human body. It shifts its focus away from the cosmological aspects to focus on these geometric proportions. The final image has two parts where the first showcases a cyclical representation of the human body and the second shows a human hand that leans more towards the cosmological understandings of the human body. Afterwards, Pappapetros uses the lectures of Fritzl Saxl on ‘Microcosm and Macrocosm’⁵² to chart out the cosmological understandings of the images in the panel and to create a pathway through these images. This panel, for Pappapetros, essentially qualifies as a model for the way Warburg was trying to showcase the geometrical and structural underpinnings of early modern science.

⁵² Fritz Saxl. “Microcosm and Macrocosm”. Lecture. University College London Online Archive. (Open Access)

Before going into further discussion about the way the guided pathway is created in this website, one needs to ponder over the relevance of such a project to understanding the way narratives of trauma has been documented through online archives. This website and the commentary provided on each of the panels can be seen as a model on how archives can be created with guided pathways about such images. These images are a part of the visual as well as art history of the western canon. These are images and panels that comment on the philosophical underpinnings of the human agency as well as the relation between the human body and the cosmos. The shift in focus from the cosmological understanding to the geometrical understanding in early modern science in Europe informs the context of the panels and helps in creating the rhetoric around it. But to understand them from the perspective of memory studies and that too from the perspective of prosthetic memories connected to material objects, one comes to the understanding that the prosthetic memory is informed by this underlying philosophical rhetoric. We must keep this understanding in mind while focusing on Aanchal Malhotra's website in the latter part of the essay.

The first image in the Panel is understood by Saxl as representing the way the human body is connected with the seven planets. The body is in essence connected with the planets through rays of light. While this connection through rays represents the cosmological aspect of it, the God figure is stated to be residing outside this image and at the centre of the Panel. It is important to notice that Saxl's commentary is merely quoted in this part of the commentary. No other original commentaries are provided. This image, titled 'Radial Lines- Feet Over the Moon' is considered as one of the earliest examples of reappearance of Pagan elements in the middle ages. This structure by Hildegard acts as a philosophical composite of the Christian cosmological elements and the Pagan elements from this standpoint. Next Pappapetros goes

into a detailed understanding of the way the zodiac man has been represented in about five images of the panel and the way the implication of the zodiac man may vary in the different ways they may be read.

Next, through a discussion of the figures seven and eight, Pappapetros showcases how these two images concerning the figure of the Vitruvian Man connect with the cosmology of the early modern science. But he also points out that there are remaining implications of the earlier epistemology within these images. Although the geometric lines are apparent within these images, they represent a debt to the medieval understanding of the human cosmos. The new rational world, no matter how alienated in essence from the medieval iconography, does showcase certain aspects of it as well. This can act as sufficient premise for the argument that it is not always possible to come out of an earlier world system or worldview no matter how radical the departure may sound in theory. The representations in praxis cannot always do away with the implications of the earlier ideological or theoretical stance. The present can be planned to be a radical departure from the Pagan and Medieval past in this context but the iconography that is sustained cannot be but informed by the evolution of the artistic as well as the philosophical praxis.

This transformation or advancement is often termed as a regressive advancement. The final two images in the panel confirm the way this regressive advancement works. The final two images are those of a Pentagram and a hand. These two images act as testaments to the renaissance cosmological systems on the one hand. But on the other hand they almost act as rudiments to an archaic belief and iconographical system according to Pappapetros. The figure is described by Agrippa in his inference on Occult philosophy in purely geometrical terms. The image is such that the figure has its arms and legs stretched on both sides. The tips of the

fingers of both the feet and the arms touch the circumference of the circle if a circle is drawn by taking the navel as the centre. The stretched legs also create a triangle which is equal in all sides taking the navel as the reference point. The figure and the circle in conjugation divide the entire circle into five parts. From this originates the name of the Pentagram. Agrippa proceeds in this manner to find a great number of similarities between several body parts. But these segregations seem like negative calculation after a point where cosmological implications are attached to body parts forcefully according to Pappapetros. The hand in the final image of the panel represents how the Warburg focuses on the importance of Chiromancy or Palmistry, still there in the supposedly rational age. By counter posing these two images, Warburg essentially tries to underline the notion of the regressive advancement and tries to drive in the central notion of the panel and in turn of the entire project itself.

But this final image also implies the centrality of the human body and human agency according to Pappapetros. It does so apparently, by underlying the fact that although human future and human agency is predetermined, this agency is concealed within the human fist and can be controlled by the human body. In the 20th century implication it can be read in the way that the entire world is within the grasp of a single human palm after the advent of modern technology. This reading once again underlines how these images within the panel can correspond to differing ways of conceiving the human cosmology in accordance with the day and age one reads it in. But to understand the originating concepts underlying them, one needs to understand the cosmological and iconographical history attached to the origin of each of the images.

In the conclusion to the discussion, Pappapetros focuses on how these images and panels have specific implications in accordance to the social and political climate of the age

that they are assembled in. If the similar panels were assembled during the First World War then they would assume new meanings and connotations post the Second World War. The Mnemosyne project, seen from this standpoint, can be extended ad infinitum by adding new images to these panel structures in accordance to subsequent times and ages. The way the Renaissance architectural idea of proportion was regenerated in the post Second World War Europe is seen by Pappapetros as an example of how past ideas can be therapeutic to modern day individuals in times of despair. He also cites an image of the first man setting foot on the moon and the way it was connected to medieval cosmology to argue how the once cosmological image of man's feet on the moon gathers a homological significance through this event.

It is not in the scope of this thesis to discuss all the panels archived in the website and the commentaries on them. But a discussion of the essential way in which the guided pathway of Panel B is created makes manifest a few features about the creation of such an archive. These panels are discussed with the underlying understanding of the medieval, early renaissance and renaissance cosmology and geometrical underpinnings connected to it. The possibility of understanding such panels through an individual understanding is acknowledged only at the end of the discussion. The project stresses on the fact that it doesn't aim to give out a prescriptive way of understanding these panels. But the historical and ideological background is provided to open up new ways of inferring and understanding these images. Moreover, these are not images of specific events or objects connected to specific events. These are images that underline philosophical traditions and ways of reading these traditions. By grouping together various images that are on the surface unconnected to each other, Warburg tries to create a macro-microcosmic structure where the distinction between the two

gets blurred. The microcosm represents the macrocosm while often being unconnected to them.

It is on this notion of connectivity with philosophical tradition that I want to focus on for the purpose of my thesis. These are not images that any person can immediately connect to. But that is true for any image whatsoever. But a person with a preliminary understanding of Western Art and Western Cosmology will also find it difficult to connect with them and create an understanding about them. To connect the image of the first human setting foot on the moon to the cosmological image of the Vitruvian man or the Pentagram structure with the image of the human feet on the moon, one needs to be a connoisseur of Western Art and cosmology. These are traditions that entail a philosophical discourse. But these images are not central to the mass memory. The aim of Warburg's project in his own words was to invigorate the memory, understanding and imagination of the contemporary reader about the "afterlife of antiquity". The creation of the Mnemosyne project underlines the fact that to have a response to these panels one need to have an understanding of the antiquity itself. So the project essentially aims at the creation of a memory of the antiquity so that the response can be possible. The memory invoked in the minds of the viewers of these images can be termed in turn as a prosthetic one in this regard. But it is in essence a 'double prosthetic' memory. Here, the memory of the context and the connected political and cultural significance has to be implanted in the memory of the viewer through reference points.

It is important to go back to the dichotomy between memory and history at this point discussed at the beginning. It has been already discussed how a negative view has often been attributed to the notion of memory where memory is viewed as fiction as opposed to the factual nature of history. But memory in this understanding, also acquires the power of

reinvigorating a marginalized notion of the past, one that has been forgotten through a flux of official narratives. By making the original connotations and attributes of the images in the Panels of Aby Warburg, the Mnemosyne Project enables the viewer to have an individualized response to these images as opposed to the mediated ones. It is a bit paradoxical though that the original reference points are presented to us through the digital medium and a mediated voice. But the website does not look to regulate the response of the viewers to the panels themselves.

A detailed analysis of Aanchal Malhotra's project will be done in the next chapter. But in order to attempt a comparative study of the two processes, it is important to give a brief introduction to Malhotra's project.⁵³ The mediated voice in the case of the Mnemosyne Project is provided by the researchers because of the fact that the original creator and his voice has not survived. The voices of Partition on the other hand have not been lost altogether to us. Although the voices are slowly being lost which is underlined in the urgency of various groups like the 1947 Partition Archives⁵⁴ to collect the remaining narratives, an archive created thus can be termed essentially as a participatory archive. Patricia Carlton, in her thesis on Participatory Digital Archives, focuses on the fact that participatory archives help in dealing with the collective trauma of any social event.⁵⁵ But the focus of this thesis is not on participatory archives of that sort.

Malhotra's project has a mediated narrative similar to that of the Mnemosyne project. Malhotra interviews the survivors herself. As will be discussed in detail in the next chapter,

⁵³ Malhotra. *Remnants*.

⁵⁴ <http://www.1947partitionarchive.org>

⁵⁵ Patricia Carlton. "From Ashes to Ashe: Memorializing Traumatic Events Through Participatory Digital Archives. University of Central Florida. Doctoral thesis(open access). 2016.

the narratives Malhotra archives can be roughly divided into two parts. There are a lot of narratives within her family. These narratives hold a sense of personal importance for her. Also there are narratives of people who came from a completely different background compared to her own. But the similarity in the process of archiving and portrayal lies in the way each of these narratives is presented to us through a mediated voice of Malhotra. This mediated voice is albeit a lot different from that of the Mnemosyne project. The voice of the Mnemosyne project does not require it to be subjective and socio-historically aware. That voice only fulfils the condition of being aware of the specific contexts of the images used.

It is at this point that we must look at the way the objects and narratives used by Malhotra are different from the images archived in the Mnemosyne project. The images that are archived in the Mnemosyne project have meanings and contexts embedded within the images/structures themselves. But the images that Malhotra chooses, acquire significance only through extra-textual context. The image of a heirloom, some pearls, a *Hamam-Dasta*, a shawl or an Identification certificate don't necessarily attract or engage our consciousness the way the image of a Vitruvian man does. The latter is at the outset something that is out of the normal and encourages us to delve deeper into its history and origin. But these everyday objects acquire importance only when the stories that are connected to them are stated along with the image of the object. It is only when we get to know that these set of pearls were gifted to a young woman by the person she was supposed to marry in their last meeting, and that she migrated amidst riots that killed the man, with these pearls as her last memory of him that makes us delve deeper into the object.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Malhotra. P.54.

But this object catches the imagination of the viewer in almost the opposite way to that of the Vitruvian man. The Vitruvian man makes us curious about the image itself where we try to understand what the creator was trying to portray through the image. The pearls on the other hand take us away from the object and its context to muse on the way other such narratives must have transpired. It can also evoke a sense of a personal loss. Malhotra states how after her interaction with her grandmother she felt guilty for what had happened to her grandmother. She could not understand the reason behind this guilt. It is probably embedded in the prosthetic memories evoked by these images. Narration of an event of cruelty can make us sad. But it can also make us guilty for acting in a somewhat similar manner in a different context. A basic dichotomy can be noted by juxtaposing these two images. The Vitruvian man calls for our understanding. But the pearls, in a way, evoke imagination. Both sets of images, seen from this standpoint, call for footnotes to be attached to them. But as we have seen through our discussion of these two archives, the footnotes must differ vastly in nature.

Physical Sites of Commemoration

I have presented the example of the Mnemosyne project to showcase the abovementioned difference in approach that must be taken into account while creating a digital archive or a book. If next we take the case of Memorial Museums, we will be faced with a whole set of different problems. David Clarke, in his study talks about the case of the Leistikowstraße Memorial Museum in Potsdam, which commemorates victims of Soviet occupation after 1945.⁵⁷ Here he states, “As Patrizia Violi has pointed out, the notion of

⁵⁷ David Clarke. “Understanding Controversies over Memorial Museums: The Case of the Leistikowstraße

authenticity in relation to memorial museums is a paradoxical one. Despite the inherent “indexicality” of the site itself, in which the materiality of the place acts as a kind of witness to the atrocities committed there, it is nevertheless necessary to present the site in such a way that this indexicality can be experienced and understood by visitors. In other words, the link between the place and particular events in its past is not in fact naturally given, but has to be constructed by the exhibition that is created there.”⁵⁸

I will try to look at the Partition museum in Amritsar – *Yaadgaar-e-Taqseem*- against the ideas of authenticity, indexicality of the site itself and the constructed exhibition of the Museum itself as focused on by David Clarke in the above extract. It must be noted at this point that the ideas are not being used here out of context as Clarke clearly states in his study that his intention is to take the museum in Potsdam as an example to talk about the problems museologists and historians face in the process of creating memorial museums. Guha’s contention of how the 1947 Partition narratives are different for the fact that there is no oppressor-oppressed narrative that puts the blame on one side has to be kept in mind while examining this museum also.

Kamayani Kumar, in her guest editorial talks about the fact that the monumental event of the Partition of 1947 ‘resists integration’⁵⁹. This resistance to integration according to Kumar, stems from the fact that in the immediate aftermath of Partition, it was relegated to the ‘realm of the unspeakable’. While this relegation is understandable when we think about the

Memorial Museum, Potsdam.” *History & Memory*. Volume 29. Number 1 Spring/Summer. 2017. P. 41-71

⁵⁸ Ibid. P.51.

⁵⁹ Kamayani Kumar. “Past in Present: Partition in India”. Guest Editorial. *Café Dissensus*. 2016.

immense and invasive sense of trauma that millions have suffered following the event, it has to be acknowledged that this has left a striking silence when it comes to the realm of ‘people’s history’ of the Partition.

Kumar in her article acknowledges the stance taken by Ramachandra Guha. But she differs vastly in her own stance about the issue. Kumar talks about this museum being a site for performing the ‘rituals of remembrance’ that might enable the Partition survivors to go through a process of catharsis. Kumar cites the stance taken by Salman Akhtar. She talks about how Akhtar points out the therapeutic use of a Partition museum.⁶⁰ The difference between a museum and a memorial museum becomes more apparent to us when we take this stance into account. The memories of an event of trauma are essentially a private one. But when a survivor makes the narrative accessible for the larger public through a public and open forum that enables the survivor to go through a process of healing.

The Amritsar Partition Museum however, must not be seen through a one-dimensional lens. The Museum was inaugurated in August, 2017, just in time to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Partition. The museum is located in the town hall of Amritsar. Going back to Clarke’s idea of the indexicality of the site, the town of Amritsar was central to the trauma of the Partition survivors in the Western part. The centrality of this city is comparable only to the city of Kolkata in terms of the trauma and the horrors the city has witnessed. When we later look at Aanchal Malhotra’s accounts we will see in more detail how most of the migrants use Amritsar as their first halt. Moreover, as one of the survivors in Malhotra’s accounts points out, there is not a single family in Amritsar that has not lost a family member to the brutalities of Partition.

⁶⁰ Salman Akhtar. “A Partition Museum”. *Café Dissensus*. 2015.

Going back to the Amritsar museum, it is important to point out that the museum categorizes the memorial objects in three parts- Arts, Refugee Artefacts and Oral histories.⁶¹ But the museum is not exclusive in nature. It is vastly inclusive due to a few reasons. The partition narratives are complex in nature. They cannot be categorized within a singular bracket. The sole aim of the museum is to create a ‘meaningful discourse from a plurality of resources’ according to Kumar. While it is true that the museum showcases how the Partition has shaped the lives of the generation that survived the event and many more after that, it does not try to do it by completely going away from the official narrative. Like any other museum commemorating a historical event, the Amritsar museum houses hundreds of engravings stating the official history and many more hundreds of newspaper cut-outs, posters, articles and photographs that has shaped the collective memory of the Indian subcontinent in the last 70 years.

What makes this museum different is the fact that along with these documents ‘maps, artefacts, diaries, archival footage, transcripts of oral testimonies, soundscapes, letters, tickets from the infamous trains that went between India and Pakistan, transporting refugees and dead from one side of the border to the other and art installations’⁶² are also on display. These materials are displayed in the museum interspersed with all these images and documents of official history. This ensures a twofold process. It firstly presents to us the alternative history-material memory being only one part of it- of the Partition. But secondly and more importantly, the museum presents to us these narratives alongside the official narrative which enables them to attain legitimacy both to the visitor and the survivors who have donated these

⁶¹ www.partitionmuseum.org

⁶² Kamyani Kumar. *Café Dissensus*. 2016.

objects to the museum. Clarke's idea of authenticity of the museum objects is achieved in this museum through this process of creating a space for dialogues. The museum in a way becomes the site for a dialogue between the unofficial or the alternative narratives and the mainstream or the official narrative.

It is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss all the objects archived within the museum. But a brief focus on a few of the objects archived will make the politics and aim of the museum more manifest.

One of the objects exhibited in the museum is the shaving kit carried by Aporajita Chakravarty's great-grandfather. He migrated to India from East Bengal, leaving his ageing mother behind. He didn't carry much, just four sets of clothes, a tree twig for a toothbrush, the shoes he was wearing, one book and a shaving kit. Since he had to leave his mother behind during his migration, he brought his mother's photograph inside the shaving kit. This shaving kit has been donated to the museum by his great-granddaughter. We do not have the account of the owner along with this object. But the context helps anyone viewing the object to imagine the agony of the son who had to leave his country while and his mother behind. While the shaving kit in itself might be considered a mundane everyday object, this context makes us value an individual narrative. This also makes us aware of the fact that other thousands of similar narratives pertaining to the Partition must have been present that has been silenced or lost. The object in essence gives voice to this narrative silence when it comes to the alternative historiography of the Partition.

Another important part of the Partition survival narrative is the utensils carried by several families during their migration. We will look into one narrative when we look at Aanchal Malhotra's project in detail. Malhotra states in an interview that the survivors would

take a lot of time before opening up about their experiences. The recapitulation would always start in a pragmatic tone and end with a deep pathos-laden nostalgia for the homeland left behind. The underlying mood however in this process of recapitulation is that of looking forward to a brighter future. Many of the survivors after recollecting the trauma of the entire event would end on a note of satisfaction that in spite of all the odds, they have been able to survive and make a living for themselves and their family. The fact that utensils were selected for all the pragmatic purposes of preparing food while leaving a host of other dearer things behind underlines this mood.

Apart from these kinds of objects, the Amritsar Museum is house to several art installations that underline various events relating to the Partition. Exhibits of a riot-run house or the well of Thoha Khalsa⁶³ can be cited as examples of these kinds. The Amritsar Museum focuses on creating an ambience wherein to present in one whole the traumatic experiences of the survivors. This is where it ceases being a museum and ends up becoming a memorial museum. But these art installations also run the risk of becoming performative sites. Richard Schechner, in his idea of performance and rituals focuses on how certain rituals (religious, social, political etc.) can be termed as performances for they are underlined by certain performative aspects.⁶⁴ From this standpoint, it can be stated that the terms performance and ritual can often be used interchangeably. If the Amritsar Museum is looking to capture the multiplicity of narratives then such art installations can be counter-productive for the simple

⁶³ *Thoha Khalsa* is a village of Khatua Region of the District Rawalpindi in Pakistan. It was a village mainly inhabited by Sikhs before the Partition. On March 6 of 1947, the village was marred by communal clashes. It is infamous for the way all remaining women and children committed suicide by jumping in a well after all the men were killed in the massacre.

⁶⁴ Richard Schechner. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge 2013.

fact that they might start breeding certain macro-narratives that the museum is trying to get rid of.

The riot-run house or a specific well might run the risk stated above. But art-installations that aim at the process of integration of these narratives serve quite a different purpose in the Amritsar museum. An inherent inner conflict fixed within the imaginations of Partition survivors in particular and the entire region in general is that between the grief of loss and a hope for a brighter future. Two of the art-installations housed inside the museum makes this dichotomy manifest. One of them is the 'Tree of Hope'. This symbolic tree is made out of barbed wires. The symbolic importance of this tree is immense when we talk about the prosthetic memories. As we go into the realm of prosthetic memories we will see that mundane objects acquire symbolic significance in the eyes of an observer who doesn't have any lived experience of the event. These art-installations are created in essence with its focus firmly set on its symbolic importance. It can be argued that these art-installations might be of lesser importance to the actual survivors who have real objects and memories relating to the event. But this inference will be sweeping in nature given the fact that the response to a work of art is mostly subjective. But to observers who are not aware of the context of trauma relating to the event, these installations are bound to add stimulus to the process of grasping this history.

Another such installation is the 'Wall of Remembrance'. In the words of Mallika Ahluwalia, the curator of the museum, "While curating this Museum of Memories, I have come to realize that reflecting on the history of Partition itself is an internal conflict: the struggle between the grief of loss and hope for the future. This exhibit is a symbol of this duality, with the well being a source of life but, in times of war, a setting for the death of

thousands. The Well of Remembrance commemorates the lives of women lost in the horrors that followed Partition, driven to commit suicide in fear of rape and murder...”⁶⁵ The aim of a museum of any kind is essentially to engage the spectator in an internal dialogue with the event, objects and artefacts. This need is probably there in the highest measure when it comes to a Partition Museum or any other memorial museum.

The museum also holds paintings and sketches of artists like S.L.Parasher, Satish Gujral, Arpana Caur and Krishen Khanna. All of these artists have lived through the Partition and put their experience into canvas. It is important to note here that the museum engages the visitor/viewer through various stages. The visitor who is completely uninitiated about the entire event will become aware of the context of the official history of the Partition. The second layer of engagement happens with the uncovering of the erstwhile silenced voices. This enables the viewer to take the alternative narratives within the ambit of focus. This stage is reached at the primary level through the artefacts and objects archived there. But the Museum also has several stations where the visitor can listen to interviews and testimonies of Partition survivors. This secondary level of engagement enables the viewer to form a sense of allegiance towards the survivors. The art installations act on the visitors as an enabler of their prosthetic memories about the event. Knowledge of the individual narratives makes the creation of prosthetic memories easier for the viewer. This process will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Amidst all these presences one absence/silence must also be talked about. The Museum does not look to engage in a narrative of putting the blame on one side or the other. This is probably the most essential part of creating a Partition Memorial Museum.

⁶⁵ www.partitionmuseum.org

Ramachandra Guha's scepticism about the creation of such museums is countered by the Amritsar Museum by not indulging in the formation of this discourse altogether. This method is probably followed because of the fact that the Partition Museum is created in sync with the ideology of the Partition survivors. The survivors acknowledge the troubled past. But almost all of them talk about the future and the importance of looking forward. The Amritsar Partition Museum in a way can act as a 'forward looking' institution.

This looking forward in essence brings with it the formation of prosthetic memories. While the objects, artefacts and installations in the museum talk about the silences inherent within the Partition experience, it is important to ensure that there are no more silences in the dissemination of the prosthetic memories that are enabled through this process. I would like to focus briefly on the work done by the likes of Jake Barton in this regard. Jake Barton is a visual designer who has worked extensively in creating visitor experience interfaces within museums. He has worked with museums like Cooper-Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, National September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York, ARoS Art Museum in Denmark among others. He states in one of his interviews⁶⁶ that the biggest challenge in creating a memorial museum on September 11 was to make the visitor engage with an event of trauma that has been as recent as a decade back. His interfaces allow the visitor to create one's own tour guide and also to record one's response at the end of it. This is just one of the several interfaces. But I would like to focus on the possibilities this process brings forward in recording the prosthetic memories.

⁶⁶ Shaunacy Ferro. "How Jake Barton Creates Museum Magic". *Magentia* web portal. Sep 11 2017.

The material objects of Partition bring a sense of tangibility to the observer. A fourth generation Partition survivor is completely alienated from the immediate context of the events. The silence of trauma narratives in the first 50 years following the Partition has made these experiences something outside the public narrative. But the process of healing for the survivors must begin with the acknowledgement of these narratives. What follows from this sense of acknowledgement is the sense of integration. This integration will surely give rise to new narratives about the entire experience from the observer's perspective. The Amritsar Museum thrives towards acting as a site for the dissemination as well as integration of these narratives within the future generation. But it must, at the same time, act as a site of recording these responses as well. While the creation and dissemination of prosthetic memories is extremely important, it must also be focused on that these memories are not lost and are recorded for posterity.

CHAPTER IV: NARRATIVES OF MATERIAL MEMORY

In this part of the thesis, I will focus on the website/text entitled *Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory* by Aanchal Malhotra. Aanchal Malhotra sought to understand the event of Partition through a collection of everyday objects that have acquired a certain cultural and historical importance due to their connection to the Partition and the mass displacement/migration following the event. The Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 gave rise to the largest mass migration in the history of mankind. The effects of the event still persist within the imagination of the residents of South Asia through direct or indirect association with it. As a direct by-product of the Partition, the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war happened as a result of which millions once again had to migrate from Bangladesh to India and the other way round.

A few generations have already grown up in the last 70 years without any direct involvement with the event of the Partition. But the memory of the event persists and is acquiring newer dimensions with each passing day. Malhotra states at the outset in the website as well as in the introduction of the book that she had nothing to do with the Partition until she came across her grandmother reminiscing the event while looking at a coin collection. A collection of coins, mundane and insignificant at the outset, has acquired an importance for her grandmother only due to its association with the time of the Partition. It is important to examine what this memory is connected to.

We have inherited the responses to the other side of the border through the ways they have been portrayed to us by our elders. My grandparents from both the maternal and the

paternal side migrated to India from Bangladesh. But this was not during the 1971 war. It was during the Partition of 1947. Coming from a personal experience, the image of 'desh' has come down to me through their eyes. In my childhood I would imagine our 'desh' to be place filled with laughter and joy where we had huge houses and paddy fields to ourselves only for everything to be taken away by the Partition. But they would often refrain from talking about the actual migration and the way the entire process unfolded. It is interesting to note in Malhotra's projects that these objects that the survivors hold so dear to themselves enable them to talk about this process. The fact that the objects survived with them attributes almost a similar status to the objects as to themselves. These objects almost become their alter-egos. This in turn enables them to narrate the story of how the object was brought to its present place. The journey of the object acts as a testimony to the journey of the individual. The initial response to the fall of the British Empire and the creation of the Radcliffe line was one of disbelief and denial states Malhotra.

Haimanti Roy in her essay, "A Partition of Contingency: Public Discourse in Bengal 1946-47" points out that the public response varied vastly during the Partition. But the overarching belief in the general public till the actual event happened was that this could never have happened. Roy's essay provides a counter-narrative to the narrative that the Partition was a culmination point of a long standing divide between the Hindu and the Muslim community and that the Partition was inevitable due to this reason. Citing examples from many of the public debates in the two years leading to the Partition and many letters written to the editors of many leading newspapers, Roy states that the Partition was contingent on many discourses and that the creation of the Radcliff Line along with its implementation was a haphazard decision to say the least. From the perspective of the official narrative this narrative is an

aberrant one. But in Malhotra's intervention, we see that the individual responses and the oral narratives related to the partition in fact support this view. The 1947 Partition Archive is a huge repertoire of many such oral narratives. Even though it is not within the scope of this thesis to focus on these narratives and this archive, it is important to acknowledge that the process of creation of such an archive has contributed to the works like that of Aanchal Malhotra's.

Coming back to the project of Malhotra, she states in the introduction of her book how memory is essentially malleable in nature. It must be kept in mind that when a person remembers a past, the event is in parts reconstructed within the mind of the person remembering. Our mind is not a mnemonic device that can store and remember everything in ditto for them to be retraced in the future. This understanding has contributed largely to the process of viewing memory as an inauthentic history. But these are personal histories. And often personal histories tell the real story much more than the official one. However, it is not the purpose of this thesis to argue for the authenticity/ inauthenticity of history/memory. The aim of this chapter is to discuss memories connected with an event of recent history and the images connected with them. The Mnemosyne project, in this respect acts as a counterpoint to Malhotra's archive.

This brings us to the understanding of the nature of Malhotra's archive and the objects she chooses. Each chapter of her book is named after a certain object that belongs to a certain Partition survivor. These are everyday objects that attain significance only due to their relation to the event specific to the person who has retained them. For a prosthetic memory of these objects to be evoked in the viewer, the viewer has to understand the historical importance connected to them. Malhotra tries to bridge the gap of the intangibility of the event to a

generation who has not directly experienced the event through these objects. She states in the introduction of her book that these objects are tangible and they in turn make the intangible tangible. They also in turn evoke a sense of belonging for the viewer. She also talks about the nature of this sort of memory. She differentiates between the notions of collective, generational and inherited memory. Collective memory is often shaped by the official narratives. Generational memory on the other hand is often specific to a particular family or household and is oral in nature. Inherited memory is seen by her in similar light. She connects the notion of images with the aspect of inherited memory in her work's context. The images form generational and inherited memory in the particular context. The aim of her work is to make them accessible to the collective consciousness enabling a plethora of subsequent secondary and prosthetic memories. She has combined images with words in her work to make these memories accessible.

In the first chapter of Malhotra's book entitled 'A Ghara for My Father and a Gaz for My Mother: The Heirlooms of Y.P.Viz', she talks about her visit to the house of her maternal grandparents in Old Delhi. While the entire house reeks of childhood memories of the author, this experience as narrated by her acquires a special significance in the way this thesis is trying to understand the role of material objects with relation to history and memory. Malhotra states that out of the old objects brought out for them, 'two items had been kept away from the pile'⁶⁷. Her uncle later states that this house is an old one and it is full of old objects. But the Ghara, a round-bottomed vessel and the Gaz, a long, thin metal-stick acquired this significance because they have stayed with the family from the pre-partition times. We clearly see in the course of the interaction that the family has divided the timeline of their personal

⁶⁷ Malhotra. *Remnants*. P.41.

history as pre-Partition and post-Partition. The idea of us being essentially ‘citizens of partition’⁶⁸ becomes manifest here in a very prominent manner.

Gautam Ghosh, in his introduction to a journal volume on partition entitled “Introduction: Citizens of Partition” says, “Indeed, many of those affected come to feel that they live more as citizens of partition than as members of a nation.” Ghosh relates the extremely convergent ideas of Partition and nationalism. It is important to analyze the Partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947 from this standpoint mainly due to the religious undertone of this Partition. The idea of nationhood as being homologous with the idea of religion was accepted by the flag-bearers of Partition. It also most certainly became embedded within the consciousness of many. But an objective distance from the event has enabled the survivors to talk about the events in a more detached manner. This has in turn enabled us to gain critical insights about the nature and driving forces behind this event. At one point in the opening chapter, Malhotra’s uncle states how he feels amazed about the fact that he could talk so freely about things that have been unspoken in the household for decades. This organically leads us onto a discussion of how memories of trauma can be dealt with either through recollection or through forgetfulness. We have already discussed about this in detail in the previous chapters.

But to return to the narrative, the Ghara was used by Malhotra’s great-grandmother to churn lassi. Malhotra states, “ Just the sheer thought made me smile- an object of such

⁶⁸Gautam Ghosh. Introduction to Citizens of Partition. *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*. Vol. 42. No. 1. PARTITION, UNIFICATION, NATION: Imagined Moral Communities in Modernity. P 3-15.

banality laid claim to a historic past, travelling through generations and still in use today.”⁶⁹ She has visited this house innumerable times from her childhood and has had lassi several times as well. But the association of the Ghara with the traumatic past of the Partition makes her take notice on two layers. She makes a close inspection of the Ghara while becoming enthralled and amused by its significance all the while. But on the secondary plane she becomes aware of how the Partition cannot be viewed as being just like any other historical event as she has done for most of her life. She states-

*“So far they had just been images—of an event far removed from me, both by time and purview. But as my granduncle spoke about the Great Divide as something they had seen, witnessed, survived, it made my skin crawl. This monumental exodus that I had viewed purely academically became a living, breathing entity that had affected the people I knew”.*⁷⁰

The object not only enthral her towards its significance as the object it is but it also makes her view the event with which the object is related to in a new light. This is where the idea of prosthetic memory⁷¹ becomes associated with objects of historical importance.

Alison Landsberg talks about the idea of prosthetic memory in three specific historical instances—the immigration of Euro-Americans in 1910s and 1920s, the Afro-American immigration post the abolition of slavery and the Holocaust. Landsberg contends that memories of these events needed alternative ways of transmission as in many cases the sufferers and survivors are absent altogether. She acknowledges the role of mass culture and technology on the one hand and museums on the other hand. The memory of the Holocaust is

⁶⁹ Malhotra. *Remnants*. P.42.

⁷⁰ Ibid. P. 43.

⁷¹ Landsberg. *Prosthetic Memory*.

not only the memory of the Jews but it is embedded within the collective memory of the entire world through mass cultures and museums. We have already seen the institutional response to the Partition in the immediate aftermath of the Partition and the process of giving voice to the alternative historiography through the creation of the Amritsar Partition Museum almost 70 years after the Partition. At the end of the discussion on the Amritsar museum I tried to touch on the way there is a dearth of endeavour about archiving the prosthetic memories invigorated as a result of this process of giving voice to a marginalised history. We will see in through our discussion of this chapter how a project like that of Malhotra's tries to address this gap. Malhotra's project does that in a twofold manner. It firstly archives the narrative of the observer/viewer. On the secondary level, it places the memories of both the survivor and the listener/observer of that narrative side by side thereby creating the space for multitudinous responses within future observers/ listeners of similar narratives.

The number of survivors who have lived to tell the tale is not very small. But the response of Malhotra's granduncles symbolise the way individual narratives have not yet come into the public eye. It can be argued that there has been a lack of initiative from the part of the state or other stakeholders to undertake such projects. But it can also be argued that objective recollection of such an event and the atrocities related to it becomes somewhat impossible for the survivors unless a substantial amount of time has elapsed after the incident. In this case we can see how these two objects become the medium for the release of the tension. They become the carriers of individual memory that provokes the prosthetic memory of the observer. Malhotra further observes,

“What I had just witnessed was the physicality- texture, scent, surface- of an object serving as a catalyst to preserve and invoke the memory of a person, a time, an event that was regarded as the most catastrophic in the contemporary history of the Indian subcontinent.”⁷²

This encounter shakes Malhotra to the core. Her response to it is to return to the same house after a few weeks. This time, to talk about how the family survived and dealt with the Partition. She states that everything in the same house suddenly started looking new to her. Reading the description of her granduncles about the struggles of a Punjabi family in Delhi in the initial years which was becoming increasingly hostile towards Sikhs, we realise the centrality of the house and its objects in this story that is essentially that of survival. While this house becomes a marker of the days of struggle during and post- Partition, the Ghara and the Gaz have become symbols of lost time. They signify the memories of the pre-Partition times not only for the owner of those objects but also for the entire family.

Malhotra’s uncle exclaims at one point, “We are not forgetting! The children are!” but we see that the granddaughter of the family takes an active interest in understanding the history and the memories related to it. It is essentially made possible by the stories surrounding those two objects. As a social event, the Partition is removed from the present generation by almost six to seven decades. The presence of an object that has memories associated with that past adds a sense of tangibility and makes it relatable to the observer.

The experience in the first chapter has a relation to Malhotra’s family history which provides her with a familial context to relate to the events lived through by her ancestors. The objects as well as the memories connected to them provide Malhotra with a sense of her own

⁷² Malhotra. *Remnants*. P.44.

roots. Malhotra similarly focuses on narratives connected to her family in the third and fourth chapters of this text. In the third chapter entitled ‘Utensils of Survival: The Kitchenware of Balraj Bahri’, Malhotra narrates her interactions with her paternal grandfather and the story of survival of his family during the unsettling times of the Partition. Similar to the first chapter, the narrative starts in medias res. This is symptomatic of many of the narratives of survivors. An event of trauma essentially makes the narration of it congested within the minds of the survivor. This has to be related with the process of remembrance and forgetting. The survivor, in her/his struggle for survival has to look forward towards the future without dwelling too much into the past. While we always have a linear narrative relating to the ‘official history’, the personal narrative is often found devoid of any sense of linearity. This mostly happens due to the want of negotiating with these memories by trying to forgetting them. But it is evident in many of the accounts here as well as elsewhere, the process of remembering is central to the process of reconciliation to this traumatic past. It also however becomes clear in these narratives that a significant time lapse is essential before one can go back towards recapitulating this past. The objects mentioned in these interviews merely become the tools for the survivors towards taking their narratives forward.

The utensils referred to in this chapter were in her grandfather’s words, “only things that she brought, actually.”⁷³ These were brought by Malhotra’s great-grandmother in order to ensure survival. While talking about the centrality of these utensils, her grandfather states- “Survival- that was her basic concern. To live, to survive, and for that we needed food.”⁷⁴ The utensils become a symbol for survival for the family in their tenuous journey. But these

⁷³ Ibid. P. 76.

⁷⁴ Ibid. P. 76.

utensils also enable an entry point for the survivor to these times of trauma. This narrative embarks on an almost circular trajectory. From the comfort and security of the family's erstwhile home in Pakistan they come to face the intense battle for survival in post-partition India. The narrative serves a cathartic purpose for the narrator. Malhotra states:

*“And once he started to remember, it was difficult to stop. It was almost cathartic, for the more he divulged, the less control the past held over him. The pain, displacement, anger and penury were replaced by all that he learnt as a result: hard work, diligence, modesty and simplicity.”*⁷⁵

It is important to note that the narrator is able to extract the positives out of these experiences only in retrospect. Apart from all these positive attributes that this struggle had imbibed within them, Malhotra is also amused to know that her grandparents fell in love in one of the refugee colonies of Delhi. She is amused at the prospect that such unlikely emotions can be felt by people living through such extreme times. But her grandfather stresses on the fact that these times seem extreme only while recapitulating the past. That was mostly because of the fact that it was very difficult to make sense of anything that was happening around them in those times. Most of the decisions were impulsive as calculated moves were impossible to embark on in these times. While the objects in focus in this interview are not directly related to all the experiences Malhotra's grandfather narrates, they most definitely provide an entry-point to the process of remembering.

The fourth interview also has a personal connection when it comes to Malhotra. This chapter entitled ‘Stones from My Soil: The Maang-Tikka of Bhag Malhotra’ narrates the

⁷⁵ Ibid. P. 85.

experience of Malhotra's grandmother and her family. This experience brings to us an experience from the female perspective by narrating the struggles of a single mother to ensure the safety of her children during the Partition and their struggle for a better future after it. This chapter has references to two objects. First is the pocket knife that her grandmother used to keep with her as a young woman in the 1940s. She tells the story of how the most important thing for a woman was seen to be as being able to protect her honour. She was to strike anyone in a situation of threat. But she was to use it on herself if that was not possible. About the present use of that very knife, she states, "When I go for the morning walks, I take it with me so I can cut off the stems and leaves from the aloe vera tree."⁷⁶ Malhotra at first frowns at the 'fall of grace' of this knife but after some consideration she realizes that the knife has stayed with her grandmother as a symbol of protection. She probably feels safe through the act of putting the knife in her handbag each morning before going out.

About the Maang-Tikka, Malhotra says, "This was an object that had survived the transitions of time, circumstances and geography. It brought them closer somehow, mother and daughter, and a part of my great-grandmother remained in it."⁷⁷ The Maang-Tikka was actually the only remaining mark that Malhotra's grandmother possessed of Malhotra's great-grandmother. This ornament could be carried while migrating for it firstly being small in size and more importantly for its worth. Malhotra's grandmother narrates how her mother would often talk about selling the Maang-Tikka when faced with desperate need of money. But she knew in her mind that she would never be able to bring herself to do that. The battle for survival also takes a symbolic nature in the presence of this object. The struggle is directed not

⁷⁶ Ibid. P. 101.

⁷⁷ Ibid. P. 108.

only at making ends meet but also to ensure that the Maang-Tikka does not have to be sold. It is also fascinating to note Malhotra's expression after knowing the history behind the Maang-Tikka. She states that she had seen the ornament. But it never fascinated her or made her want to wear it. But now that she knows the history behind it, she feels extremely nervous even holding it. Her grandmother goes on to confess after placing the Maang-Tikka on her forehead that this was only the second time she was wearing it. The association of the object with those turbulent times enabled it to acquire a sacrosanct place in the eyes of the possessor. It is her only connection to the struggles of the past in general and her mother in particular. Interestingly, it also has the same effect on Malhotra after knowing the narrative associated with it.

Apart from collecting these narratives of personal association, Malhotra narrates her experiences of collecting narratives that do not stem from her own family (which is greater in number). The chapter entitled 'The Pearls of Azra Haq' showcases one such example. In this chapter Malhotra visits Azra Haq in Lahore who had migrated there from Ludhiana in 1947. She talks about the pearls that she received from the Maharaja of Bikaner when she was very young. She narrates further:

“The set of jewellery is what I brought with me when we left during the Partition. That's why I hold it so close, that's why it's so valuable to me. It survived migration. When we were leaving, it was so difficult to decide what to take and how to take it. You just picked up what you could afford to, and this was small enough to slip into the folds of clothes. It has survived

and, with it so many memories of the maharaja and the decadent parties and luxurious lifestyle... ”⁷⁸

A literal analysis of this proclamation by Azra Haq makes it clear that the pearls acquire the importance because of the fact that it ‘survived’ the migration. Like many other objects in this book, this object also becomes a fellow journeyman for the survivors. It stands as something that could be accommodated within the small luggage that the family brought with them. It also in a way stands for everything else that the family could not bring with them. Its association with the royalty must have been a reason behind it getting selected as one important object that the family will carry with them. But more than seventy years after the Partition, what becomes more important is the fact that it survived along with the family.

Malhotra has put across 18 narratives in total in her book. It is not within the scope of this thesis to go into a detailed paraphrasing of all the narratives. Keeping the above discussion in mind I will try to focus on how this becomes a process of archiving partition narratives and evoking prosthetic memories. I will try to do that in the remaining part of this chapter while drawing references to certain other narratives archived by Malhotra in her book as and when necessary.

Krishna Sobti talks about the importance of intermixing memories of an event of trauma with historical facts in order to deal with these experiences.⁷⁹ She says this mostly in the context of literary texts. Sobti, in this interview to Alok Bhalla states that it was important for the first generation writers after the Partition to restore human values after so much

⁷⁸ Ibid. P. 59.

⁷⁹ Alok Bhalla ed. “Memory and History: In Conversation with Krishna Sobti.” In *Partition Dialogues: Memories of Lost Home*. New Delhi: OUP 2006. P.135.

‘hatred, violence and killing’.⁸⁰ She goes on to focus on how tradition, music, art and literature are not similar to geographical areas and cannot be bound by any borders. While it is true that these voices by writers and artists are important markers for us to get a sense of one of the ways in which the trauma could be dealt with in the initial phase, it is also important to recognise the fact that literary or artistic representation is essentially a limited one. A concurrent question always remains—what about those who could not take a fictional, artistic or even political refuge to deal with this trauma?

In the process of finding answers to these questions, a glaring silence is posited in front of us. This silence can be directly attributed to the fact that there have been no concerted efforts of collecting the micro-histories of the Partition in the first fifty years after the Partition. As has been focused on already, the initial phase of silence was a very important part of dealing with this trauma. But as we see in these narratives of Malhotra, remembrance becomes central to the process of healing for the survivors. The survivors essentially find a voice to their trauma only after a certain amount of time has elapsed. If the immediate fictional response of preserving human values on the face of violence and trauma was important, then the present focus on reclaiming the past through the process of remembrance becomes equally important for these survivors.

In accepting the centrality of the process of remembrance, one must subsequently look at the process of remembrance itself. It is here that Aanchal Malhotra’s book makes a critical intervention. Dipesh Chakrabarty distinguishes between two aspects of memory in his

⁸⁰ Ibid. P. 135.

understanding of the way memory of traumatic events work.⁸¹ He says that there is the sentiment of nostalgia on the one hand and there is this sense of trauma on the other. This contradictory relationship for Chakrabarty is central to the way our past is recalled. In the narratives of Malhotra, we see that the objects lead the survivors towards narrating incidents pertaining to both these sorts of memories. The utensils of Balraj Bahri evoke the memory of how this object became the most important necessity for them to simply have food. While these utensils evoke this traumatic memory, they also serve as a marker of the struggle for existence and are hence still used by the family. The *Ghara* of Y.P.Vij is similarly still used for churning lassi by the family.

It has already been noted that in the immediate aftermath of the 1947 Partition, the trauma associated with it was in a way relegated to the realm of the unspeakable. There have been debates about whether this relegation was justified or not. Abdul Kafi, in his essay⁸² goes into a discussion about the ethical norms that this silence has been subjected to. He takes the stance that to subject this ‘silence’ to the mere ethical norms of whether one should have reacted in this way or not is to completely ignore the sense of trauma associated with this event. One needs to remember that no response about the Partition can necessarily be organic in nature as is the case about any event of trauma. In case of the Partition, there definitely was a collective sense of trauma.

⁸¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty. “Remembered Villages: Representations of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition”. *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000). P.319.

⁸² Abdul Kafi. “Noishhobder Gronthi Ebong Deshbhager Sahitya: Shottar Ononto Bibhajan” (Knots of Silence: Infinite Ruptures in Identity/Subjectivity)(trans.own). *Ujagar*. Vol.13 1 & 2. (Kolkata: 2016). P.25.

The objects in a way enable the survivors to go back to the narratives as has already been discussed. I will try to focus on the sorts of silences that find voice through this process of recapitulation. I will not deviate much from the way Malhotra herself sees the project. In her introduction she categorically discusses the ways these narratives enable us to grasp this traumatic past.

These narratives in many ways help us to understand the ‘other’ side of the border- ‘sarhad ke uss par’- as Malhotra puts it. As has been discussed already, the idea of the life on the other side pre-Partition has often come down to us as being an idyllic one (there are accounts of the brutality faced by marginalised communities as well. The example of Bhag Malhotra’s narrative can be taken as an example where as a woman her mother had to face a systematic social oppression even before the Partition). But we see many of the survivors acknowledging the fact that migration has in a way opened the world to the survivors. Malhotra’s grandmother states at a point in her recollection that life could never have been the way it is at the present had the migration never happened. This is not to say that this migration was sought for in any way. But I stress on this point to put forward the fact that such narratives enable us to understand and acknowledge the fact that survival narratives can be and must be viewed in accordance with the multiplicity of responses that the experience in essence brought with it. Moreover, this grasping of the other side also happens in its present context. That is to say, the way one views the other side essentially undergoes a perspective change for the one listening to or engaging with these narratives.

It is important to refer once again to the editorial by Ramchandra Guha for *The Telegraph* on the feasibility of a Partition museum⁸³ where he states that a national museum on the Partition is essentially a defeated proposition at the ideological level because it will essentially reinforce the fissures between the two sets of narratives that exist on both sides of the border. However, a very pertinent counterpoint to Guha's argument can be found in the way Malhotra describes her experience. Malhotra states that she felt no sense of unfamiliarity or homesickness in the course of her stay in Lahore for the research. This has a lot to do with the fact that the narratives have made Malhotra aware of the shared history of these two cities. The fact that a person residing in Lahore has a set of jewellery from the time of the Partition just like her grandmother and the fact that both of them think about their own silences clinging on to these objects makes Malhotra feel a sense of familiarity.

Another purpose that these objects serve for the survivors is to maintain a sense of association with this traumatic past. In the process of trying to forget the trauma by ignoring it and not recapitulating it, one often runs the risk of making oneself understand and acknowledge that the official or the state narrative is one's own narrative. While many of the incidents faced by these people do subscribe to the many clichés (which are absolutely true) associated with the Partition—like the communal riots and killings, the over-crowded trains, the discrimination faced in the new surroundings, the refugee colonies—we realise that each account is a separate narrative with their own set of struggles. The objects evoke the memories of these individualized parts of their own stories. History is often customized to create a collective memory. The Partition, one must remember, coincides with the independence of

⁸³ Ramachandra Guha. "Memorializing Partition- The best memorial is one that reconciles, not disrupts." *The Telegraph*. 2013

two countries as well. It is thus no surprise that the official narrative following the events of 1947 has mostly been underlined by a sense of optimism for a new and free future. We have already discussed that in detail in the previous chapter.

While the struggles of daily life made it essential that survivors looked forward to the future, the presence of these objects ensured that these very survivors would look back to the silences of the past. It is also important to note that it was not possible for the survivors to realise that these objects would acquire such importance in future for themselves. Many survivors in Malhotra's book states that they were not sure of the finality of this divide. Most of them thought that they would return to their land once everything is sorted. Sumohini Bhagat in Malhotra's book says:

“despite the fact that my father was one of the advisors to the Punjab Boundary Commission, he didn't actually believe that Partition would happen. In that, there is something to be said about unwavering belief. We refused to believe that such a vivisection would- could- ever occur. I think about it now and I am still astonished. Just weeks before independence, I remember my father constantly writing letters, being engaged in meetings, long phone calls and closed-door conversations with Lord Mountbatten, Pandit Nehru and all the others, and yet we left in haste, completely unprepared and unwilling... we should have realised it sooner, at least my father should have, that there was no coming back... Lahore was now lost forever.”

Just like Bhagat's father, many of the people in power did not realise the full implications of the Partition while the decision was being taken. Quite understandably, people far removed from the centres of power realised even less. But the objects serve as a

memorabilia of these times for the survivors. It is also important to note that these are not always material objects in strict sense of the term. The poems of Prabhjot Kaur literally enable her to transcend this time and place. After she fails to respond to both Malhotra and her daughter's request to read out the poems from her handbook, her daughter says, "She cannot hear us. You see, she is here, but she is not. She hasn't read these in a while..."⁸⁴

"*Love in the Time of Nationalism: The Poems of Prabhjot Kaur*" is the 12th chapter in Malhotra's book. The object focused on in this chapter is essentially different from many other objects talked about in these projects because they are poems that are not associated with an essence of tangibility like many other objects. But the poems remind Prabhjot Kaur about her courtship with Major Narendrapal Singh who travelled from Syria to Lahore. Malhotra and her granddaughter are taken by immense surprise that such times could breed a love story of this nature. Kaur reads out these autobiographical conversation poems between Bir Singh and Rohini. The poems are in Punjabi. They talk about the indecipherable distances between two lovers. While they stand inches apart from each other, their thoughts are driven by the sea of uncertainties that cloud the possibility of a future together. The lovers decided to be together. But they also decided only to marry in independent India. So they decided to wait and limit themselves to only writing letters until then. These letters and the poems helped her look forward in optimism in those times of turmoil.

All of these people that Malhotra interviews, talk about the way the declaration of the Partition came to them as a sudden blow. Prabhjot Kaur also states this. Malhotra also focuses on the importance of the Radcliffe line in the scheme of things. She underlines the fact that for each object that crossed the line with the migrants there were thousand others that could not.

⁸⁴ Malhotra. *Remnants*. P. 244.

The objects that crossed the line have a certain sort of memory attached to them. But the objects that were left behind were often lamented for. This creates a contested space of memory. Malhotra has tried to explore these contested objects and the contested memories connected to them. While the surviving objects evoke the trauma of these times, they also evoke nostalgia for the things left behind. Malhotra also briefly focuses on the trauma of the makers of this line. It is well documented how Radcliffe refused to take any fee for his work two days after 15th August. He was repulsed by the horrifying consequences of his duty.

In her quest to make sense of the objects that she comes across in the process of the research, Malhotra posits the questions that she grappled with:

“How did one approach it? Was it a prized possession or something too mundane to be considered of value? Was it allowed the luxury of touch and feel and smell, the sensual caress of fingers and skin, or was it to remain elusive in its tactility, situated behind glass, stored safely at the back of a closet? Moreover, what did these objects convey to its owner? Was its importance immediately recognised, did it demand an audience, was the story of its serendipitous survival known and celebrated or abandoned and forgotten? Could it be used as a guide for recollection, a propagator of the past?”⁸⁵

The answer to her last question can be given in the affirmative without much speculation. But most of the other questions she posits demand for these objects to be brought and tested in the public eye. For that Malhotra stresses on the importance of archiving these objects. Malhotra’s method of archiving makes the narrative connected with the object a part of the archive. The reason behind taking this strategy becomes clear to us when we see how

⁸⁵ Malhotra. *Remnants*. P.17.

Malhotra expands her horizon by including narratives of absolute strangers within the scope of her project. The narratives that have familial connections serve an already present backdrop for her. But the objects possessed by strangers become significant only in their association with the stories connected to them.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

It is not the aim of this thesis to put forward a concrete answer to the questions raised at the beginning. Rather the aim of the thesis was to comprehend the root of these questions and trying to find possible ways of making these questions relevant for the contemporary as well as the future listener/observer/ viewer of objects/ narratives connected to the Indian Partition. But it can be definitively suggested from the various narratives and archives analysed in this thesis that the focus on creation and dissemination of prosthetic memories about the Partition is dependent mostly on the individual memories as opposed to collective histories. These individual memories in turn acquire significance in the minds of the observer through their associations with certain markers like objects, photographs, testimonials etc.

This thesis projects that the Partition's afterlife so far has been mostly devoid of any focus on the notion of 'material memory'. Through a focus on various narratives, objects, art installations and other artefacts archived in museums and archives, this thesis has sought to understand how the association of the material makes the event of Partition a tangible one for observers who have no direct experience of the horrors and the sense of trauma associated with the event. In many of the interviews, the interviewees rue the fact that the next generation does not care or know about the struggles of the survivors. While it is true that every individual should be aware of this history, it is also true that concerted efforts are required for this to happen in a large scale. Archives, museums and exhibitions can act as a contact point for the future generation to engage with all types of narratives relating to the Partition.

Moreover, archiving these narratives alongside the ‘official’ narratives will subsequently create a space for dialogue between these two types of discourses. I have tried to focus on the ways in which these dialogues are already taking shape with the contemporary boom in memory studies especially relating to material memories. The ‘postmemory’ of the artefacts has the possibility of taking the focus away from this dialogue. But the prosthetic memories created through the mediated narratives hold the possibility of producing newer types of responses. In my thesis, I have also tried to engage with the possible ways and the importance of archiving these newer responses for posterity.

I hope to have made an interjection in the contemporary discourses relating to these issues through the questions I have dealt with in my thesis. Far from being an end in itself, I have tried to acknowledge how memorialising the Indian Partition ‘from below’ has just started and is in need of an influx of more and more conversations relating to the same. The history of collecting, archiving and nurturing collective memory is taking a new shape with the advent of digital technology. The challenges of nurturing the alternative history of the Partition gets multiplied manifold due to the fact that the process has started off late.

Along with dealing with the issues regarding archiving these narratives, the institutions must also incorporate newer technological advances within their system in order to make the viewer/observer interface more engaging. This thesis has tried to contribute to and hopefully give rise to newer discussions relating to the same.

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