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Masters Thesis

Echoes of the Partition of India in 1947

An Analysis of Fictional Narratives and Oral Histories



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Abstract

This study examines fictional narratives and oral testimonies to provide a multifaceted comprehension of the 1947 Partition of India. Focusing on Saadat Hasan Manto's selected short stories alongside oral testimonies from Anam Zakaria's *The Footprints of Partition*, the thesis investigates how fictional and factual narratives contest state endorsed accounts of the Partition thus bringing forth a holistic comprehension of what unfolded. This thesis explores how personal and collective narratives are transmitted as well as constructed while drawing various concepts from memory studies, Partition literature and oral testimonies. Through analysing Manto's literary portrayals alongside oral testimonies, the thesis focuses on the inherently polyphonic and fragmented nature of Partition narratives, as well as on how these voices counter monolithic state narratives and in turn preserve marginalized narratives. This approach highlights the significance of narrative plurality in comprehending the continuing impact of Partition.

Key words

fictional narratives, oral testimonies, memory studies, Partition of India in 1947, Manto's selected short stories, Zakaria's *The Footprints of Partition*

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction	1
2 Theoretical Framework.....	8
2.1 Memory studies.....	8
2.1.1 Collective memory and collected memory.....	8
2.1.2 Counter memory.....	9
2.1.3 Post memory.....	9
2.2 Hayden White's Emplotment	10
2.2.1 Narratives modes (Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, Satire.....	10
2.2.2 Anti-Emplotment and Narrative Resistance.....	11
2.3 Partition Literature	11
2.3.1 Partition as literary paradigm	11
2.3.2 Fictive Testimony.....	12
2.3.3 Dialogism and Polyphony.....	13
2.3.4 Polyphony, Archive and Memory.....	15
2.4 Oral testimonies.....	16
2.4.1 Oral History and Counter Archive.....	16
2.4.2 Methodological Turn.....	16
2.4.3 Ethics, Power and Co-Construction.....	16
2.4.4 Interstitial Spaces and Slow Memory.....	17
2.4.5 Polyphonic memory	18
2.4.5 Lieux de Memoire.....	19
2.4.6 Trauma.....	19
2.5. Conclusion.....	20
3 Case study one: Manto's selected short stories.....	22



4 Case study two: Zakria's selected oral histories	37
5 Conclusion.....	50
6 References.....	54



1 Introduction

When Saadat Hasan Manto's 100th birthday was commemorated in 2012, a weekly edition called 'Books and Author' was published by a newspaper in Pakistan called *Dawn*, containing reviews of Manto's short stories and write-ups about his legacy. This commemoration provided a window not only into Manto's short stories, but rather to revisit the Partition of India in 1947 from a completely new perspective. These fictional testimonies penned by Manto were an eye-opening perspective on an event that has been described by Butalia as "one of the great human convulsions of history" (2000, p 3), prompting an unconventional response to the state histories of Partition which centred on the ideological context and pushed aside the human side of history. The Partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947 signifies a "turning point" within South Asian history (Khatri and Singhvi, 2024, p 65). The establishment of Pakistan and India led to the "greatest forced migration" (Talbot, 2008, p 420) ever witnessed in history. The exact number of deaths can never be ascertained; however, it is estimated that more than "18 million people were displaced and more than 2 million were killed" (Talbot, 2008, p 420). Hence, the Partition of 1947 has been termed a watershed moment as it altered the very tapestry of the subcontinent.

The literary and historical scholarship related to the Partition of India has enabled us to comprehend the intricacies and relationships among cultural processes, historical trauma and collective memory which are "inextricably entangled" (Khatri and Singhvi, 2024, p 65). Moreover, this scholarship has altered the cultural memory of Partition significantly, now seen not only as a "high politics transfer of power" (Lambert, 2017, p 1). Despite extensive scholarship on Partition, the predominance of Indian-centric narratives highlights a gap in exploring Muslim voices and cross-border comparative analysis. However, as Butalia (1998) and Virdee (2009) argue, representation remains predominantly Indian-centric, necessitating further exploration of diverse voices, particularly those from Pakistan (p 1). The Partition of 1947 did not only constitute communal violence and massive displacement but also left a profound impact on the literature of the region. Partition literature operates as a "literary paradigm" (p 10) a wider conceptual framework that classifies genres, certain shared narrative forms, and political imaginaries across different geographies and histories (Bernard, 2010). Partition literature remains significant in comprehending the complexities of migration, identity, and communalism. (Talbot,



1995). Writers across generations, languages and genres have portrayed human suffering, identity crises and loss caused by this Partition. These works are a testament to shared history and humanity that often gets overshadowed by political and religious divides. The democratic nature of storytelling allows the narrator not to impose meanings on the characters but to express autonomous perspectives. Partition literature consists of disjointed, even contradictory narratives without smoothing them into one coherent story. Contradictions are not flaws, but evidence of polyphony, of memory resisting linearity and closure.

Partition narratives, both fictional and oral, are inherently dialogic. Similarly, oral histories are not monologic recollections, but rather fragmented and multi-voiced engagements encompassing trauma, nostalgia, and political critique. Oral history can be seen as a form of counter-story-telling, drawing on from Solorzano and Yosso “a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told (i.e., those on the margins of society)” (Action, 2013, p. 113). Counter-stories or narratives involve the collection and preservation of personal narratives that either supplement or challenge dominant historical records. Oral testimonies, unlike state-sanctioned histories represent the voices of the marginalized and forgotten.

Saadat Hasan Manto’s earned him the reputation of being one of the most significant literary voices from South Asia due to the courageous stories he penned depicting themes of violence, displacement, and fractured identities during the Partition of India in 1947. His works encompass 250 short stories, several radio plays and essays (Isphani, 1988). He faced charges of obscenity owing to his candid depiction of the society around him. By employing the medium of storytelling, Manto tried to illustrate the inherent absurdities of borders as well as the psychological, cultural and social trauma faced at the onset of Partition. “Clearly, in Manto's stories the statistics of mass migrations, dislocations and refugees take on very concrete human meaning” (Flemming, 1988, p 107). This study will use his stories translated and compiled by Khalid Hasan (2001) in *Saadat Hasan Manto: Selected Short Stories*. These narratives address the themes of communal and gendered trauma. Manto’s legacy is embedded in not only literary contributions but also in his fearless depiction of what transpired during the Partition of India in 1947 (Alter, 1994).



In oral testimonies of Partition, survivors often narrate events in incoherent, emotionally charged fragments, mixing past and present, and frequently stumbling at moments of intense pain or trauma. These accounts often evade neat beginnings or moral conclusions. For instance, a woman recounting her separation from her brother during migration, stops short of describing what followed next, allowing for silence to follow which discloses more than words can. Manto's short stories like "Khol Do" [Open it] or "Toba Tek Singh" to create an impact on the audience intentionally avoid narrative closure hence highlighting the arbitrary nature of reality or events in general. For instance, "Khol Do" finishes with a perturbing act of unconscious bodily submission rather than resolution, representing how the trauma has violated the victim beyond recognition. Similarly at the end of "Toba Tek Singh" the character Bishan Singh lying in no-man's-land belonging to neither India nor Pakistan, symbolises the sense of displacement shared by several real-life survivors. This interplay between fictional representation and testimonial narration deliberates how trauma is resisted within linear storytelling by writer or survivors alike. By placing oral testimonies alongside literary representations like those of Manto, the purpose of this thesis is to examine the terrain of memory where grief, silence, voice, and fragmentation merge into a testimonial space that refuses to be forgotten.

In Pakistan, the state narrative largely presents Partition as a triumph of liberation, an inevitable result of the Muslim community's political awakening and its demand for a separate homeland. This account centres around Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the All-India Muslim League while downplaying the internal heterogeneity of Muslim identities, dissenting voices, and the contested nature of the Pakistan Movement (Zamindar, 2007). These simplified narratives are institutionalized through school curricula and public commemorations. They often omit or sanitize the plural and incoherent experiences of Partition, particularly those of marginalized groups such as women, children, and religious minorities. As Butalia poignantly notes, "This is the generality of Partition: it exists publicly in history books. The [truth] is harder to discover; it exists privately in the stories told and retold inside so many households in India and Pakistan" (Butalia, 2000, p. 41). By foregrounding the affective, fragmented, and embodied nature of memory, oral histories present a radical alternative to monolithic national narratives. Drawing on what Solorzano and Yosso term a "counter-story" as quoted by Action (2013) challenging the authority and selectivity of the official narratives. In doing so, these stories become sites of



resistance, testimonies that not only recover suppressed histories but also interrogate the ideological construction of nationhood itself.

Partition literature and oral history function as dynamic mediums for preserving and recognizing not only the multifaceted experiences of the Partition of India in 1947 but drawing attention to the layers of intricacies embedded within these narratives. These experiences present alternative archives as well as narratives by foregrounding personal and collective memories, and in turn contesting monolithic accounts in official histories. The inclusion of diverse voices stemming from various oral history projects paves way for a more comprehensive understanding through the preservation of firsthand accounts of Partition survivors. The testimonies they bring forth and intend to preserve challenge hegemonic historical accounts by providing polyphonic representations where multiple voices coexist.

The purpose of the study is to analyse both fictional and factual narratives of the Partition of India in 1947. There remains a gap in the existing research not only in terms of Pakistani voices but also how the narratives of Partition exist in the memory and imagination of the people. By bringing together oral histories and fictional accounts, this study will augment our understanding of the event's multi-layered impact, addressing silences or absences that often marginalize underrepresented voices. This study will address the following research questions: foremost, how do Manto's short stories provide counter/narratives of the Partition of India in 1947? Furthermore, how do oral testimonies of Partition complicate official narratives? Additionally, how do factual and fictional narratives contribute to a more inclusive understanding of collective and cultural memory? Lastly, in what ways do oral testimonies and fictional representations reveal the emotional and psychological aftermaths of Partition?

This study will employ a qualitative methodology to examine the interplay between fictional narratives and oral testimonies related to the 1947 Partition of India. This will be done by investigating selected short stories by Manto alongside oral histories from survivors, transcribed by The Citizens Archive Project (CAP) which is a cultural and visual archive intended for preserving Pakistan's heritage, consisting of several projects including the Oral History project. Some interviews collected under the Oral History project were published in Anam Zakaria's *The Footprints of Partition*. Zakaria herself was part of the Oral History project and collected several interviews with



witnesses of Partition, some which she later published in her book. The book is a collection of 17 interviews across four generations. Taking into consideration the sensitive nature of the study, this MA thesis upholds to the ethical guidelines for the use of oral histories. Moreover, the study considers the limitations in interpreting personal narratives, although it intends to present the accounts with reliability and sensitivity. Hence by incorporating literary analysis alongside oral history, this study aims to highlight the value of diverse narrative forms that complement the multifaceted realities of historical events.

The research aims to explore how these narratives contribute to a multifaceted understanding of Partition and its enduring impact on cultural memory. Focusing on a close reading of a few of Manto's short stories, as translated from Urdu and compiled by Khalid Hasan, will constitute the literary component of the study. The narratives selected deal with themes of identity, displacement, and trauma. Furthermore, the analysis will consider how Manto's storytelling techniques such as fragmentation, irony, and open-ended conclusions resist monolithic interpretations of historical events. Complementing the literary analysis, oral testimonies from survivors of Partition comprise first-hand experiences providing a larger picture of the events.

This study draws on a constellation of theories: memory studies, Hayden White's metahistorical theory of narrative, Partition literature and oral history methodologies, and trauma theory, to interrogate the layered, multivocal processes of remembering, forgetting, and meaning making in the representation of the Partition of India in 1947. These frameworks serve as lenses to comprehend representations of Partition not as fixed historical accounts, but as evolving, and often fractured narratives shaped by both lived experience and its mediation. Memory studies offer a lens through which to examine how recollections are collectively shaped and ritually performed. The study will further employ concepts of collected memory and collective memory. White's theory of "emplotment" offers insight into how historical events are affected by narrative structures rather than neutrally recorded. In *Metahistory* (1973), White argues that historical writing inevitably organizes past events into specific narrative forms which in turn carries inherent ideological assumptions about the nature of human events.

This study investigates the narrative plurality in comprehending the intricate history of Partition of India in 1947. By bringing together fictional and factual accounts, it



adopts a holistic understanding to one of the most traumatic events in South Asian history. Examining factual and fictional narratives by paying close attention to Manto's short stories and oral histories from The Citizens Archive Project (CAP) and Zakria's *Footprints in Time*, this research aims to unearth the intricate layers of trauma, memory and identity that characterize this watershed moment underlining the significance of multiple voices within these narratives. Serving as repositories of collective and individual experiences, the narratives used in this study challenge monolithic, singular, and conventional historical representations by accentuating marginalized experiences and voices.

The study intends to draw attention to fictional storytelling and factual documentation showcasing how both forms contribute to a more nuanced, richer comprehension of Partition's emotional and cultural legacy. Hence seeking to enrich our comprehension of the ways in which collective memory informs the ongoing relationship between cultural representation and historical trauma in turn impacting post-colonial identities. Finally, this project intends to contribute significantly to the ever-changing scholarship on Partition, offering valuable insight into the merit of narrative plurality in fostering dialogue and preserving history in contemporary society. By examining intersections between fiction and fact, this study aims at paving more empathetic and inclusive historical discourses. The following sections will consist of a theoretical framework, followed by two case studies, first, dealing with analysis of Manto's selected short stories and second, with oral testimonies selected from Zakaria's book, and lastly, the conclusion.



2 Theoretical Framework

The 1947 Partition of India remains a decisive moment in South Asian history, its reverberations extending far beyond political borders to mould the cultural, social, and psychic contours of the subcontinent. The subsequent fragmentation of memories, identities, and geographies call for a theoretical framework to engage with contestation, multiplicity, and discontinuity not only in the content of memory but in the very forms through which it is expressed. Consequently, this chapter outlines a constellation of theories: memory studies, Hayden White's metahistorical theory of narrative, Partition literature, oral history methodology, and trauma theory, not merely to retrieve historical facts, but to interrogate the layered, multivocal processes of remembering, forgetting, and meaning making in the representation of the Partition of India in 1947. These frameworks serve as lens to comprehend representations of Partition not as fixed historical accounts, but as evolving, and often fractured narratives shaped by both lived experience and its mediation. In this context, memory studies offer a lens through which to examine how recollections are communally shaped and ritually performed; Partition literature operates as essential tools in understanding of the 1947 Partition of India through multifaceted viewpoints that counter official narratives, which often describe uniform versions of events. Various genres in Partition literature by foregrounding individual experiences and marginalized voices in the centre provide key insights to the intricate nature of Partition, often encompassing themes of trauma, displacement, and identity. These frameworks collectively permit this thesis to navigate the intersecting and vivid terrains of memory, narrative, and identity, revealing how Partition continues to live in fragments: in silences passed down through generations, in contested public commemorations, and in residues of loss and displacement. These theoretical tools help shift the focus from 'what happened' to how it is remembered, narrated, and made meaningful, thus foregrounding the memory of Partition of 1947 in the broader perspectives of literature and testimony.



2.1 Memory studies

The 1947 Partition is not solely remembered as history; it remains alive through both personal and collective memory. Jeffrey K. Olick and his co-authors, in *The Collective Memory Reader* (2011), identify collective memory as the “social frameworks of individual memory” (Olick et al., 2011, p. 10) a view initially proposed by Maurice Halbwachs in *Les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1925). Halbwachs argued that individual recollections seldom exist in isolation; rather, memory is vitally shaped within social contexts. Notably, drawing on Halbwachs, they assert that:

Memory is not static: it evolves through an ongoing dialogue between past and present. Thus, studying memory is less about reflecting on subjective mental processes and more about identifying the shifting social frameworks that condition recollection. (Olick et al., 2011, p. 10)

2.1.1 Collective memory and collected memory

Social frameworks act as “stimuli or opportunities for recall” (p. 11), blurring the lines between the individual and collective dimensions of memory. Comprehending this entanglement is vital when examining how Partition is remembered not merely as isolated personal experiences, but as cultural memories rooted within communities. Social identity shapes how individuals recall and interpret the past, making positionality critical to any study of historical memory. As Olick et al. continue, “here is no point in seeking where individual memory ends and collective memory begins” (Olick et al., 2011, p. 12). Within both fictional and oral narratives of Partition, the demarcation between personal trauma and collective loss becomes blurred, hence accentuating how Partition simultaneously surfaces as individual suffering and shared calamity. The collected memory refers to personal recollection such as oral testimonies pertaining to a certain historical memory. Whereas collective memory refers to shared social mediated representations such as literature and public commemorations. Both the collected and collective memory are significant for the archive and testimony as they encompass information about how a certain historical moment unfolded and how one’s social, cultural and economic positionality impacts memory. The study of Partition is deeply entwined with questions of archival absence



and testimonial presence. The archive is both a repository and a regulator of memory, structured by power and desire. What is included, what is omitted, and who decides these are crucial questions when it comes to official histories of Partition. Most state archives present sanitized versions of 1947, foregrounding nationalist narratives while marginalizing personal trauma.

2.1.2 Counter memory

Memory, as Mitchell (2003) argues, is embedded within politics and refashioned to serve different purposes. “There is a deep politics to memory, and each age attempts to refashion and remake memory to serve its own contemporary purposes” (p. 443). Thus, Land (2023) expands on the two modes of this “refashioning” (p 1012): the first mode takes place through collective memory described as shared interpretations of pasts remade by powerful groups, like the state, to create singular, highly idealized images of the past (Land, 2013). Collective memory impacts the way names, symbols, and commemorative activities are incorporated within school curriculum and transmit certain accomplishments. These memories weave a particular narrative around certain events categorizing them as “natural order of things” (p 1013). The second mode is based on “counter-memory” (p 1013) which is viewed by many as “antithetical” (p 1013) and “a process whereby marginalized groups stage acts of resistance against the official discourses of memory that are promulgated by the powerful groups that impose collective memory” (Land, 2013, p 1014).

Land (2023) expands on the idea of counter-memory as a site of resistance by exploring how memory always contests authority, the potential for counter-narratives to enter the public’s consciousness and bring forth multidimensionality, “rather than idealized interpretations of the past” (p 1015). These counter narratives provide a focal point for resistance and function as “emancipatory endeavour” (Land, p 1014, 2023) owing to their form and location. This emancipatory endeavour entails a more holistic comprehension or interpretation of the past.

2.1.3 Post memory

As counter-memory has an emancipatory endeavour, it also emerges in narratives characterized by post-memory. Marianne Hirsch’s (2012) theory of ‘post memory’ adds more depth to uncovering various facets of memory and extends the logic of



collective remembrance into the realm of generational transmission. Hirsch defines post memory as “the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before” Anjali Roy's *Memories and Postmemories of the Partition of India* (2019), refers to the relationship of the “generation after” to traumatic events they did not directly experience but inherit through narrative, images, and affect (Roy 2019, p 4). Fictional narratives set during Partition, written decades later, operate within this post memory field, bearing the emotional imprint of Partition without direct witnessing. Importantly, post memory is mediated, imaginative, and reconstructive. It does not reproduce the experience of 1947, but transforms it through narrative, art, and emotional inheritance. Both fictional and oral narratives are crucial vehicles for the post memorial process. Partition's memory is thus not a closed national script but part of a broader, dialogic network of remembrance and trauma.

2.2 Hayden White: Emplotment

2.2.1 Narrative Modes (Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, Satire)

White's theory of emplotment offers insight into how historical events are shaped into narrative structures rather than neutrally recorded. In *Metahistory* (1973), White argues that historical writing inevitably organizes past events into specific narrative forms such as romance, where history is structured as a victorious struggle leading to salvation; tragedy, where noble aspirations are overcome by human limitations; comedy, where conflicts are eventually resolved in reconciliation and renewal; or satire, where historical processes are viewed as fundamentally ironic and flawed (White, 1973). Each of these narrative modes carries inherent ideological assumptions about the nature of human events and political progress. White's theory of historical narrative thus provides a crucial lens to critique how Partition is represented: rather than presenting an objective account, historical writing actively constructs meaning through these narrative choices. In *The Content of the Form* (1990), White further elaborates that history is never a transparent mirror of reality but is instead “emplotment - a sequence of events configured in such a way as to represent symbolically what would otherwise be unutterable in language ...” (p 173) which is selectively structured into coherent and meaningful wholes through literary devices and tropes such as tragedy, comedy, or satire (p 46). White stresses that historical representation is not simply a matter of recounting facts; it is an act of poetic



construction shaped by the expectations and conventions of narrative form. History, for White, is therefore always already narrativized embedded within ideological, aesthetic, and rhetorical frameworks that profoundly influence how the past is understood.

2.2.2 Anti-Emplotment and Narrative Resistance

Traditional historical frameworks often attempt to organize the chaos of historical events into familiar narrative structures typically tragedy, emphasizing inevitable loss and suffering, or romance, portraying national independence as a triumphant culmination of a collective struggle (White, 1973, p. 9). However countless narratives refuse to align with dominant narratives in what White terms “anti-emplotted”. Anti-emplotted refers to narratives that resist shaping events into coherent narrative arcs such as romance, tragedy, comedy, or satire (White, 1973, p. 11). In anti-emplotted narratives, the likelihood of narrative closure is questioned, presenting history as divided, fluid, and open to manifold, often contesting interpretations. Certain events thus demand an “emplotted-sensitive” approach (White, 1990, p. 376), meaning that readers and historians must remain critically aware of how narrative forms influence and potentially distort the historical knowledge of traumatic events. Furthermore, White’s concept of “emplotted failure” (White, 1990, p. 368) the narrator’s inability to impose narrative coherence on fundamentally chaotic historical material. White identifies as “histories without heroes” (White, 1990, p. 390), where history is not driven by the triumphs of great individuals but marked instead by human vulnerability, suffering, and the breakdown of familiar social and moral orders. White’s broader critique of narrative closure (White, 1990, p. 26) further reinforces the epistemic significance of fragmented testimonies.

2.3 Partition Literature

2.3.1 Partition as Literary Paradigm

Bernard (2010) argues that Partition literature engages with cultural memory rather than factual history. Partition literature functions as a “literary paradigm” by organizing common narrative forms such as the “romance-across-divide, fragmented narrative and Bildungsroman” (p 10), which both remember and critically question



the historical logic of partitions, offering counterfactual visions of solidarity and alternative nationhood.

These forms seek to critically replicate the processes through which the event of partition is memorialized. They do this not only by testifying to the physical and psychic violence inflicted by partition and in its aftermath, counterfactual representations of Partition of pre -partition history or post partition present. (Bernard, p 11)

In her article “Forms of Memory: Partition as a Literary Paradigm”, Bernard puts forth the suggestion that Partition literature should not just be viewed as a historical or regional subfield, but rather as a literary paradigm: a wider conceptual framework that classifies genres, certain shared narrative forms, and political imaginaries across different geographies and histories. Moreover, Partition literature does not merely encompass accounts of specific historical partitions, but creates a recognizable literary structure that questions, reimagines and critiques by employing various “narrative strategies” (p 10). Hence, Partition literature also becomes a mouthpiece for narrating collective trauma, imagining alternative futures, and contesting nation state boundaries. In a nutshell, Partition constitutes a paradigm for studying a distinct set of literary features and political critiques.

2.3.2 Fictive Testimony

Saint (2012) in his article on the short stories of Manto talks about “fictive testimony” (p 53) which entails how Manto’s works operate as an imaginative, literary form bearing witness to real historical trauma, particularly displacement, violence and psychological aftermath of the 1947 Partition, despite being fictional stories, not factual accounts. Manto did not pen historical testimonies along the lines of survivors giving factual oral histories. Rather via fiction, he reconstructed psychological, emotional and ethical truths about Partition violence. Fictive testimony hence refers to fictional storytelling and emotional historical witnessing.

Manto's work refuses to become dated, especially on account of his ability to reinvent the afsana or short story as a self-reflexive mode of 'fictive' testimony, which captures both the direct impact of fiendish forms of



collective violence as well as the persistent after-effects of historical trauma.
(Saint, p. 53)

According to Saint, Manto's short stories such as "Toba Tek Singh" and "Khol Do" [Open it] lend a deeper truth about psychological and ethical disintegration caused at the onset of Partition although the objective history books either try to simplify or sanitize it. Fiction permitted Manto to portray the madness and absurdity of Partition bureaucracy in "Toba Tek Singh" and psychic trauma and dissociation in "Khol Do" [Open it].

Such modes of transmission of otherwise untold stories as testimony to both the horrors of collective violence, as well as the possibility of resistance to the submergence of the self into the morass of effects such as vindictive rage and humiliated fury, remain crucial in attempts to further reconciliation.
(Saint, p. 55)

Manto's short stories hence cast the emotional truth about Partition in a different light that often official accounts fail to capture. Fiction serves an alternative archive of madness, grief, ethical collapse and humanity. At their heart these stories have stood the test of time as they do not try to fix or resolve trauma rather than just testify to it imaginatively and honestly.

2.3.3 Dialogism and Polyphony

Bakhtin's notion of dialogism offers insight into the fragmented and multi-voiced nature of Partition narratives. Bakhtin emphasizes that "at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom" implying its intrinsically dialogic, involving an interplay of various ideological perspectives (Bakhtin, p 291). In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin explains that "the novel orchestrates all its themes by means of the social diversity of speech types and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions" (Bakhtin, p 263). Fictional works mirror this heteroglossic structure: multiple social discourses collide, not able to fully dominate or synthesize the others. Similarly, oral histories are not monologic recollections but fragmented, multi-voiced engagements with trauma, nostalgia, and political critique.



One of the most known and celebrated fictional works of Partition is Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man* (also published as *Cracking India*) which forms a cornerstone of Partition Literature and is considered as one of the "best hundred novels of all times" (Mansoor, 2020, *The Literary Encyclopaedia*). The novel vividly depicts the turmoil and division of identities during the 1947 Partition. *Ice Candy Man*, commonly noted for its depiction of communal violence and dislocation through the perspective of a child narrator who belongs to a minority, supports the multiplicity of voices as well as experiences surrounding Partition by incorporating characters belonging to various segments and ethnicities. As Patwa argues, historical documentation of factual records is devoid of human experiences, explaining how Sidhwa's novel transcends historical recounting by incorporating multiple perspectives: "It is the sensibility, the empathy of the writer to experience the fellow's agony, pain, the loss and devastation, the importance of the occasion and to convey it exactly to the readers" (2013, p 1-2). Partition narratives like *Ice Candy Man* instead of presenting a monologic affirmation of a single "truth", encompass plural discourses, exhibiting the fractured identities, unresolved traumas and conflicting ideologies. Hence in Partition narratives, vivid illustration of the multiple voices and perspectives that shape the memory of Partition are observed.

The concept of polyphony refines this understanding. Polyphony, originally a musical term, was adapted by Bakhtin to describe a novelistic structure where multiple independent voices coexist without being incorporated under a single authoritative viewpoint (Bakhtain, p, 430). A polyphonic text invites a dialogue between diverse and often conflicting perspectives rather than promoting one dominant truth. Viswanathan (2010), analysing Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* through this framework, highlights how the novel diffuses voices across genres, characters, and even historical contexts, creating a vibrant interplay that challenges a confirmed meaning. In this sense, "unfinalizability" (p 58) refers to the endless, open-ended possibility of generating additional meanings, as readers bring their evolving cultural, social, and political contexts into each reading. Every encounter with the text thus changes perception, proving how reality itself is fragmented and fluid; identified differently across time and reader. "Rushdie's comments and Bakhtin's concept of polyphony indicate that the narrator's version reflects only one view, while the novel as a whole is the site of contesting voices" (Viswanathan, 2010, p 58). Partition



fiction, by its very nature, demands a reading strategy attentive to this polyphony, contradiction, and the refusal of a single, closed interpretation.

Syrrina Ahsan Ali Haque's (2021) *Dialogue on Partition* explores dialogic possibilities within Indo-Pak English novels pertaining to the theme of Partition of India in 1947 through the individuality and multiplicity of plural voices of narrators, writers, and characters hence allowing for depiction of "religious, cultural, and emotional plurality" (xviii). Her book analysis Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*, Khushwant Singh's *A Train to Pakistan*, Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and Mehr Nigar Masroor's *Shadow of Time*. The selection of the novels is done in a way to denote four time periods: "pre partition, eve of partition, partition and post partition" (Haque, xi). She argues that literature can foster dialogue and reconciliation by allowing conflicting experiences to coexist within a shared narrative space. Polyphonic novels challenge dominant narratives by refusing to resolve contradictions into a unifying mode. Instead, they resist narrative synthesis, revealing the plural logic of memory. As Haque states, "Bakhtainin Dialogic prism sheds light through rotating perspectives on multiple identities both fractured and intact" (xi-xii).

2.3.4 Polyphony, Archive, and Memory

Similarly, fictional works serve as imaginative archives, preserving silenced experiences and alternative histories. Furthermore, archive's mediate identity formation: whose memories are preserved, whose are marginalized, and how are they framed? In Partition narratives, the interplay of personal memory and archival authority becomes a battleground over the meaning of history itself. Polyphony reflects the fractured realities of Partition survivors. As Louise Harrington highlights in her reading of Tabish Khair's *A Love Story*, the co-existence of contesting voices in Partition narratives reveals truth not as a singular entity, but as dialogic, layered, and contingent hence encapsulating Bakhtin's notion of "dialogized heteroglossia" (p 272). Moreover, she goes on to say this: "Yet the tragedy of the violent events of 1947, which saw mass displacement, death, abduction, and rape, is punctuated by silence" (Harrington, p 262). This multiplicity of voices is not limited to literary imagination; it resonates with real testimonies, where survivors offer differing, sometimes opposing, recollections of the same event. One survivor recalls a train journey as a moment of horror; another sees it as a moment of community solidarity.



The notion of polyphony honours these contradictions, rejecting them into one master narrative, whether in fiction or in archival memory.

2.4 Oral history and testimonies

2.4.1 Oral History as Counter-Archive

Oral history, as a form of “counter-archive” involves the collection and preservation of personal narratives that challenge dominant historical records (Loa, p ii). Oral testimonies lend a voice to those who have been marginalized and forgotten within the state-sanctioned histories found in textbooks. Traditional archives often echo the viewpoints of dominant groups, possibly overlooking the voices of those who experienced events differently. Upon returning to Pakistan, I visited the National Archives of Pakistan to explore and get an insight of whether the Partition of India in 1947 is preserved in the form of interviews of survivors and to my surprise there were 85 interviews mostly those of freedom fighters; those who participated in the creation of Pakistan. Upon perusing through some I realized that these narratives aligned with the official histories taught via textbooks.

2.4.2 Methodological Turn

In her research paper, “Oral Traditions and Contemporary History: Event, Memory, Experience and Representation” Indira Chowdhury outlines theoretical frameworks and methodologies of employing oral history to comprehend historical narratives. These frameworks present a transformative methodology to historiography, particularly within postcolonial contexts critiquing traditional archival practices by placing personal narratives and memories in the centre which are often absent from official records.

Oral history raises questions about relationships between subjectivity and history - particularly the role memory plays in understanding what historical events mean to human subjects who experience them. (Chowdry, p 55)

2.4.3 Ethics, Power, and Co-Construction

Traditional archives have generally given more priority to official documents, often conveniently shelving the voices of marginalized communities. Chowdry advocates



oral history to be more of an inclusive medium by democratizing the outlook of historical narratives, hence permitting a more holistic representation of the past. By collecting and preserving firsthand accounts, oral histories function as a counter-archive, offering alternative perspectives that investigate and enrich established historical records. Chowdhury points out that oral histories are not only repositories of facts but also co-constructed narratives between the interviewer and the interviewee. These repositories of facts shed light on the subjective nature of memory and the impact of personal experiences on historical interpretation. Such an approach requires a shift from viewing oral testimonies as supplementary to acknowledging them as essential to comprehending complex historical phenomena. Oral histories play a fundamental role in capturing the experiences of those eliminated from mainstream narratives as colonial legacies have adulterated historical documentation. Oral histories also bring forth a handful of ethical considerations, such as respecting the narrator's agency, safeguarding informed consent, and focusing on the potential for re-traumatization. Chowdhury advocates for a sensitive and reflexive approach, identifying the fundamental power dynamics in the act of recording and illuminating personal narratives.

2.4.4 Interstitial Spaces and Slow Memory

Drawing on Avishek Parui's exploration of memory studies and postcolonial writing, oral histories can be viewed as "interstitial spaces" (p 726) which are liminal zones where personal and collective narratives cohabit, often unveiling tensions and overlapping in identity formation. These spaces are neither completely private nor entirely public, acknowledging individual recollections to traverse within collective memory, the shared remembrance constructed and sustained by communities to shape cultural and historical identities. As Parui says these spaces "offer a memory studies perspective into how mutable and interstitial identities function through an interplay of remembering and forgetting across affective, geopolitical, and material markers" (p 726).

These narratives resist linear historiography, instead presenting fragmented, non-linear accounts that reflect the complexities of memory and identity formation in postcolonial contexts. Oral histories exemplify what Parui describes as "slow memory" (p 725) a form of emergence not through monumental events but through everyday routines, family rumours, broken objects, and intimate affective spaces.



Parui emphasizes that slow memory is defined by gradual accumulation and resistance to event-centric narratives often found in traditional accounts. The oral history narratives resist closure, remain elliptical, emotionally charged and performative. Moreover, we also see how the very act of storytelling or narrating stories is also in turn impacted by anxieties. Some fictional narratives try to structure trauma into coherent arcs, however oral histories in contrast to official histories try to elaborate “liminal identities” (p 725) which are transitional states encompassing grief and contesting official histories. Parui also suggests that these spectral dimensions of history constitute emotional resonances, everyday household contexts and the traumatic presences of past that linger in memory “manifested in postcolonial retellings and reconstructions in a vocabulary of memory that may be episodically oriented toward shared cultures of commemoration, consolidation, and subversion” (p 726).

Thus, the terrain of “slow memory” does not conform to linearity and intersects with cultural memory theory, which views memory as a shared social construct entrenched in institutions, media and rituals thus focusing on the way societies recollect and honour the past. “It highlights the intersections of memory studies and postcolonial writing in framing examinations of complex spaces, subjects, and identities, especially related to the politics of representation, affect, and agency” (Parui, p 726). Unlike singular or dominant narratives, oral histories host multiple autonomous voices, each presenting their own worldview and interpretation of events. Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony lends a constructive perspective in context of deciphering multiple nuances pertaining to Partition. This polyphonic framework supports Butalia’s (1998) *The Other Side of Silence* work, where personal recollections are shown to be inseparably connected to communal memories of displacement, violence, and belonging.

2.4.5 Polyphonic memory

Oral history challenges state-sponsored historiography by introducing emotional ruptures, fragmented timelines, and what Parui (2024) describes as “mnemonic entanglements” the intricate interweaving of remembrance, forgetting, affect and silence (Parui, 2024, p. 727). Survivors’ testimonies and fictional portrayals resist closure, destabilizing “monolithic historical account” (p 728) of Partition, which traditionally seeks a unified, linear narrative. Furthermore, applying Bakhtin’s



concept of heteroglossia allows us to view oral testimonies not as “pure” or “unmediated” truths but as dynamic constructions, shaped by memory, ideology, and identity (Bakhtin, 1981). Survivors often articulate their experiences through religious, communal, and national frameworks, even while sometimes resisting these narratives. Virdee (2013) emphasizes that oral histories serve as radical and empowering tools, particularly in understanding the “gendered dimensions of Partition trauma”, shedding light on women's experiences often omitted from formal histories (Virdee, 2013, p. 49). Similarly, Khan (2002) argues that oral histories create “counter-narratives to official historiography” by prioritizing lived experience over political rhetoric (Khan, 2002, p. 205).

This recognition of narratives encompassing multiple voices prompted a surge in alternate archival practices. Urvashi Butalia’s (1998) *The Other Side of Silence*, Anam Zakria’s (2015) *The Footprints of Partition* and several other books construct an affective archive through oral testimonies, centring marginalized voices absent from official records. Similarly, initiatives like Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP) collect memories of the survivors and descendants of the Partition of 1947 to create counter-archives contesting state-centred narratives. Oral history becomes a method as well as a form of resistance, challenging the state's monopoly over historical discourse and permitting a more pluralistic comprehension of the past. As Antoinette Burton (2005) elaborates how postcolonial archives become “sites of struggle”, (p 36) where identity, memory, and power constantly intersect. Partition testimonies thus facilitate a radical rethinking of identity, not as fixed or homogeneous but as fractured, intersectional, and emergent. Oral histories transform memory work into acts of healing and resistance.

2.4.5 Lieux de Mémoire

Oral history as conceptualized by Pierre Nora function as *lieux de mémoire*, or “places of memory”, (1989, p. 273), where intangible representations like stories and personal artifacts act as mnemonic anchors against forgetting. Survivors, through storytelling, engage in political and emotional reclamation of suppressed pasts. As Raychaudhuri (2020) highlights in *Narrating South Asian Partition* that memory blurs the border between individual and communal experiences. His study, encompassing 165 interviews across India, Pakistan, and the UK, emphasizes on Partition not as a



singular national tragedy but as a polyphonic event - a chorus of divergent yet intersecting voices.

2.4.6 Trauma

In oral narratives of Partition, trauma emerges through silence, repetition and confusion. Survivors may circle around painful memories, unable to recount them in linear or coherent ways. This aligns with Shoshana Felman's argument that trauma "produces a radical disruption of narration", (p 77) leading to testimonial acts that are simultaneously vital and incomplete. Anjali Gera Roy deepens this discussion by emphasizing that the ethics of representing trauma demand narrative forms that preserve suffering's unsettled, haunting presence rather than appropriating or smoothing it over (Roy, 2019, p. 72). For Roy, trauma is not simply an event of the past, but an ongoing experience transmitted across generations through post-memory, a process by which the children and grandchildren of Partition survivors inherit fragmented, affective memories. For instance, Roy shows how oral testimonies recorded in Partition memory projects reveal intergenerational echoes of trauma. In interviews collected in Punjab and Bengal, second-generation narrators often relay inherited emotions of loss, fear, and dislocation, despite not having lived through the Partition themselves. The sensitivity of these oral stories challenges the listener to confront not only the survivor's memories but also the complex aftershocks that persist in familial storytelling. Roy also highlights specific cases, such as women's oral accounts from Amritsar and Lahore, where the articulation of trauma remains incomplete marked by silences around sexual violence or sudden emotional breakdowns during interviews (Roy, 2019, p. 98–102). These examples demonstrate how oral history, when approached ethically, does not merely recover information but bears witness to trauma's resistant, elusive nature. Thus, fictional and oral narratives of Partition become intertwined acts of witnessing that resist closure, inviting audiences to engage ethically with historical suffering. They reveal that memory and post memory are not simply about preserving the past but about grappling with its ongoing emotional afterlives offering a plural, fragmented, and affectively charged understanding of Partition's legacy.



2.5 Conclusion: Echoes of Partition

This theoretical framework provides an overview that no single lens can sufficiently comprehend the complexity of Partition narratives. Testimony, memory, and oral narrative are not secondary to state documents. They are often more truthful, because they reveal the messiness that history tries to suppress. The incorporation of collective memory and post memory theory stresses how Partition reverberates across generations, not merely as a historical episode but as an ongoing affective inheritance highlighting the fractured, multivocal nature of both fictional and oral accounts of 1947. These narratives in turn resist closure, fixed meaning, and singular historiography, instead sustaining a dynamic, contested field of memory. White's insights into historical emplotment illuminate how both fictional and testimonial accounts negotiate, resist, or subvert narrative forms traditionally imposed on historical events. Through this lens, the fragmented, open-ended structures of many Partition stories become not narrative failures but ethical interventions and forms of storytelling appropriate to the magnitude of trauma and dislocation. Finally, theories of archives and memory foreground the political stakes of historical narration. Partition's memory is actively curated, suppressed, or reinvented through state archives and nationalist narratives. In contrast, oral histories offer a vital counter-archive that centres personal testimony and emotional truth over state-sanctioned versions of the past. By synthesizing these theoretical positions, this study embraces a method that is necessarily comparative, dialogic, and ethically attuned. It is precisely through a layered theoretical engagement that the echoes of Partition fractured yet insistent, painful yet vital can be meaningfully interpreted. In doing so, the study hopes not only to illuminate the literary and testimonial afterlives of 1947 but also to contribute to broader conversations on memory, narrative, and identity in postcolonial contexts. Ultimately, the echoes of Partition are not singular; they are dispersed across time, and generations demanding, as this framework contends, a multi-voiced, interdisciplinary critical approach.



3 Case study one: Manto's selected short stories

This chapter will encompass the first case study: Manto's selected short stories translated by Khalid Hasan. These short stories function as a window to communal violence, identity, and displacement set in the backdrop of the tumultuous Partition of India in 1947.

No writer has been able to convey the violent ambiguities of communal conflict with as much force and conviction as Saadat Hasan Manto. Many of his short stories focus on the sense of despair and dislocation caused by the Partition of Pakistan and India in 1947 (Alter, 1994, p 91).

The chapter will propose that Manto's stories provide a counter-narrative to official historiographies, operating as a repository or archive of Partition 1947 stories hence paving way for a more holistic comprehension of what unfolded. This chapter will examine six selected stories: "Toba Tek Singh", "Colder Than Ice", "Open It", "It Happened in 1919", "The Price of Freedom", and "The Dog of Titwal". By drawing on concepts of cultural memory and the narration of Partition, Manto vividly recreates the anger and horrors of the period, as well as the trauma experienced by refugees who were uprooted and victimized by the delineation of arbitrary borders - each narrative reflecting a distinct outlook and ideological stance (Alter, p. 91). This plurality paves way for a more multifaceted interaction of voices within a narrative, challenging a monologic interpretation of events. Manto's stories challenge traditional narrative structures, contesting the imposition of a singular, linear and authoritative interpretation of Partition of India in 1947. Hence, these stories serve as counter-narratives, enhancing the voices of those sidelined within official histories. By centring subaltern characters, like the prostitutes, lunatics, and common folk, he challenges discourses that often overlook the experiences of the disenfranchised.

For example, "Toba Tek Singh", one of Manto's classics, "and a masterpiece of South Asian literature in English" (Singh, 2021, p 384), examines the absurd and tragic side



to the Partition of India in 1947. Set in a Lahore asylum, the plot centers on Bishan Singh, a Sikh inmate who had been “confined there for 15 years” (Manto, p 47), puzzled by the geopolitical turmoil that has rendered his homeland's location ambiguous.

Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhananya te mung the dal of the Government of Pakistan... the Government of Pakistan had been replaced by the government of Toba Tek Singh, a small town in the Punjab which was his home (Manto, p 47).

Through the lens of the asylum's inmates, Manto critiques the subjective nature of national boundaries and the profound human suffering they entail and create. The story unfolds as the governments of Pakistan and India decide to exchange inmates from their respective asylums, illustrating the larger population transfers occurring during Partition. “A couple of years after the Partition of the country, it occurred to the respective governments of India and Pakistan that inmates of lunatic asylums, like prisoners should be exchanged” (Manto, p 44). This decision paves the way for chaos to prevail in the asylum, with inmates struggling to comprehend the concept of Pakistan and the logic behind the exchange: “A Sikh lunatic asked another Sikh: ‘Sardarji, why are we being sent to India? We don’t even know the language they speak in that country’” (Manto, p 45). Their confusion and the senseless dialogue that ensues function as a microcosm of the meaninglessness and broader disarray of Partition. For instance, a Muslim lunatic from Chaniot, previously a political party member, declares himself Quaid e Azam (the leader of Muslims) and another inmate declares himself as Master Tara Singh, leader of Sikhs. “Apprehending serious communal trouble, the authorities declared them dangerous and shut them up in different cells” (Manto, p 46). Similarly, another inmate who is a young Hindu lawyer ends up in the facility due to his unrequited love. Upon inquiring about his lover’s location and finding out that she is in another country he ends up cursing all major and minor Muslim and Hindu leaders holding them accountable for cutting “India into two, turning his beloved into Indian and him into a Pakistani” (Manto, p 46).

In “Toba Tek Singh”, Manto employs heteroglossia by presenting the perspectives of Sikh, Muslim and Hindu inmates in a mental asylum through multiple speech types and languages, each representing different facets of society affected by Partition. The protagonist, Bishan Singh, embodies the confusion and disorientation experienced by



several on the onset of this period. His nonsensical mutterings, a blend of Punjabi, Urdu, and English, symbolizes the fragmented identities resulting from the arbitrary division of the subcontinent. “Uper the gur gur the annexe the bay dhayana the mung the dal of Guruji da khalsa and guruji ki fateh...jo bole so nihai sat sri akal...the dal of Pakistan and Hindustan dur fittay moun” (Manto, p 449-50). The nonsensical mutterings are accompanied with a popular Sikh victory slogan “Guruji da khalsa and guruji ki fateh...jo bole so nihai sat sri akal”, which translates to “The Khalsa belongs to Waheguru (God), victory belongs to Waheguru... Blessed is he who says, Truth is the Timeless One” (*The Sikh Encyclopaedia*, 2025). The second phrase “dur fittay moun” is a Punjabi slang for the colloquial term ‘facepalm’ or a sort of curse. This discordance of voices underscores the absurdity of the geopolitical split, as individuals grapple with imposed national identities that conflict with their personal histories.

Bishan Singh's character represents the profound dislocation experienced by countless individuals during this period. His constant inquiries about the location of Toba Tek Singh, his hometown, reflects a search for identity and identity in a world where familiar landmarks have been relocated and thus rendered foreign. When Bishan Singh's friend Fazal Din comes to visit him, he queries the location of Toba Tek Singh “Where is Toba Tek Singh? He asked. ‘Where? Why it is where it has always been’. In India or Pakistan’. ‘In India ... no in Pakistan” (Manto, p 49). At the climax of his journey, he collapses in the no-man's-land between Pakistan and India: “he collapsed to the ground. There, behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth, which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh” (Manto, p 51). This connotes the tragic liminality imposed upon many by the very act of redrawing borders. Manto's narrative employs satire to emphasize the absurdity of the political planning that led to Partition. The description of lunatics being exchanged between nations highlights the dehumanizing bureaucratic processes that disregard individual histories and identities. The inmates' inability to grasp the idea of Pakistan mirrors the bafflement of ordinary citizens thrust into a new national identity without approval or comprehension. The story's surviving relevance resides in its fearless portrayal of the human cost of political decisions. By focusing on marginalized individuals regarded insane and thus voiceless, Manto highlights the tragedy of Partition, emphasizing the meaningless suffering inflicted upon the innocent.



As Stephen Alter (1994) has suggested in his paper titled “Madness and Partition”, Manto’s approach is not to write history, but to expose its fallout on the human psyche. “As the characters in Manto’s stories confront the ruthless inhumanity of Hindu-Muslim violence murder, rape and mutilation-their only conceivable response is madness” (Alter, p 91). For example, in Manto’s story “Open It”, Sirajuddin slowly unravels, unable to cry: “the dead body of his wife, her stomach ripped open. It was image that would not go away...All questions. There were no answers. He wished he could weep, but tears would not come” (Manto, p 79). Moreover, his haunted final recognition of his daughter, “The old Sirajuddin screamed with joy, she’s alive...My daughter is alive...” (Manto, p 81), reflects how trauma displaces not only the body but also language and time, both of which unravel across the story’s arc.

In this way, Manto’s ‘Open It’ aligns with other Manto stories like “Toba Tek Singh” as ‘testimonial fiction’ (Saint, 2012, p 53). Testimonial fiction resists the narratives as an event with a clean beginning and end. Instead, they open a space for unspeakable suffering which must still be witnessed even if it cannot be fully understood. Another characteristic of testimonial fiction is that it seeks to bear witness to trauma through fragmented and non-linear narratives (Saint, 2012). Bishan’s Singh’s question pertaining to the location of his village remains unanswered and is symbolized through his death in a no man’s land illustrates trauma. Similarly, Sakina’s condition at the end of “Open It” is a testament to the horrors of unspoken violence she has had to endure. Often such literature demonstrates or echoes the structure of oral testimonies, where personal recollections are marked by pauses, silences, and emotional ruptures. While Manto’s work is fictional it captures the rhythm of oral recollection, emotionally charged, disjointed and centred on individual suffering hence blurring the lines between fictional and lived experience. Thereby, Manto’s stories do not encompass trauma rather they embody a testimonial mode which aligns with oral histories, specifically in the larger context of where official records don’t acknowledge the human cost of Partition. Henceforth, this alignment underlines how personal narratives and fictional testimony simultaneously contribute to a more intimate and affective understanding of historical violence.



In “Khol do” [Open It], Manto confrontationally portrays the gendered violence and psychological fragmentation produced by the Partition of India through penning a nonlinear narrative and abrupt ending leaving readers with a sense of unsettled trauma, echoing the disjointed experiences of those who lived through the turmoil. This narrative choice challenges the reader to counter the raw, unstructured reality of historical events, rather than only reading neatly packaged stories. The story follows Sirajuddin, a father in search of his daughter Sakina after the two are separated during their escape from Amritsar:

He could feel a bulge in his pocket. It was a length of a cloth...It was Sakina’s dupatta [a long piece of cloth used as a scarf] but where was she? ...Other details were missing. Had he brought her as far as the railway station? When the rioters had stopped the train, they had taken her with them? (Manto, p 79).

What begins as a narrative of a desperate father seeking help from volunteers devolves into a bleak and unsettling account of sexual violence, memory, and the limits of recovery. Manto delays the central act of trauma, Sakina’s implied repeated assault, until the very end. The moment of rupture is not narrated directly but revealed implicitly in the final lines, when the doctor orders “Khol do” [Open it], implying to open the window and Sakina responds by loosening her trousers. The phrase becomes a metonym for her abuse. This response, stripped of conscious agency, functions as both literal obedience and a horrifying reflex.

He checked the corpse for a pulse then told Sirajuddin, “Open the window. There was movement in Sakina’s dead body. With her lifeless hands, she untied her salwar and lowered it. The doctor was drenched in sweat from head to toe (Manto, p 80-81)

“Khol Do” as a narrative intentionally resists closure, the story ending abruptly and uncomfortably, denying the reader any sense of emotional resolution. The trauma remains open-ended. Sirajuddin finds his daughter, but the reader is forced to confront that she has been irreparably harmed. There is no redemption, healing, or moral conclusion, only a stark and painful reality. This resistance to narrative closure disrupts traditional expectations-such as depicted within official histories of Partition, where migration to each side of the border could secure freedom and honour. Hence, resistance to narrative closure forces readers to sit with the unsettling truth, that



history itself can be narrated in ways that resist dominant and simplified interpretations. The ending refuses resolution: Sirajuddin's joy at his daughter being "alive" is tragically ironic, as the reader sees that what survives is only a shell hollowed out by trauma. This stands in contrast to official Partition histories that emplot mass migration as a chapter of triumph or sacrifice (Naqvi, 2012). Here, Manto offers anti-emplotment, a narrative of horror without redemption. The story neither resolves the trauma nor restores order. It embodies what trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth describe as a wound that speaks without healing:

What the parable of the wound and the voice thus tells us, ..., both in what it says and in the stories it unwittingly tells, is that trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available (Caruth, 1996, p 4).

This refusal to provide narrative closure may be seen as a form of anti-emplotment, a structure that deliberately avoids meaning making in favour of unresolved horror.

In "Open It", while there are contrasting discourses such as Sirajuddin's paternal love, the nationalist rhetoric of the volunteers, and the silent testimony of Sakina's trauma these are not presented as fully autonomous voices engaging in an open-ended dialogue. Instead, they are orchestrated to highlight the tragic irony and critique the socio-political context of Partition. The narrative does not provide each perspective with equal weight or independence; rather, it guides the reader towards a specific emotional and moral response. These perspectives operate as heteroglossia acknowledging the existence of multiple voices within a single narrative thus reflecting the diversity of societal voices and ideological perspectives. The young men, hailed as saviours initially, are exposed as possible perpetrators, an ambiguity that addresses the breakdown of moral binaries during Partition. Their dialogue, "If your daughter is alive, we will get her back" (Manto, p 79), coexists with their implied complicity, a dual voice that problematizes simplistic interpretations of heroism or villainy. "Open It" lays bare how women's bodies became the literal battlefield upon which the Partition played out:

The predominance of gendered violence during the Indian partition was due to the fact that attacks on women were symbolic of attacking the honour and



purity of the religion/country to which the women belonged (Dey, 2018, p 28).

The story's structure progressing from chaos to personal loss to a perverse form of discovery mimics the collapse of ethical certainties: "in the context of Manto's same story, 'Open It' also highlight[s] the fact that in time of fratricidal war and violence, "the female body becomes a contested site subject to assault and conquest" (Ram, 2017, p 111). While Sakina is rescued in technical sense, the story's gut-wrenching irony reaffirms that being found is not the same as being restored.

"Colder Than Ice" [Thanda Gosht] exemplifies this subversion of traditional emplotment as the story unfolds through a series of flashbacks and incoherent dialogues, described by Flemming (1977) as "the brutally shocking story" (p 101). Ishar Singh, a Sikh man who, during the communal riots of Partition, murders a Muslim family and abducts a beautiful girl with the intent to rape her. However, upon attempting the act, he discovers that the girl is already dead, her body cold. As a result, this shocking realization renders Ishar impotent, a condition that becomes manifest and pronounced when he fails to respond to his lover, Kulwant. Suspecting infidelity, Kulwant not only confronts Ishar but in a fit of rage, ends up stabbing him with his own kirpan (dagger): "Like a wild and demented creature, Kalwant Kaur picked up Ishwar's Singh's kirpan, unsheathed it and plunged in his neck" (Manto, p 56). As Ishar lies dying, he confesses the disturbing event that led to his impotence: "Kulwant jani, I cannot tell you what a beautiful girl she was. I would've killed her too. She was dead, ... I had carried a dead body...a heap of cold flesh..." (Manto, p 57). Hence, this fragmented narrative structure highlights the dehumanization and moral decay which was prompted by communal violence. By depicting Ishar Singh's trauma, Manto challenges dominant narratives that often depict perpetrators of violence as inhuman or purely evil with a central character whose humanity is although hardened by his own brutal deeds not completely lost.

that even at the last limits of cruelty and violence, of barbarity and bestiality, he still does not lose his humanity! If Ishar Singh had completely lost his humanity, the touch of the dead woman would not have affected him so violently as to strip him of his sanity (Flemming, 1977, p 102).



Although having committed the worst crime, without any hitch initially, his conscience over the course of the story develops, giving an insight to the “glimmer of humanity” (Flemming, 1977, p 102) that still resides within him. This story sheds light on these perspectives of perpetrators hence, enriching the narratives.

When they began to loot Muslim shops and houses in the city, ...there was this house I broke into ... there were seven people in there, six of the men whom I killed with my kirpan one by one...and there was one girl... she was so beautiful... I did not kill her... I took her away (Manto, p 56).

This examination of traumas also aligns with oral testimonies from Partition survivors, several of whom describe its psychological scars and not only the physical atrocities they witnessed or endured. These personal narratives often uncover the deep emotional wounds that official histories may overlook, accentuating the significance of individual experiences in understanding the full effect of Partition. Incorporating trauma as a central theme in the analysis of ‘Colder than Ice’ [Thanda Gosht] allows for a more overarching comprehension of the story and its reflection of the extensive human consequences of Partition. It also brings together literary representation and historical testimony, emphasizing the enduring relevance of Manto's work in discussions of collective memory and trauma. “Colder than Ice” [Thanda Gosht] surfaces as a multifaceted narrative that depicts the minute and human intricacies of experiences during Partition. Manto's storytelling challenges conventional narratives offering a singular perspective, rather encouraging readers to engage in the multitude of voices and experiences that label historical events. This approach in turn confronts monolithic rationalizations of history, advocating for a more empathetic as well as pluralistic comprehension of human actions and motivations during periods of upheaval.

The next story penned by Manto, “It Happened in 1919” is referred to as “one of his poignant stories” about the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, a narrative set against the backdrop of the massacre that unfolded in Amritsar connecting collective and personal memories. Its relevance to Partition literature lies in its historical and emotional continuity “as a means of filling in the gaps in the official historical record; like subaltern testimony, it is seen to serve as one of the small voices of history” (Bernard, p 13). With a plot that describes the events leading up to and after this tragic event, Manto allows us to contextualize the Partition of 1947 in a bigger picture. By



recounting an earlier trauma in Indian colonial history, “an incident that stirred the conscience of millions, one that far reaching implications on national freedom struggle,” (Jalil, 2019, p iii), Manto draws an emblematic similarity between two defining moments of mass violence, the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and the communal bloodshed of 1947. Both state-sanctioned or community-justified violence eradicates the humanity of its victims.

The representation of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre gives rise to questions related to historiography in regard to a binary privileging of narratives that are bifurcated into two distinguishing strands of dominant discourse and marginalized narratives (Shahnawaz, 2022, p 48).

The personal narrative in “It happened in 1919” of Mohammad Tufail, an unlikely hero marginalized by caste and reputation, centres the experience of those routinely omitted from official nationalist historiography. Known for living a carefree life, after the Jallianwala Bagh incident, Tufail’s conscience is awakened. He ends up rebelling against the British soldiers and as a result gets killed. His sacrifice becomes not just an act of rebellion but a testament to the recurring cycles of brutality and the silencing of subaltern voices. “He was Thaila kanjar [pimp] - kanjar, because he was the son of a prostitute- otherwise Muhammad Tufail” (Manto, p 223).

Despite societal disdain, Tufail challenges British soldiers, eventually sacrificing his life in an act of defiance against colonial oppression: “He had been hit, but he kept advancing like a wounded lion... he was brave. I tell you he had already been hit when he extorted his companions not to run but to move forward” (Manto, p 225). This narrative accentuates Manto's critique of societal duplicity as Tufail who is looked down on by society for being a prostitute’s son and living off his sister’s income at the end becomes an unlikely hero who gets killed for protesting. By contrasting individual trauma with historical events, Manto examines the recurring nature of brutality and the selective commemoration penned by nationalist historiographies. The individual trauma in this case is Tufail’s identity and how his sisters who were popular dancing girls in Lahore are invited to perform for the British soldiers right after their brother’s demise. This narrative strategy invites readers to examine whose stories are memorialized and whose are neglected. As the narrator remarks: “I have a feeling that when they finally make a list of those who died in the blood bath in Punjab, Thaila kanjar’s name won’t be included” (Manto, p 226).



In “An Episode from 1919”, Manto employs an “historical emplotment”, the form of narrative that impacts our understanding of how certain events unfolded in the past by centring on the personal sacrifice of Tufail to reflect the broader national trauma of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, this narrative choice highlights the senseless loss and the profound impact of colonial violence on individual lives. By customizing the historical atrocities through Tufail's story, Manto invites readers to participate with history on an intimate level, contesting impersonal historical accounts. Furthermore, Manto's narrative approach can be seen as a commentary on the act of historiography itself as he is recounting pre and post events leading to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. By concentrating on a character marginalized by both colonial and indigenous societal structures, Manto analyses the selective nature of narratives and historical memory that are either valorised or marginalized. This aligns with the assertion that history is not an unbiased recounting of facts but is sculpted by narrative choices that exhibit worldviews and biases. The story's depiction of social inversion and its narrative construction offers a nuanced critique of colonial and societal structures, while also inviting reflection on the ways history is remembered and told. Through Tufail's tragic yet heroic arc, Manto narrates a historical moment but also challenges readers to reconsider the narratives that define honour, heroism, and historical memory.

The next story gives us an insight to a post-Partition setting on the border between India and Pakistan and is called “The Dog of Titwal”. The previous stories dealt with different facets of Partition in context of its timeline: “Toba Tek Singh,” like “The Dog of Titwal” is set after Partition. “Open it” and “Colder than Ice” are set during the onset of Partition, while “It happened in 1919” describes the pre-partition era. ‘The Dog of Titwal’ is a sad and darkly satirical short story, in which, through a deceptively simple narrative involving a stray dog, Manto critiques the absurdity and cruelty of Partition. In the mountainous border region of Titwal, two army posts, one Indian, the other Pakistani, face off across enemy lines. A stray dog begins wandering back and forth between the two camps. At first, the soldiers find it amusing. They give the dog different names: the Indian soldiers call him “Jhun Jhun”, while the Pakistani soldiers name him “Shun shun”. However, their amusement turns into suspicion and hostility. Each side begins to see the dog as an enemy agent, a potential spy, or a symbol of betrayal. Eventually, the soldiers, representatives of both nations, decide to shoot the dog, whose only crime was crossing a man-made border. Manto lays bare the pointlessness of armed conflict through the fate of an innocent dog. “It



soon became a game between the two soldiers, with the dog running around in circles in a state of great terror... The poor bugger has been martyred. He died a dog's death" (Manto, p 266).

The creature's innocent wandering between camps, oblivious to national boundaries, becomes a tragicomic commentary on the irrationality of human conflict. What begins as playful interaction spirals into deadly paranoia, illustrating how nationalist fervour strips even ordinary acts of their innocence. The soldier's transformation from amused observers to ruthless executioner mirrors how easily war debases individuals and turns the absurd into the norm. In choosing a dog as a creature unable to comprehend human divisions as his protagonist, "Even the dogs will now have to decide if they are Indian or Pakistani" (Manto, p 266), Manto highlights the absurd theatre of war, where loyalty, betrayal, and enmity are projected onto the most blameless beings. This can be a metaphor or critique of how the masses at both sides of the border were coerced to migrate and this senseless displacement led to unprecedented murder and brutality. In "The Dog of Titwal", Manto constructs a multivocal narrative that critiques the absurdity of post-Partition violence, revealing how competing ideological discourses nationalism, militarism, and humanism intersect and collapse in the figure of the innocent dog, whose death exposes the moral void at the heart of historical conflict:

The brave never run away from the battle. Go forward and complete your mission... It soon became a game between the two soldiers, with the dog running in circles in a state of great terror. Both Himmat khan and Harnam Singh were laughing boisterously... shot him dead (Manto, p 266).

Manto's story can be seen as emplotted tragically: it begins with a playful, even comic scene but culminates in senseless death. The collapse of meaning in this story exemplifies what White identifies as "the historian's (or storyteller's) unavoidable imposition of narrative structure onto chaotic human events" (2001, p 274), Yet Manto ironically exposes the emptiness of such structures when applied to lived horrors. Manto's narrative resists any monologic (single-voiced, authoritative) reading. In "The Dog of Titwal", no single moral, nationalistic, or humanistic interpretation can dominate. Through "The Dog of Titwal", Manto enacts a powerful dialogic critique of war and nationalism. Ultimately, Manto's story is not just about a dog caught in a crossfire; it is a meta-narrative that not only tells a story but also



reflects on the nature of storytelling, the construction of meaning, and the absurdities inherent in human conflicts such as war and nationalism (Usmani, et al, 2020). Neither the Indian nor the Pakistani soldiers are fully demonized or idealized; instead, their behaviours are shown as tragically human marked by fear, suspicion, and absurdity. Even the dog cannot be anchored to one meaning; it is both an innocent victim and a contested symbol. Thus, the story refuses to offer the reader a single, coherent political or moral takeaway, embracing multiplicity over certainty.

The last story “The Price of Freedom”, is set in the pre-Partition era and examines personal loss that stemmed from this monumental event. Manto dissects the cost of political independence not through triumphalist narratives but through intimate portrayals of personal loss, betrayal, and moral collapse. He shifts the focus from grand historical figures to ordinary people whose lives are irrevocably upended by the macro narrative of freedom. The plot recounts the story of Ghulam Ali and how he became the face of revolution after the Jallianwala bagh massacre when the anti-government sentiments were high.

Jallianwala Bagh had become the hub of the movement of civil disobedience launched by the Congress... His fame spread like wildfire in the city of Amritsar... The movement needed people like Ghulam Ali who would be seen for a few days in Jallianwala Bagh, make a speech or two and then duly get arrested (Manto, p 231-232).

Ghulam Ali amidst this political upheaval falls in love with Nigar, both of whom are Congress workers in Amritsar. Their marriage is solemnized by a Baba who, though a religious figure, is deeply involved in the politics of the time; every major event requires his approval. During the ceremony, the Baba preaches that a marriage based on true sentiments must be free of lust. Influenced by this sentiment, Ghulam Ali vows that they will not live as husband and wife until India gains independence. Soon Ghulam Ali is imprisoned and after he returns from prison the fervour has faded and so have his emotions.

The world outside had changed too. Spun cotton, tricolour flags and revolutionary slogans had lost their power. The tents had disappeared from Jallianwala Bagh...Politics no longer sent the blood cruising through my veins as it used to (Manto, p 244).



At the end, due to all the emotional burn out, and owing to their initial promise of renouncing intimacy and the instability pertaining to social conditions, “The next morning Ghulam Ali was taken in because he had threatened to overthrow the Raj and had declared publicly that he would father no children as long as India was ruled by a foreign power” (Manto, 240), makes both Ghulam Ali and Nigar, walk out of this marriage. Thus, by penning this narrative Manto critiques the celebratory accounts of Partition and Independence exposing its devastating effects on society's members. The narratives explore human dimension of the pre-partition era where several individuals like Ghulam Ali and Nigar were swept by a patriotic fever and end up sacrificing their happiness and well-being, only to find themselves disenchanted at the end.

Ghulam Ali's ultimate disenchantment after witnessing the strategic compromises made between the British Raj and nationalist leaders unveils the flawed glorification of political movements, revealing that even freedom was negotiated at the cost of the idealism of common people. Abid and Mushtaq in their article have also explored the above facet of independence in Manto's works: “Manto also deconstructs the historical perspective that elevates these freedom fighters and illustrates that they were just being used as pawns in the game of chess by the powerful.” (2020, p 11) Once all the fervour subsides, the emotional and social brunt emerges as a strong force that disrupted the contours of normalcy for several individuals. Furthermore, the figure of Baba illustrates another layer of power. Although presented outwardly as an ascetic, Baba is deeply implicated in political machinery; no political movement in Punjab can begin without his approval.

Although on the face of it Babaji had nothing to do with politics, it was no open secret that no political movement in the Punjab machinery could begin or end without his clearance. To the government machinery he was an unsolved puzzle (Manto, p 235).

Manto critiques the historical portrayal of religious leaders as selfless supporters of independence. In a sharp deconstruction of appearances, Manto contests the blend of ritualistic piety with true virtue, noting that ritual without inner moral substance is meaningless. As he writes, one can be “virtuous without having your head shaved, without donning saffron robes, or without covering yourself with ash” (Manto, p 236). Manto's narrative structure is inherently dialogic and encapsulates elements of



heteroglossia: different voices, colonial, nationalist, religious, and cynical, collide but do not synthesize into a harmonious whole. His stories reject the teleological arc of progress, instead staging conversations where conflicting ideologies coexist in unresolved tension. The very title of “The Price of Freedom” is deeply ironic, a double-voiced discourse: “freedom” is simultaneously invoked with reverence and undercut by bitterness and scepticism. Freedom over the course of the story has several connotations, both personal and collective. It is amalgamated in the acts of political parties who are on a quest to secure an independent homeland and encapsulates individuals’ macro and micro levels of struggles who give up the freedom to live their own lives or own their needs. For instance, Ghulam Ali is imprisoned for seven years and must give up physical intimacy. Thus, “The Price of Freedom” becomes a work not of national celebration but of mourning, irony, and unresolved historical critique, a profound ethical engagement with the wreckage that independence left behind.

Manto’s characters' speech is marked by heteroglossia, a multiplicity of conflicting voices that reflect fractured identities and ideological dissonances (Bakhtain, p 270). Instead of a singular nationalistic tone, Manto crafts a cacophony of perspectives, capturing the psychological fragmentation wrought by Partition through his canvas of short stories. Manto structures his narratives not as triumphant resolutions but as anti-climaxes where independence arrives not as a moment of collective fulfilment, but of mass disillusionment. His stories, such as “Toba Tek Singh”, “The Price of Freedom”, “It Happened in 1919”, “Open it”, “Cold Meat” and “The Dog of Titwal” reveal how political liberation for the nation coincides with individual madness, violence, and disorientation (Pritchett, 1994). By focusing on figures excluded from heroic nationalist history, the insane, the voiceless, and the displaced, Manto exposes the narrative silences, showing whose suffering gets erased when triumph becomes the dominant mode of history-writing.

Manto's short stories emerge as complex, multi-voiced narratives that resist singular interpretations by foregrounding diverse perspectives and exposing the constructed nature of national and communal identities they challenge “monolithic narratives” of history (Ben et al, 2013, p 295). Monolithic narratives of histories illustrate events in a simplistic linear manner marginalizing the multifaceted experiences of individuals and communities. In Manto's short stories, these monolithic narratives of histories



are examined through his nuanced interpretation of the Partition of India in 1947. This approach in turn lends insight to the constructed nature of communal and national identities, highlighting that history is not a fixed uniform account but rather a tapestry woven from several, often opposing, voices. Manto not only documents the human cost of Partition but also invites readers to engage in an ongoing dialogue about identity, memory, and the narratives that shape our comprehension of history. The next chapter will examine the second case study, which is oral testimonies.



4 Case study two: Oral testimonies of Partition from *Anam Zakaria's The Footprints of Partition*

This chapter will analyze oral testimonies as recorded in Anam Zakaria's *The Footprints of Partition*, focusing on how individual narratives resist, align or reframe prevalent historiographical accounts. The emphasis will be on how Zakaria curates these stories through narrative framing, contextual anchoring and affective description of how the interviewees themselves deliver their memories, often blending, nostalgia, emotion and silence. These testimonies will be analyzed not just for what they recount, but how they recount it. Moreover, this chapter explores the relationship between oral testimony and fiction, recognizing their shared function: both represent distinct yet complementary narrative modes that enable us to comprehend the intricacies pertaining to master-narratives of Partition. While fiction draws on imagination and symbolic structures, and testimony stems from lived memory, both serve to pluralize history. Thus, reading oral and fictional narratives side by side validates a multivocal approach to Partition historiography- an approach that foregrounds complexity and contradiction, in the understanding of the past.

These oral testimonies were collected by Zakaria when she was heading the Oral History project at the Citizens Archive of Pakistan. Oral history serves as a counter-narrative by recording firsthand accounts, memories, and emotions that present a more nuanced comprehension of historical events, challenging those who had narrated a nationalistic "emplotment" of historical events (White, 1973; White, 1990). This methodology places personal experiences as a cornerstone in comprehending historical narratives. There are several initiatives that have emerged over the years to preserve the voices of those impacted by historical events. One such renowned initiative is the 1947 Partition Archive which was founded by Dr. Guneeta Singh Bhalla and intends to preserve marginalized voices. 1947 Partition Archive records as well as preserves oral testimonies of those impacted by the 1947 Partition of India. Having a collection of more than 10,000 interviews across a wide region, these interviews serve as a repository of memories that effectively contest officially state-



sanctioned histories. Furthermore, these archives provide a window into the personal testimonies of individuals who endured the impacts of Partition, the fragmented and heterogeneous realities which when analysed resist simple or nationalist emplotments. Moreover, these archives function as platforms for not only integrating but preserving marginalized voices, to ensure a more holistic and inclusive understanding of historical events encompassing the intricacies of human experiences. As a result of these personal stories, we gain access to diverse realities otherwise suppressed or homogenized in dominant narratives, enabling a richer understanding of the tumultuous period surrounding 1947.

In Pakistan since 2007, oral history initiatives like those conducted by The Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP) and other South Asian memory projects have actively commenced the collection of Partition stories. CAP is a non-profit organization working to preserve Pakistan's cultural and historical heritage and intends to be an inclusive repository by incorporating diverse narratives. One of its leading initiatives has been the Oral History Project, that intends to archive, collect and disseminate personal stories from individuals who witnessed this event. The project has a unique and broad focus on the personal stories from Partition survivors, early migrants, and key figures in the country's development across various sectors. The recorded interviews encapsulate the intricacies pertaining to identity, migration, and memory often marginalized by official histories. The Oral History Project is insightful in the context of attempting to democratize history by providing a platform where individuals from different backgrounds and regions can voice their testimonies. These narratives are preserved in physical and digital formats and circulated through publications, exhibitions and school outreach programs, so that the future generations can have access to the multifaceted lived experiences of those that continue to shape Pakistan's story. Emerging from the broader domain of South Asian memory studies, these efforts aim to make history "multivocal" liberated and voiced by the people themselves. While often positioned in contrast to official state histories, oral accounts do not merely subvert dominant narratives; they can also overlap with, complicate, or even confirm them. The distinction, then, lies not in opposition but in perspective and tone. For example, when I interviewed Salman Tahir (2024), Head of Oral History Project at the Citizens Archive of Pakistan, he recounted a story of a survivor from the archive which he has personally collected. In the story the interviewee had recounted her journey of reaching Pakistan and witnessing people eat sand out of love



for the “new soil”. This story underscores how memory blends trauma with symbolic national identity, reflecting both personal conviction and collective mythmaking.

In the introduction of *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia*, Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar (2007) contests the traditional comprehension of Partition of 1947 as a singular event; rather she presents it as an intricate process that she terms as “Long Partition” that very much extended beyond the division by the British into India and Pakistan. Zamindar argues that the formation of nation-states was not a linear or simplistic outcome of decolonization, but rather these were ambivalent decisions that continue to mould national identities, paving the way for mass displacement and intentionally constructing national differences in regions where identities were previously intertwined. The story of Ghulam Ali, as stated in the introduction of Zamindar’s book, highlights the “Muslim question”- the dilemma of Muslims who found themselves on the “wrong” side of the newly drawn borders and gives us an insight to the various facets of how oral history operates. How stories of various individuals travel, become symbolic and lend insight to difficult questions. It is rather interesting that Ghulam Ali is compared to Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh’s” protagonist (one of the short stories the first case study analysed as well) whose story captures the same ambiguity that looms pertaining to belonging and identity.

Ghulam Ali, barbed wire on either side of him, is the quintessentially Manto-esque figure: like Toba Tek Singh in Saadat Hasan Manto’s best known Urdu short story of Partition’s “madness”, he invokes all the aporias of belonging in a cartography of nation-states. Where indeed is India? Where is Pakistan? Who is an Indian? Who is a Pakistani? (Zamindar, p 2).

Zamindar studies how these individuals traversed their identities amid the administrative processes which led to marginalization. By integrating oral histories of families divided and swept amid this notion of literal and figurative belonging implying place of birth and destined abode owing to religious affiliations (which this case study also discusses while deliberating upon the stories of Muhammad Boota, Ashiq Naseer, Viqar, Shireen, Amy and Tina), Zamindar also highlights the lived experiences of ordinary people. Hence, this approach shows the intricacies of belonging, citizenship, and identity in the aftermath of Partition, confronting the dominant narratives that often overlook these nuanced perspectives. Oral history projects such as CAP counter this uniformity of Partition narratives by creating a



space for marginalized voices which refers to as “the drone of silence” (Zamindar, p 3). Oral testimonies often resonate or align the same national or dominant outlooks, however at the same time they resist and reframe them. This inherently dynamic dialogic relationship between national history and personal memory underlines the revelatory richness of oral history. Oral histories stand apart for their authenticity and emotional immediacy. Salman Tahir rightly notes that these stories are told “without adulteration or embellishment”, providing a rare window into personal truth.

Eric Ketelaar, a prominent archival theorist, reconceptualizes archives not as “static repositories of historical facts, but as dynamic, socially constructed processes” (p 133). He views archives not just as repositories of documents, but rather he considers the “act of archiving” encompassing what gets excluded, included, described and forgotten” (p 135). This process is impacted by cultural, political and institutional forces. Hence, the process of archiving becomes a site of continuous negotiation between forgetting and remembering. This process assumes an identity of its own in the bigger picture of Partition or gendered violence, where what is suppressed, stifled, or left undocumented becomes historically substantial.

Anam Zakaria's *The Footprints of Partition* examines the 1947 Partition of India by employing the lens of oral histories. As the head of the Oral history Project, Zakaria draws from her extensive work with the Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP). The book analyses personal narratives demonstrating the human facet to these experiences behind the historic Partition of India in 1947. Zakaria's book becomes a testament to the relevance of oral testimonies in capturing the multifaceted realities of Partition. The book is structured around the recollection of 17 interviews and conversations conducted over the span of several years with people from Pakistan and India, also including accounts of second and third-generation descendants of Partition survivors. These narratives were collected through field visits at the time Zakaria was working for CAP. Zakaria carefully selects these accounts to reflect a diverse array of perspectives across regions, religions, genders, and generations in turn ensuring that the book resists a singular or nationalistic interpretation of history. The narratives that are a part of the book shed light into the intricacies of individual experiences beyond official histories. As Urvashi Butalia notes, Zakaria's work “gives life to the dry documents of history” (2015, p 1a), underlining the value of lived experiences in comprehending historical events. Furthermore, the book focuses on how memories of



Partition are transmitted across generations. Zakaria's interviews capture the trauma of displacement and violence which continues to impact on the descendants of those who experienced Partition, thus in turn moulding their identities and perceptions. By incorporating diverse personal accounts, Zakaria challenges monolithic narratives of Partition. Her work illustrates a tapestry of experiences that contest official histories, advocating for a more inclusive comprehension of the past. Furthermore, her interaction with individuals across borders fosters dialogue and understanding.

Viqar's story

In one of the first oral testimonies presented in Anam Zakaria's *The Footprints of Partition*, we encounter the narrative of Viqar, who was 13 years old at the time of Partition and forced to leave his family's 350-year-old haveli in Meerut, India, when they migrated to Pakistan. This testimony is deliberately positioned at the beginning of Zakaria's book to foreground the deeply emotional and mnemonic dimensions of displacement. Zakaria draws on interviews conducted through her work with the Citizens Archive of Pakistan, framing Viqar's story not only as a personal recollection but also as an emblematic account of memory, loss, and identity. As Viqar recounts, the relationships his family held with Meerut "could not be eradicated overnight." He remembers his visit in 1956, ten years after Partition, describing how his Hindu and Sikh neighbors in Meerut clung to him, weeping and asking after his mother and sisters: "They were my people, my home. We had lived together for so long. How could we forget each other?" (Zakaria, 2015, p. 2). This narrative reflects what Maurice Halbwachs defines as "collective memory" the socially situated frameworks within which individual memory takes shape. Viqar's story is not just about personal trauma but about how a whole community's memories persist across borders and time. The mango orchards in Meerut, still tended by Hindus and Sikhs, continue to generate income for his family in Pakistan, demonstrating the persistence of "co-dependence" and "multicultural dynamics" even amid nationalist rupture (Zakaria, p. 2–3). Zakaria identifies these recollections as "an idealization of the past," (Zakaria, p. 2) where memory becomes a form of resistance against the erasure imposed by official historiography. Such accounts serve as lieux de mémoire "places of memory" in Pierre Nora's terms - where seemingly intangible elements like stories and shared labor become mnemonic anchors. Moreover, Viqar's reflection on the pre-Partition fluidity of identity versus the "crystallization" of identities post-Partition exemplifies



what Jeffrey Olick distinguishes as the tension between “collected” and “collective” memory (Olick et al., 2011, p. 24). In this light, Zakaria’s project is a critical intervention into dominant historical narratives, privileging what Land (2023) calls “counter-memory” a practice that contests the “idealized interpretations of pasts” propagated by nation-states (p. 1015). Viqar’s and others that will follow, provide an “emancipatory endeavour” (Land, 2023, p. 1014), not by resolving the trauma of Partition, but by preserving its complexity, contradictions, and emotional truth. These truths within this case study will emerge through the different voices emanating from oral testimonies.

Muhammad Boota & Ashiq Naseer

The oral testimonies of Muhammad Boota and Ashiq Naseer, as collected in Anam Zakaria’s *The Footprints of Partition*, vividly exemplify the function of personal memory as a counter-archive to state-sanctioned historiography. Muhammad Boota’s story unfolds in the village of Sheikhpura, Pakistan, where Zakaria interviews him under the searing South Asian sun, a sensory detail that anchors the reader in place and time. Boota, originally from Amritsar, fell in love with a Sikh woman in Kasur. Even after Partition, he continued to cross the border to find her until the Indo-Pak border hardened in 1965. His enduring attachment is captured poignantly when his nephew explains to Zakaria, “a part of his uncle’s heart belongs to India” (Zakaria, 2015, p. 17). Such recollections defy the dominant historical emplotment of Partition as a clear-cut rupture or an act of necessary separation. Instead, they offer emotional continuity, a persistent interweaving of love, identity, and place. These stories align with the theory of collective memory, where personal recollections are shaped within social contexts and become part of a shared framework. In this way, Boota’s narrative becomes a form of counter-memory, resisting nationalist narratives and foregrounding affective, intercommunal ties that official histories marginalize.

Ashiq Naseer’s story, like his uncle’s, underscores the persistent interconnections between communities long after 1947. Living near Mahiwala Road in Sheikhpura, Ashiq points Zakaria toward a centuries-old mela (festival) held near the India-Pakistan border. The event draws both Indians and Pakistanis who gather to pray at a *mazaar* [shrine], evoking a collective religious-cultural memory that contradicts the contentious logic of Partition. Zakaria reflects on “how paradoxical this is for someone like herself, born in the 1980s, who grew up on narratives of religious



separation and communal animosity” (Zakaria, 2015, p. 21). Further deepening this sense of shared identity is Ashiq’s father, Saraf Din, who was adopted by a Sikh family before Partition and remembers his four Sikh brothers “Sucha Singh, Acher Singh, Bajna Singh, and Khoja Singh” (Zakaria, 2015, p. 22).

Moreover, “The Sikhs family was my father’s real family, the Sikh gentleman made sure my father was safely sent to Pakistan” (Zakaria, p 23). This narrative not only startles Zakaria but the reader as well because the commonly circulated perception is that the ethnic and religious divide was the reason behind the prevalent discord. Saraf ud Din was fifty-seven at the time of Partition and he looked just like a Sikh “wearing a pagri and matching turban, just like his brothers” (p 23). As Zakaria continues, “when communities intermingled with each other, their identities got diluted in the process (Zakaria, p 23). Ashiq as we are informed, like many people living on both sides of the border, it is not prejudiced because for him the divide has not been real owing to all his encounters- stories from his father and his interaction with people on other sides of the border. Saraf Din momentarily at the mela met his family “Instantly recognizing each other, they tightly embraced, tears streaming down their face” (Zakaria, p 23).

Ashaq Naseer feels a strong sense of connection to India due to the bond his father shared with India- it almost being an extension of his identity. However, due to the border control issues and rivalry, travelling has been almost impossible. “Bara dil karta hai jane ka, bohat mohabat hai Hindustan sa [I really want to visit India, I feel a lot of love for India and its people]- his eyes moist” (Zakaria, p 240). Ashiq has tried to keep in touch with his father’s foster family. However, he says that after attempting to write letters, when he received them in Gurmukhi and tried to get them translated from the city and wrote a response, however he did not hear back from them maybe because they had changed their address. Ashiq refers it to as “imposed division” (Zakaria, p 24). The same sentiments are reflected in another story Zakaria recounts of a man who had travelled from the Indian side to Multan as his mother had wished to see or return to her ancestral home. In a way to honour her memory he was taking a brick from that home to place on her grave. Hence for both these “other” is a symbol of love and loss, the border only serving as a physical impediment although both these men felt immense love almost reverence for places on the other side of the border.



These testimonies challenge the official historiography by positioning memory as both an emotional and political act. Such stories serve as counter-archives that recover suppressed intercommunal solidarities. These narratives also reflect what Avishek Parui describes as “slow memory” emergent through intimate, everyday practices and familial spaces rather than grand historical events (Parui, 2024, p. 725). In resisting closure and coherence, these stories exemplify the polyphonic nature of Partition memory. They are not isolated recollections but part of a broader cultural memory, shared and sustained by communities to contest the monologic emplotment found in traditional nationalist archives (Bakhtin, 1981; White, 1973; Olick et al., 2011). Through them, Partition is reframed not as a national achievement or tragedy alone, but as an ongoing affective legacy marked by love, loss, and cross-border kinship.

Shireen and Amy

The next testimonies are by two sisters who reside in Lahore and belonged to the Parsi community that is a “dwindling Zoroastrian community in Pakistan” (Zakaria, p 55). They reminisce about how their father was a true Lahori at heart and no matter what would never move to any other place leaving behind his forefather’s home and their mother who was from Bombay, India having married their father “also made this her home” (Zakaria, p 55). Both sisters who share an age difference of twelve years, having a different affinity for Lahore as Amy recalls that her father at the onset of Partition had thought “that the politics of the state had nothing to do with us; that whether a Muslim or Hindu government was in place, we Parsis would remain unaffected” (Zakaria, p 56). These sentiments also remind us of the how Bishan Singh is baffled by the uncertainty his native village faces in “Toba Tek Singh”. Shireen the elder of the sister’s reminiscences of a pre-Partition Lahore:

It was a multicultural society back then. I used to have Hindu, Muslim and Christian class fellows at the Cathedral School and no one quite though in terms of communities. Everyone was human first, that was what was important. Shireen tells me (Zakaria, p 57).

The very fabric of this multiplicity is manipulated at the onset of the Partition and the mindlessness of this communal violence has been captured by Manto in his short



stories and discussed at length in the first case study. Shireen, Amy and several others would become “a part of the changing landscape of and character of Lahore ... here in the Paris of the East as Lahore used to called” (Zakaria, p 57). The sisters’ reminiscence of the annual journey they used to take in summers to their maternal grandmother’s home which consisted of two nights and three days. They recall how the journey was comfortable, and they would stop at various stations on their way, “how wonderful it was just looking the window and stopping at stations” (Zakaria, p 58). They recall fond memories of the city of Bombay, how it was a thriving, beautiful and peaceful place where multiple cultures thrived. It was a place their mother had emotional ties with till the very end; however, Partition adversely impacted them:

Our mother felt a wedge had been built between her early life in Bombay and her life in Lahore. Of course, she eventually reconciled with living here but emotionally she was always there, in Bombay, even until she died in 2004 (Zakaria, p 59).

The sisters talk about how their mother became a Pakistani overnight, and I am reminded of the Indian lawyer from the story “Toba Tek Singh,” analyzed in the first case study, who even despite losing his memory does not forget his lover and laments that now she belongs to another country due to the borders drawn at Partition. “Her home, her childhood, her ties were now in another land, a land which could not become foreign despite its best attempts to sperate her, to deny, to cast her out” (Zakaria, p 59). This sense of being uprooted and declared a foreigner overnight resurfaces several times within fictional and oral testimonies. Shireen further recounts how one of the music examinations she had been tirelessly studying for, got rescheduled in Bombay due to the discord of Partition and she travelled with one of her family friends to take the exam. The train journey she took was rather terrifying, all the pleasant memories had now been replaced with fright: “Getting across alive was the only thing that mattered... theirs was a lucky train, one that reached the destination unharmed...None of us knew we would get there alive...” (Zakaria, p 61). The sisters’ story is a testament to how all people from all segments and walks of society irrespective of their status and religion were deeply impacted by the Partition of 1947: “Those were troubled times. There was so much misery around us that it was difficult to continue our lives... but we all had to” (Zakaria, p 62). Shireen later went



on to secure a scholarship and had a thriving career in Lahore. However, a few years after the Partition her life is disrupted again when she must go to India and become an Indian national as the government there was confiscating properties, “as the governments of Pakistan and India began to freeze - non-Pakistani and non-Indian properties respectively” (Zakaria, 63). Amy was young, Shireen being the eldest had to take off to safeguard the family’s property. Her career and life had to be put on hold. She becomes emotional while recalling all the details. The emotional toll such decisions had on the lives of the individuals on both sides of the border was catastrophic:

What an irony, I think. Just as their mother had to become a Pakistani, while Bombay burnt in her heart, Shireen had to become an Indian, far away from her cherished Lahore. Both mother and daughter had been struck with the same fate; they were ruptured from their families, forced to take up a new nationality, to have their identities moulded, no questions asked, no choices given (Zakaria, p 63-64).

These ruptured identities within these oral testimonies shed light on how themes of displacement, longing and loss presented are an archive within themselves, the trauma and pain that is deeply embedded within oral testimonies is neither mentioned nor deliberated within the state-sanctioned histories.

Tina Vachani

The last oral testimony examined is Tina’s story which opens with a moving depiction of separation, almost as if one is watching a movie or reading a novel.

I was standing right across from him. I could see my father wave at me while he pleaded with the Pakistani officials to talk to the Indians, to let me come just a little forward. But they would not allow it. This was the last time I saw him, from behind the Indian gate at Wagah (Zakaria, p 42).

Tina was separated from her parents at the age of fourteen. Being born in Karachi, she had Indian roots, “her history and heritage scattered between the two lands” (Zakaria, p 42) The border which was to serve a demarcation for the boundary between the two countries has now become a sight of contention for people rendering them homeless due to the travelling ban.



It had been years since I had seen my family...I was desperate to catch a glimpse of them, to hug my mother and father, to sit with them for just a little while. We had tired for six or seven years to get a visa, for them to come to India or me to go to Pakistan, but nothing had worked out. The meeting at the border was our last resort (Zakaria, p 45).

The absurdity of Partition becomes more pronounced within oral testimonies in the form of questions pertaining to identity and border, suggesting how several people's lives were completely dismantled. As Zakaria continues her conversation with the people, the cultural memory that emerges is one that denotes multiplicity. The multiple voices within the fictional and factual testimonies intend to explore several questions that remain unanswered.

The fluidity in context of travelling and identity on both sides of the pre-partition border undergoes a tragic emplotment post-partition. Tina recounts her vibrant childhood in Karachi, and the lack of border control, "crisscrossing ever so easy" (Zakaria, p 45). The nostalgia for a pluralistic society provides a critique of the ethnic and religious divided leaders on both sides of the border. The memories from these oral testimonies are instrumental in comprehending the fragmented facets of the Partition narratives. These oral testimonies fill in the gaps, silences and contextualize the bigger picture for those who did not witness the event but feel its reverberations up to the present day.

how wonderful and vibrant Karachi was back then... it was so cosmopolitan, with people from so many different communities. There were many other non-Muslims, Gujaratis, Sindhis... we would celebrate Diwali and other Hindu festivals, and my Muslim friends would come ... they would light fireworks and diyas with me...I never thought much about being a minority. We have seen those days (Zakaria, p 46).

At the commencement of the 1971 war due to fall of Dhaka, Tina who had been visiting her grandparents in New Delhi, was stuck there for a long period: "It was a terrible state. I did not know what was going to happen. The last thing is I wanted to be a victim of war, to be uprooted from family and trapped away from home for seven to eight years. I just could not go back..." (Zakaria, p 47). At the time when the war broke out Tina was fourteen, she could not go back to her parents and to stay in India



had to start her process of getting registered: "...she had to apply for naturalization process to become an Indian..." (Zakaria, p 49), which was time consuming and tedious too. Her parents thought it was better for her to stay in India as it would secure her prospects due to her identity and now on the other side of the border in - Pakistan she had become a minority. She recounts that she had come with the intention of spending a vacation; however, her life turned upside down. She missed her family, the warmth of the people back in Pakistan and simply her home. Visa troubles and her dad's heart condition did not allow for a union to happen. Even at the border her father was able to get special permission from the Pakistani side however on the Indian side the guards did not allow her to cross a certain line and hence she could not talk to her father and after a few months "my father had a heart attack and died" (Zakaria, p 52). Tina got her passport a few years later, and now she resides with her husband and sons in New Delhi. The border within some of the oral testimonies hence becomes metonym for separation and rupture:

of distance and divide. No political reasoning and policy can rationalize the pain caused to Tina and hundreds of other Pakistanis and Indians at the border. Their void cannot be filled by any diplomatic explanation or historical justifications...this border which prevented her from stepping forward, from embracing one last time (Zakaria, p 53).

Tina's story ends with her finding peace knowing that Pakistan is not more precious than India, and they both have their own value: "...She does not want just India or Pakistan; she wants both and both want her". Tina seems to have found the best of both worlds have a long journey. But for several divided families the questions remain unanswered whether they found similar peace, "some normalcy in the midst of the absurdity of Partition" (Zakaria, p 54).

Oral history both as a method and counter-narrative, surfaces as an integral tool for reclaiming the fragmented, silences and affect-laden experiences of those who witnessed the Partition of India in 1947. In contrast to dominant historical narratives established through textbooks and state-sponsored commemorations, oral testimonies highlight the plurality of memory and the detailed textures of lived experience. As shown through the work of scholars such as Indira Chowdhury, Anam Zakaria, Vazira Zamindar, and Urvashi Butalia, oral histories confront the one-dimensionality, coherence, and heroism often embedded in official accounts. They in turn



democratize the historical process by centring marginal voices specifically those of women, religious minorities, and displaced individuals whose experiences have long been transferred to the margin. The conceptual frameworks of “slow memory” and “interstitial identities” put forth by Avishek Parui illustrate the temporal, emotional, and narrative complexity intrinsic in these recollections. These memories rather than adhering to neat historical arcs are nonlinear, contradictory, and deeply performative. Resultantly, they resist closure and demand recognition as supplementary records as well as epistemologically significant forms of knowing and remembering.

The oral history projects function as valuable repositories of oral testimonies. Furthermore, Zakria’s work also lends an enriching perspective to the historiography of Partition, calling for a reassessment of state sanctioned histories devoid of the complexities of human experience and in turn for a broader understanding of the lasting impact of Partition on individual lives and collective memory. These projects collecting oral testimonies serve as dynamic platforms for historical recuperation, intergenerational dialogue, and cross-border empathy. To conclude, oral history through the employment of a plethora of voices reexamines what constitutes historical truth, blurring the frontiers between memory and history, voice and silence, trauma and identity. By foregrounding the deeply personal and fragmented testimonies, it calls for a more insightful, wide-ranging, and human-centred historiography, one that does justice to the nuances of Partition not as a singular rupture, but as a continuing and multilayered legacy.



5 Conclusion

The Partition of India in 1947 remains as a permanent scar on the collective consciousness of South Asia illustrating a literal and figurative divide not only of the land, but also deep psychological, emotional, and cultural fractures that have persisted across generations. This thesis has explored the interplay of fictional narratives and oral testimonies in comprehending the multidimensional legacy of this historical rupture. By putting together Saadat Hasan Manto's selected short stories with oral testimonies collected by Anam Zakaria in *The Footprints of Partition*, it has become more obvious that the memory of Partition is not monolithic nor linear. Instead, it is emotionally charged, fragmented, and polyphonic, repeatedly recreated across generations as well as geographies. Hence, the concluding reflection of this thesis seeks to synthesize the key insights drawn from the narrative forms, theoretical frameworks, and case studies employed throughout.

Manto's short stories illustrate what this thesis referred to as “testimonial fiction” (Saint, 2012). In stories like “Toba Tek Singh”, “Khol Do”, and “Colder Than Ice”, Manto avoids narrative closure, offering instead unresolved and broken, stories that mirror the psychological disintegration caused by Partition. His narratives withstand dominant state narratives that seek to cast the Partition of India in 1947 in a coherent arc. By employing multiple voices, Manto's stories become an archive of subaltern voices: the violated, the mad, the forgotten, and offers insight into emotional truth that contests, complements, and functions as a counter narrative to the official historical record. These fictional accounts, while not firsthand histories, serve as powerful mediations of identity and trauma, revealing how Partition continues to be remembered and processed. In parallel, the oral testimonies from *The Footprints of Partition* affirm that memory is not merely a private endeavour but a public and political act. The stories of Viqar, Ashiq Naseer, Shireen, and Tina among others illustrate how survivors and their descendants grapple with ruptured identities, cross-border longing, and inherited trauma. These testimonies emphasize memory as a counter-archive, one that refuses the neat emplotment of textbooks or state commemorations. They do not merely supplement dominant histories; they subvert, complicate, and at times dismantle them. Their narrative structure is often nonlinear



and marked by silences, emotional ruptures, and performative recollection, aligning with what scholars like Hirsch describe as “postmemory”, and what Parui conceptualizes as ‘slow memory’. They demand to be listened to not for historical detail alone, but for emotional resonance, for the right to remember differently, and for the right to remember at all.

Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence* and Devika Chawla’s *Home, Uprooted* emphasize the importance of such oral testimonies. In Chawla’s ethnographic reflections, her grandmother Biji articulates the deep contradiction embedded in the experience of Partition: “Desh to hame mil gayaa angrezoon sey, par humara ghar chala gaya [We got our country from the British, but we lost our home]” (Chawla, p. 5). This statement captures the conflict between political independence and personal displacement -a theme echoed across oral testimonies and even within Manto’s story, “It happened in 1919”. Fragmentation, as emphasized by Harrington, Parui, Zakaria, and Butalia, is not a narrative flaw but rather the most authentic form through which Partition is remembered. Trauma disrupts linear timelines, and therefore, oral histories unfold in disjointed, repetitive, and often contradictory fragments. In Chawla’s and Butalia’s works, incompleteness is embraced: silence, pauses, contradictions, and non-verbal expressions are not limitations but integral elements of testimony. These narrative strategies align with memory studies’ recognition of the non-linear and performative nature of trauma recollection.

The convergence of fictional and oral narratives reveals several recurring thematic patterns. First, both forms resist closure. Whether through Manto’s unresolved endings or Zakaria’s emotionally charged interviews, these stories depict trauma as an ongoing event, not confined to a past moment. Second, both narrative forms enable silenced voices to surface. Women, religious minorities, and socially marginalized individuals find space in these stories to articulate experiences often omitted from official records. Third, both modes highlight the absurdity and arbitrariness of borders, as symbolized in the characters of Bishan Singh or the experiences of displaced individuals like Tina or Muhammad Boota. Such accounts reveal that Partition was not simply a political act but a deeply human tragedy. The theoretical frameworks employed have been instrumental in dissecting these themes. These theories reveal that historical events like Partition are never simply told; they are constructed, mediated, and ideologically framed. In this sense, the very act of



storytelling becomes a site of a struggle political act that challenges dominant epistemologies and foregrounds affective knowledge as legitimate and necessary.

Moreover, this thesis has demonstrated that fiction and oral history are not merely different genres but are deeply interwoven. Fiction borrows from the testimonial register to ground its affective resonance, while oral history often adopts literary strategies to convey emotion, conflict, and identity. Together, they construct a more inclusive historical imaginary, one that is dialogic, affective, and plural. This methodology challenges the epistemic authority of state-centred archives and insists on the validity of emotional and embodied knowledge in the narration of history. In this convergence, memory is neither a static relic nor a neutral record but an active, living process of bearing witness.

This process of bearing witness calls for narrative responsibility, as Bhalla (2010) cautions:

We resist the temptation either to write celebrative narratives of nationalist victories or to become chroniclers of communities of suffering. A generation later, it is imperative that we make, like many of our fiction writers, a self-conscious attempt to develop a twofold vision in which even as we remorsefully accept our culpability in the evil of those days, we record stories ... acts which deserve our sympathetic understanding and those which are reprehensible (p. 3119).

The implications of these findings extend beyond Partition scholarship. They invite broader considerations about how we remember national trauma, whose voices are preserved, and how narratives shape identity. In an era of rising nationalism, religious polarization, and historical revisionism, the insistence on narrative plurality becomes a form of resistance. Partition literature and oral testimony remind us that historical events are not a singular account but a contested terrain of memory, silence, voice, and meaning making. Memory, in this regard, becomes a space of moral reckoning and narrative justice.

In conclusion, this thesis 'Echoes of Partition' affirms that both fictional narratives and oral testimonies are essential to understanding the legacy of 1947. Their convergence constructs an archive that resists erasure and fosters empathy. These



fictional narratives and oral testimonies recount not merely what happened; rather they exemplify how it is inherited, remembered, and lived. Moreover, these fictional narratives and oral testimonies challenge the past and reassess how we narrate it in the present and for the future. Furthermore, these fictional narratives and oral testimonies invite us to view historical events not as a linear, but a constellation of voices: painful, opposing, liberating each echoing across time with its own truth. To conclude, by highlighting the multiplicity of experiences, this thesis contributes to a growing scholarly movement that seeks to honour the complexity of Partition and preserve its echoes in all their resonant, fragmented, and human forms.



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