Trauma and Literature
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Lecture – 38
Butalia's The Other Side of Silence – Part 2

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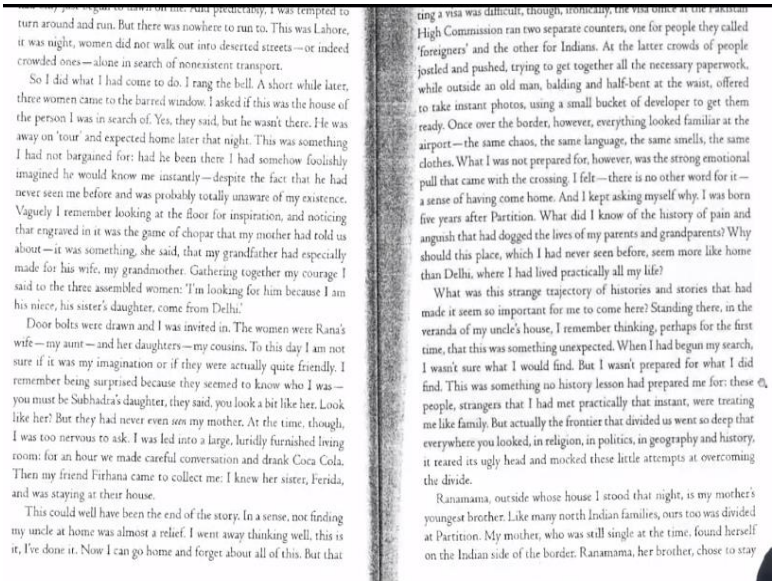

turn around and run. But there was nowhere to run to. This was Lahore, it was night, women did not walk out into deserted streets—or indeed crowded ones—alone in search of nonexistent transport.

So I did what I had come to do. I rang the bell. A short while later, three women came to the barred window. I asked if this was the house of the person I was in search of. Yes, they said, but he wasn't there. He was away on 'tour' and expected home later that night. This was something I had not bargained for: had he been there I had somehow foolishly imagined he would know me instantly—despite the fact that he had never seen me before and was probably totally unaware of my existence. Vaguely I remember looking at the floor for inspiration, and noticing that engraved in it was the game of chopar that my mother had told us about—it was something, she said, that my grandfather had especially made for his wife, my grandmother. Gathering together my courage I said to the three assembled women: 'I'm looking for him because I am his niece, his sister's daughter, come from Delhi.'

Door bolts were drawn and I was invited in. The women were Rana's wife—my aunt—and her daughters—my cousins. To this day I am not sure if it was my imagination or if they were actually quite friendly. I remember being surprised because they seemed to know who I was—you must be Subhadra's daughter, they said, you look a bit like her. Look like her? But they had never even *seen* my mother. At the time, though, I was too nervous to ask. I was led into a large, luridly furnished living room: for an hour we made careful conversation and drank Coca Cola. Then my friend Firhana came to collect me: I knew her sister, Ferida, and was staying at their house.

This could well have been the end of the story. In a sense, not finding my uncle at home was almost a relief. I went away thinking well, this is it, I've done it. Now I can go home and forget about all of this. But that

ting a visa was difficult, though, ironically, the visa office at the Pakistan High Commission ran two separate counters, one for people they called 'foreigners' and the other for Indians. At the latter crowds of people jostled and pushed, trying to get together all the necessary paperwork, while outside an old man, balding and half-bent at the waist, offered to take instant photos, using a small bucket of developer to get them ready. Once over the border, however, everything looked familiar at the airport—the same chaos, the same language, the same smells, the same clothes. What I was not prepared for, however, was the strong emotional pull that came with the crossing. I felt—there is no other word for it—a sense of having come home. And I kept asking myself why. I was born five years after Partition. What did I know of the history of pain and anguish that had dogged the lives of my parents and grandparents? Why should this place, which I had never seen before, seem more like home than Delhi, where I had lived practically all my life?

What was this strange trajectory of histories and stories that had made it seem so important for me to come here? Standing there, in the veranda of my uncle's house, I remember thinking, perhaps for the first time, that this was something unexpected. When I had begun my search, I wasn't sure what I would find. But I wasn't prepared for what I did find. This was something no history lesson had prepared me for: these people, strangers that I had met practically that instant, were treating me like family. But actually the frontier that divided us went so deep that everywhere you looked, in religion, in politics, in geography and history, it reared its ugly head and mocked these little attempts at overcoming the divide.

Ranamama, outside whose house I stood that night, is my mother's youngest brother. Like many north Indian families, ours too was divided at Partition. My mother, who was still single at the time, found herself on the Indian side of the border. Ranamama, her brother, chose to stay

This is an NPTEL course entitled "Trauma and Literature" on Urvashi Butalia's "The Other Side of Silence". In the opening of this book, we have the writer Butalia going to Lahore to reconnect to her relatives, people that she has been disconnected from due to partition.

The whole idea is to go back in time because we were talking about how going back in space is also going back in time. It is also time travel. She is going back to reconnect to her roots. It is very strange to experience because on one hand she is connected to people that she is tied to in terms of kinship. But then she is also untied from or disconnected from in terms of the cartographic constructs, which follow the partition.

We were looking at how the cartographic disconnect after partition and the sort of the kinship, which was there previously before that those are very incompatible with each other. This incompatibility is interesting for us to examine because on the one hand there are two different nation states, but on the other hand, there is this emotional connect,

going back and reconnecting to people that you are emotionally and even in terms of a family kinship system connected to.

She talks about the practical difficulties that she faces in Pakistan as an Indian citizen and how things are difficult bureaucratically as well as in terms of paperwork. “Crossing the border into Pakistan had been easier than I thought. Getting a visa was difficult, though ironically the visa office at the Pakistan High Commission ran two separate counters, one for people they call foreigners and the other for Indians.”

Indians belong to a different category in the visa office in Pakistan, the Pakistan High Commission because presumably the Indian applicants will have to go through more complex procedural methods in terms of getting a visa, the Pakistan visa. At the latter crowds of people jostled and pushed trying to get together all the necessary paperwork.

While outside an old man, balding and half bent at the waist; offered to take instant photos, using a small bucket of the developer to get them ready. Once over the border, however everything looked familiar at the airport; the same chaos, the same language, the same smells the same clothes. This is a very interesting juxtaposition of sameness and difference that we see because politically the different countries, cartographically the different countries.

We are also told that getting a visa, Pakistan visa is a difficult process. Its complete chaos and pandemonium at the counter and the people jostling and elbowing each other; and someone offering to take a photograph. But once you cross the border, everything looks very familiar. We are looking at this very interesting interplay of familiarity and difference.

These are people who have just been separated cartographically through a political process, but then these are people who also had been living together for the longest time, they share a lot. They share a common language, share a common culture, and to a great extent they share common clothes, common food. Once she crosses the border, everything looks very familiar.

“In Pakistan, people are speaking the same kind of language as she is used to in the northern part of India. This is something that she sees once over the border. However, everything looks familiar at the airport; the same chaos, the same language, the same smells, the same clothes. What I was not prepared for, however, was a strong emotional pull that came with the crossing.”

There seems to be some kind of emotional kinship and emotional affiliation that she is experiencing once she crosses over to Pakistan. This is something that she had not anticipated. The emotional pull that came with the crossing and this was something she was not prepared for. I felt there was no other word for it, a sense of having come home. This is a very important concept over here home.

Home away is less a cartographic construct, is less an address and more of a feeling, and is more of an experiential location. And so experientially she feels connected, experientially she feels like coming home because there are cultures and landmasses and people who had been living together for the longest time and who have been disconnected due to the political process of partition.

But now she has crossed the border and so that border becomes a symbolic luminal territory she crossed it. Once you cross this in, she feels that she is coming home. There is a sense of nostalgia about it. And also remember we are talking about what we call a post-memory. The post-memory is a phenomenon is that kind of memory is the modality of memory whereby a human subject consumes memory from the earlier generations.

She has not experienced partition firsthand, but she has consumed the knowledge of partition, she has consumed the memory of partition having been told the stories of partition over and over again by her ancestors, by her family relatives. “This is how she has supposed memory generation. And I kept asking myself why. So, why does she feel at home? Why does she feel this sort of homely feeling?

This homeliness once she crosses the; border and moves into Pakistan. And I kept asking myself why. I was born 5 years after partition. What did I know of the history of pain and anguish that had doffed the lives of my parents and grandparents? Why should this

place, which I had never seen before seem more like home than Delhi, where I had lived practically all my life."

This is the classic post-memory scenario where she is experiencing some kind of a kinships or some kind of affiliation based on the memory that she has consumed, which has come down to her intergenerationally. And intergenerational consumption of memory is something that she is describing in great details here. She is born 5 years after partition and she was raised practically entire life in Delhi.

"Why does she feel kinship in Lahore? Why does she feel kinship while she crosses the border? Whereas what is the border space, we are talking about not just physical geography, but also emotional geography and that is a very important concept especially in memory studies, emotional geography. The relationship and emotions have different kinds of spaces and what happens to entangle is space and emotion together.

Lahore to her seems more homely than Delhi the place where she grew up physically. What was this strange trajectory of histories and stories that had made it seem so important for me to come here? Standing there in the veranda of my uncle's house, I remember thinking perhaps for the first time that this was something unexpected. When I had begun my search, I was not sure what I would find.

But I was not prepared for what I did find. This is something no history lesson had prepared me for; these people, strangers that I had met practically that instant were treating me like family." But actually, the frontier that divided us went so deep that everywhere you locked, in religion, in politics, in geography and history it reared its ugly head and mocked those little attempts at overcoming the divide.

We are talking about the divide in a physical sense. We are talking about the divide in the cartographic sense. The divide which has been done; the partition which has been done and something which is always there as a very strong physical presence. Not contrast to that we have this emotional kinship, we have these people who are otherwise strangers, but they feel immediately connected, instantly connected in very cordial and very emotional ways.

This emotional connect completely undercuts the cartographic divide. We are looking at emotional geography superseding physical geography. Physical geography of the two nation states, which has a partition in between them, that becomes secondary over here and emotional connect that these two people have, having grown up together having lived together for generations.

Although the writer Urvashi Butalia never been in Pakistan before, never been in that part of the world before. She feels like connect almost like a genetic connect because her entire lineage comes from that area. "This is the emotional geography we are talking about. Ranamama outside whose house I stood that night is my mother's youngest brother. This is the uncle that she is talking about, Ranamama.

Like many north Indian families, ours too was divided at partition. We get to know the family history of her. My mother, who was still single at the time, found herself on the Indian side of the border. Ranamama her brother chose to stay behind."

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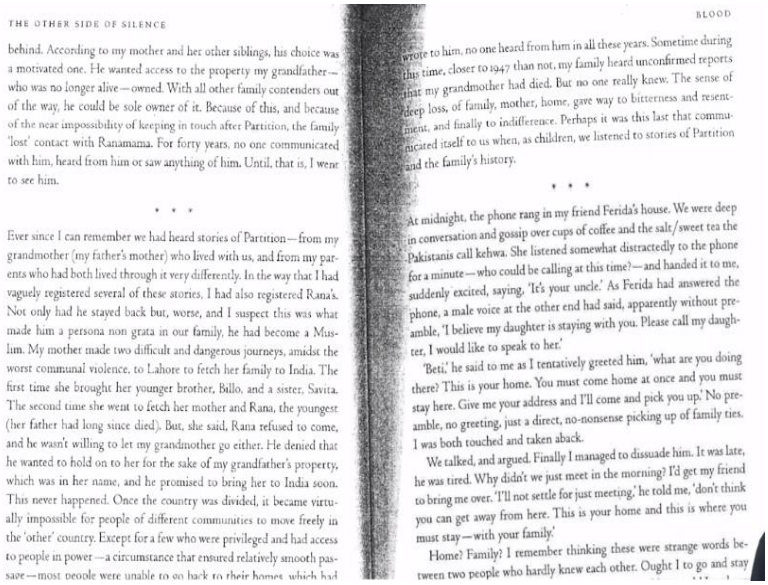

THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

behind. According to my mother and her other siblings, his choice was a motivated one. He wanted access to the property my grandfather—who was no longer alive—owned. With all other family contenders out of the way, he could be sole owner of it. Because of this, and because of the near impossibility of keeping in touch after Partition, the family 'lost' contact with Ranamama. For forty years, no one communicated with him, heard from him or saw anything of him. Until, that is, I went to see him.

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Ever since I can remember we had heard stories of Partition—from my grandmother (my father's mother) who lived with us, and from my parents who had both lived through it very differently. In the way that I had vaguely registered several of these stories, I had also registered Rana's. Not only had he stayed back but, worse, and I suspect this was what made him a persona non grata in our family, he had become a Muslim. My mother made two difficult and dangerous journeys, amidst the worst communal violence, to Lahore to fetch her family to India. The first time she brought her younger brother, Billo, and a sister, Savita. The second time she went to fetch her mother and Rana, the youngest (her father had long since died). But, she said, Rana refused to come, and he wasn't willing to let my grandmother go either. He denied that he wanted to hold on to her for the sake of my grandfather's property, which was in her name, and he promised to bring her to India soon. This never happened. Once the country was divided, it became virtually impossible for people of different communities to move freely in the 'other' country. Except for a few who were privileged and had access to people in power—a circumstance that ensured relatively smooth passage—most people were unable to go back to their homes, which had

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wrote to him, no one heard from him in all these years. Sometime during this time, closer to 1947 than not, my family heard unconfirmed reports that my grandmother had died. But no one really knew. The sense of deep loss, of family, mother, home, gave way to bitterness and resentment, and finally to indifference. Perhaps it was this last that communicated itself to us when, as children, we listened to stories of Partition and the family's history.

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At midnight, the phone rang in my friend Ferida's house. We were deep in conversation and gossip over cups of coffee and the salt/sweet tea the Pakistanis call kehwa. She listened somewhat distractedly to the phone for a minute—who could be calling at this time?—and handed it to me, suddenly excited, saying, 'It's your uncle.' As Ferida had answered the phone, a male voice at the other end had said, apparently without preamble, 'I believe my daughter is staying with you. Please call my daughter, I would like to speak to her.'

'Beti,' he said to me as I tentatively greeted him, 'what are you doing there? This is your home. You must come home at once and you must stay here. Give me your address and I'll come and pick you up.' No preamble, no greeting, just a direct, no-nonsense picking up of family ties. I was both touched and taken aback.

We talked, and argued. Finally I managed to dissuade him. It was late, he was tired. Why didn't we just meet in the morning? I'd get my friend to bring me over. 'I'll not settle for just meeting,' he told me, 'don't think you can get away from here. This is your home and this is where you must stay—with your family.'

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For 40 years, no one communicated with him, heard from him or saw anything of him. Until that is I went to see him. We see how something which is very familial in domestic and almost petty in terms of who is going to have access, who is going to have ownership on an ancestral house that becomes the motivating factor in terms of who will stay behind in Pakistan and who will go to India."

This person, her uncle, her mother's own brother, chose to stay back because he had an eye on the property, presumably he wanted the property because everyone else is going to India. As the only person who stayed behind, he inherited the property. That created, some divide emotionally as well between other members of the family. The big cartographic divide happened as a result of which there was no contact.

Everyone lost contact with Ranamama and as you can see the word lost comes in a single quote, which means that there is some kind of a complexity in this loss, so they chose to lose contact in a certain sense, until that is I went to see him. She is the intergeneration, second generation person goes back almost in space and time as I mentioned, there is also a lot of time and travel involved over here, goes back and then reconnects to him.

Now we have a very interesting and beautiful example and description of this post-memory as in the consumption of memory through stories which are handed down to someone who has never otherwise experienced the real event. But the only access they have to the event is through stories, is through the account stored and shared with them by other family members.

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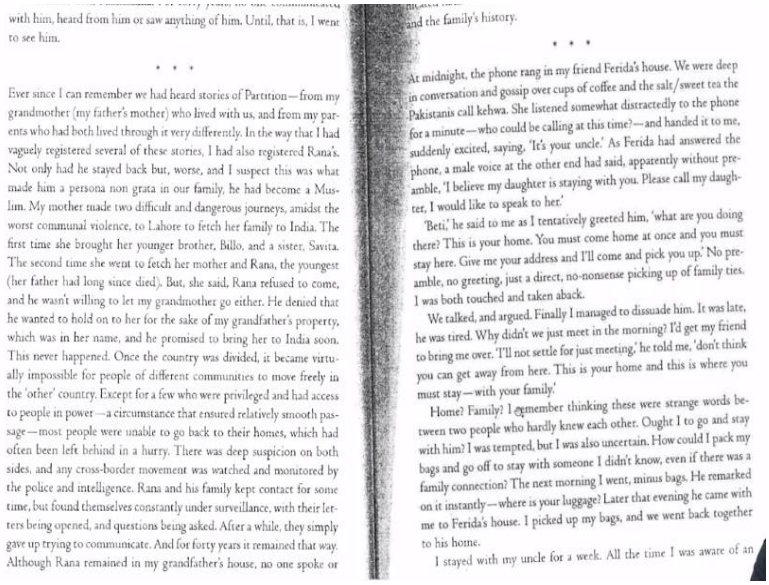

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Home? Family? I remember thinking these were strange words between two people who hardly knew each other. Ought I to go and stay with him? I was tempted, but I was also uncertain. How could I pack my bags and go off to stay with someone I didn't know, even if there was a family connection? The next morning I went, minus bags. He remarked on it instantly—where is your luggage? Later that evening he came with me to Ferida's house. I picked up my bags, and we went back together to his home.

I stayed with my uncle for a week. All the time I was aware of an

"Ever since I can remember we had heard stories of partition from my grandmother, my father's mother, who lived with us and from my parents who had both lived through it very differently. In the way that I heard vaguely registered several other stories. I had also registered Rana's." Ranamama, Rana uncle is the person whose house she is visiting at the moment in Lahore. She had heard stories about Rana and on hearing the stories she had projected some picture of him in her mind.

"Not only had he stayed back but worse and I suspect this was what made him a persona non grata in our family, he had become a Muslim." This religious conversion is further accentuated the divide because he chose to become a Muslim. He had become a Muslim and as a result of which he became a person of insignificance, persona non grata, non-acknowledged. He has become a Muslim.

My mother made two difficult and dangerous journeys amidst the worst communal violence to Lahore to fetch her family to India. The first time she brought her younger brother Billo and a sister Savita. The second time she went to fetch her mother and Rana, the youngest. Her father had long since died. But she said Rana refused to come and he was not willing to let my grandmother go either.

He denied that he wanted to hold on to her for the sake of my grandfather's property, which was in her name, and he promised to bring her to India soon. This never happened. We can almost see the accounts of the petty domestic differences and how that is sort of mapped on to the bigger difference of partition. The small micro stories of human

emotion, human difference, human pettiness, human quarrel that is sort of mapped onto the bigger story of partition.

It becomes interesting, micronarrative journey along with the bigger narrative. Even detailed accounts why Ranamama did not come, what was the stake for him, he wanted the property, he kept his mother that is Urvashi Butalia's grandmother, just so he could access the property through her and he became Muslim. All these little stories around the family suddenly become important.

Because these become the subtext to the bigger story of partition that she is trying to access and retell and reexperience as well. Once the country was divided, it became virtually impossible for people of different communities to move freely in the 'other' country. The word other again appears in single quotes. The otherness, the national otherness, the cartographic otherness, the cultural otherness, the political other apropos of each other.

India is a political other of Pakistan and Pakistan is the political other of India. And that other or essence of otherness creates a sense of estrangement as well. Estrangement is political as well as emotional in quality. By crossing the political partition, by crossing the political border, she has also crossed the emotional border and now she feels connected to the family again.

But at this point in time, we get to hear the backstory of what had happened to her family. It was divided and it was virtually impossible for people of different communities to move freely in the other country. Except for a few who were privileged and had access to people in power, a circumstance that ensured relatively smooth passage, most people were unable to get back to the homes which had often been left behind in a hurry.

So, in a hurry of partition, people have left behind their homes. But once the partition happened, once the borders were defined and the two nation states were declared, it is virtually impossible for people to go back to their homes and reclaim it. It was politically and bureaucratically impossible as well as there were other dangers as well. And other dangers constituted suspicion and this is what she says.

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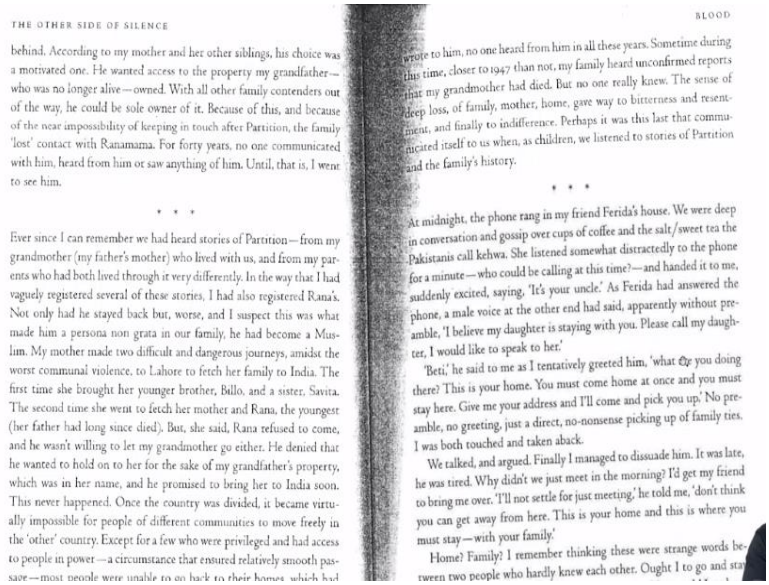

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Perhaps it was this last that communicated itself to us when as children; we listened to stories of partition and the family's history. This is a very important emotional sequence as you can see the sense of loss. There was this rumoured report that her grandmother had died, but there is no way to confirm it. There was no telephone. There was no way to write a letter and get a confirmed report.

But there was a half-formed or half confirmed report about the grandmother's demise and that created bitterness that created so vague sense of bitterness because we are not quite sure if that is true or not, but at the same time you are sad about it because you think that has happened and your family member has died. The sense of deep loss, and again notice

the sequence, the sense of deep loss gave way to bitterness, anger, resentment, further anger and finally to indifference.

The sort of at the end is just exhausted of all emotions and just becomes indifference. “Catch-22” extends indifference further until it becomes a laughter. There was tragedy, there is resentment, there is bitterness of anger, this pain, and this anguish and finally it just gets exhausted and it becomes indifferent.

Then it extends further and it becomes laughter and this laughter is not happy laughter, this is the laughter of exhaustion. This is the laughter which almost reflects a physical reaction to tragedy because we are so numbed and to react in a way which is tragic, we just laugh about it and produce a dark humor about it which is what the story was all about if remember “Catch-22”, but over here too we have a similar sequence of emotions.

Indifference is just at the end everyone is indifferent. Perhaps it was this last that communicated itself to us. Stories are told to us were indifferent stories. When as children, we listened to stories of partition and a family's history. The family story and the partition stories are mapped into each other in ways which are complex as well as incompatible.

The compatibility slash incompatibility between the families story, the human story, the emotional story, and the bigger political stories that forms the basis of the experience of partition, especially for a sort of post-memory generation like Urvashi Butalia. And we cut back into the present.

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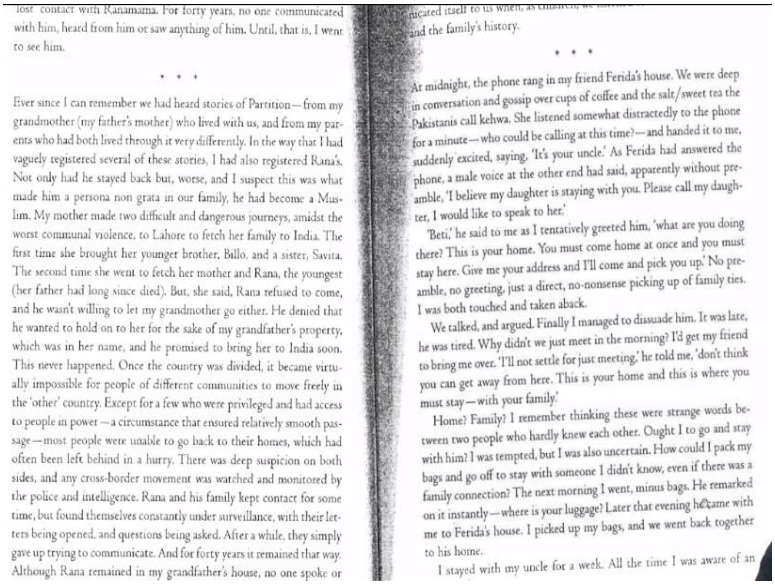

lost contact with Ranamama. For forty years, no one communicated with him, heard from him or saw anything of him. Until, that is, I went to see him.

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Ever since I can remember we had heard stories of Partition—from my grandmother (my father's mother) who lived with us, and from my parents who had both lived through it very differently. In the way that I had vaguely registered several of these stories, I had also registered Rana's. Not only had he stayed back but, worse, and I suspect this was what made him a persona non grata in our family, he had become a Muslim. My mother made two difficult and dangerous journeys, amidst the worst communal violence, to Lahore to fetch her family to India. The first time she brought her younger brother, Billo, and a sister, Savita. The second time she went to fetch her mother and Rana, the youngest (her father had long since died). But, she said, Rana refused to come, and he wasn't willing to let my grandmother go either. He denied that he wanted to hold on to her for the sake of my grandfather's property, which was in her name, and he promised to bring her to India soon. This never happened. Once the country was divided, it became virtually impossible for people of different communities to move freely in the 'other' country. Except for a few who were privileged and had access to people in power—a circumstance that ensured relatively smooth passage—most people were unable to go back to their homes, which had often been left behind in a hurry. There was deep suspicion on both sides, and any cross-border movement was watched and monitored by the police and intelligence. Rana and his family kept contact for some time, but found themselves constantly under surveillance, with their letters being opened, and questions being asked. After a while, they simply gave up trying to communicate. And for forty years it remained that way. Although Rana remained in my grandfather's house, no one spoke or

nicated itself to us when, as children, we

and the family's history.

* * *

At midnight, the phone rang in my friend Ferida's house. We were deep in conversation and gossip over cups of coffee and the salt/sweet tea the Pakistanis call kehwa. She listened somewhat distractedly to the phone for a minute—who could be calling at this time?—and handed it to me, suddenly excited, saying, 'It's your uncle.' As Ferida had answered the phone, a male voice at the other end had said, apparently without preamble, 'I believe my daughter is staying with you. Please call my daughter, I would like to speak to her.'

'Beti,' he said to me as I tentatively greeted him, 'what are you doing there? This is your home. You must come home at once and you must stay here. Give me your address and I'll come and pick you up.' No preamble, no greeting, just a direct, no-nonsense picking up of family ties. I was both touched and taken aback.

We talked, and argued. Finally I managed to dissuade him. It was late, he was tired. Why didn't we just meet in the morning? I'd get my friend to bring me over. 'I'll not settle for just meeting,' he told me, 'don't think you can get away from here. This is your home and this is where you must stay—with your family.'

Home? Family? I remember thinking these were strange words between two people who hardly knew each other. Ought I to go and stay with him? I was tempted, but I was also uncertain. How could I pack my bags and go off to stay with someone I didn't know, even if there was a family connection? The next morning I went, minus bags. He remarked on it instantly—where is your luggage? Later that evening he came with me to Ferida's house. I picked up my bags, and we went back together to his home.

I stayed with my uncle for a week. All the time I was aware of an

"At midnight, the phone rang in my friend Ferida's house which is the house where she is living at the moment. We were deep in conversation and gossip over cups of coffee and the salt slash sweet tea the Pakistanis call kehwa." Kehwa is a kind of tea and even in Kashmir they call kehwa, it is a kind of tea which is produced in that part of India and Pakistan, so the northern part of India and if we go over to Pakistan, they have a similar kind of tea as well.

"It is called kehwa. She listened somewhat distractedly to the phone for a minute, who could be calling at this time, and handed it to me, suddenly excited saying it is your uncle, so Ranamama, the uncle Rana has called up. As Ferida had answered the phone, a male voice at the other end had said apparently without preamble, I believe my daughter is staying with you. Please call my daughter I would like to speak to her.

Beti, he said to me as I tentatively greeted him, what are you doing there? This is your home. You must come home at once and you must stay here. Give me your address, and I will come and pick you up. No preamble, no greeting, just a direct, no-nonsense picking up of family ties. I was both touched and taken aback." This is the emotional reconnect that she is talking about moment she goes back.

It is almost like time travel, it is almost as if nothing had happened in the interim period and she just belongs and so he just picks up the phone, calls the friend in whose house she is staying and asks her to just come home, orders to come back and stay at her home,

which is the place where he is. They were both touched on taken aback. We, we talked and argued, finally managed to dissuade him.

“It was late, he was tired. Why did not we just meet in the morning? I will get my friend to bring me over. I will not settle for just meeting he told me, do not think you can get away from here. This is your home and this is where you must stay with your family.” We are talking about emotional geographies over here. This house which is notionally in Lahore, is notionally a different nation, is suddenly home to her because that is the house where her ancestors grew up in.

This is a bit of a time travel. We can see how space and time begin to merge together and what we call the chronotope in memory studies. A chronotope is a concept used by Mikhail Bakhtin is a literary device where time and space come together, chrono is time, chronological, tope is typography or topo space, space and time put together in one capsule.

This chronotope becomes the memory chronotope for her and she is asked to go back and stay there as the partition had never happened. This is also some sense of time traveling. “Come and stay with us. This is your home. This is your family. Home? Family? I remember thinking these were strange words between two people who hardly knew each other. Ought I go and stay with him? I was tempted, but I was also uncertain.

How could I pack my bags and go off to stay with someone I do not know, even if there was a family connection? The next morning I went, minus bags. He remarked on it instantly where is your luggage? Later that evening he came with me to Ferida’s house. I picked up my bags and we went back together to his homes.” She is asked to go back to the home where her ancestors or family grew up together before the partition happened.

We can see partition over here becomes less of a physical divide and more of an emotional divide. She has crossed the border again, the emotional ties are reestablished and reconnected.

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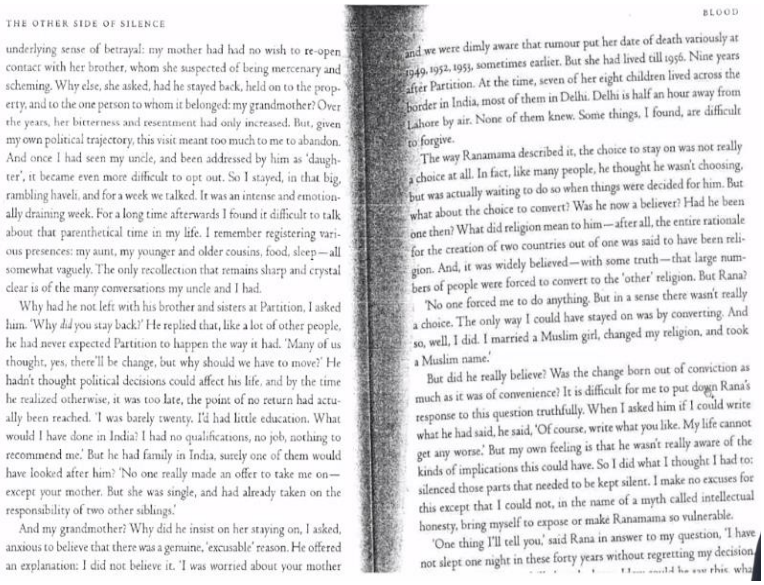

THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

underlying sense of betrayal: my mother had had no wish to re-open contact with her brother, whom she suspected of being mercenary and scheming. Why else, she asked, had he stayed back, held on to the property, and to the one person to whom it belonged: my grandmother? Over the years, her bitterness and resentment had only increased. But, given my own political trajectory, this visit meant too much to me to abandon. And once I had seen my uncle, and been addressed by him as 'daughter', it became even more difficult to opt out. So I stayed, in that big, rambling haveli, and for a week we talked. It was an intense and emotionally draining week. For a long time afterwards I found it difficult to talk about that parenthetical time in my life. I remember registering various presences: my aunt, my younger and older cousins, food, sleep—all somewhat vaguely. The only recollection that remains sharp and crystal clear is of the many conversations my uncle and I had.

Why had he not left with his brother and sisters at Partition, I asked him. 'Why *did* you stay back?' He replied that, like a lot of other people, he had never expected Partition to happen the way it had. 'Many of us thought, yes, there'll be change, but why should we have to move?' He hadn't thought political decisions could affect his life, and by the time he realized otherwise, it was too late, the point of no return had actually been reached. 'I was barely twenty. I'd had little education. What would I have done in India? I had no qualifications, no job, nothing to recommend me.' But he had family in India, surely one of them would have looked after him? 'No one really made an offer to take me on—except your mother. But she was single, and had already taken on the responsibility of two other siblings.'

And my grandmother? Why did he insist on her staying on, I asked, anxious to believe that there was a genuine, 'excusable' reason. He offered an explanation: I did not believe it. 'I was worried about your mother

BLOOD

and we were dimly aware that rumour put her date of death variously at 1949, 1952, 1953, sometimes earlier. But she had lived till 1956. Nine years after Partition. At the time, seven of her eight children lived across the border in India, most of them in Delhi. Delhi is half an hour away from Lahore by air. None of them knew. Some things, I found, are difficult to forgive.

The way Ranamama described it, the choice to stay on was not really a choice at all. In fact, like many people, he thought he wasn't choosing, but was actually waiting to do so when things were decided for him. But what about the choice to convert? Was he now a believer? Had he been one then? What did religion mean to him—after all, the entire rationale for the creation of two countries out of one was said to have been religion. And, it was widely believed—with some truth—that large numbers of people were forced to convert to the 'other' religion. But Rana?

'No one forced me to do anything. But in a sense there wasn't really a choice. The only way I could have stayed on was by converting. And so, well, I did. I married a Muslim girl, changed my religion, and took a Muslim name.'

But did he really believe? Was the change born out of conviction as much as it was of convenience? It is difficult for me to put down Rana's response to this question truthfully. When I asked him if I could write what he had said, he said, 'Of course, write what you like. My life cannot get any worse.' But my own feeling is that he wasn't really aware of the kinds of implications this could have. So I did what I thought I had to: silenced those parts that needed to be kept silent. I make no excuses for this except that I could not, in the name of a myth called intellectual honesty, bring myself to expose or make Ranamama so vulnerable.

'One thing I'll tell you,' said Rana in answer to my question, 'I have not slept one night in these forty years without regretting my decision.

"I stayed with my uncle for a week. All the time I was aware of an underlying sense of betrayal. My mother had had no wish to reopen contact with her brother, whom she suspected of being mercenary and scheming. Why else she asked had he stayed back, held on to the property, and to the one person to whom it belonged; my grandmother." The pettiness of family stories, the pettiness of family difference a sort of mapped onto the bigger picture of partition as you can see.

"Over the years, her bitterness and resentment had only increased but given my own political trajectory, this visit meant too much to me to abandon. Once I had seen my uncle and been addressed by him as a daughter, it became even more difficult to opt out. I stayed in that big rambling haveli; haveli is a magnificent mansion, big huge mansion. And for a week we talked. It was an intense and emotionally draining week.

For a long time afterwards, I found it difficult to talk about that parenthetical tactical time in my life. I remember registering various presences; my aunt, my younger and older cousins, food sleep, all somewhat vaguely. The only recollection that remains sharp and crystal clear is of the many conversations my uncle and I had." The idea of this parenthetical time is emphasized over here.

This parenthetical time seems to be almost outside of clock time, almost outside of historical time. This is some old time which has been dug up again and she is inhabiting it. This literally becomes some kind of time traveling thing whereas she just goes back in

time, parenthetical time, some kind of liminal connecting time, and she is trying to recover the lost time or redeem the lost time.

It is so loaded in terms of memory that she does not quite remember what had happened. She just remembers impressions and faces of people, but the only recollections that she has which has stayed crystal clear in the mind are the many conversations that she had with her uncle. These conversations, these stories, these narratives are stories about reconnecting stories that stitch back the past and the present.

Word stitch is used quite literally is like weaving and together, tying different orders of time through stories, through experiences, through narratives. These become quite literally experiences of redemption, experiences of reconnect which transcend to a certain extent the physical divide of two different nation states.