Trauma and Literature
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Lecture – 39
Butalia's The Other Side of Silence – Part 3

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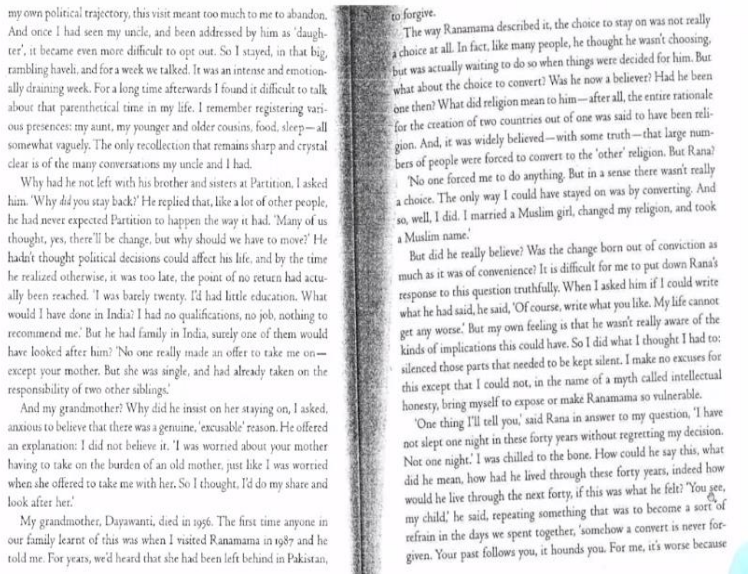

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Why had he not left with his brother and sisters at Partition, I asked him. 'Why *did* you stay back?' He replied that, like a lot of other people, he had never expected Partition to happen the way it had. 'Many of us thought, yes, there'll be change, 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 having to take on the burden of an old mother, just like I was worried when she offered to take me with her. So I thought, I'd do my share and look after her.'

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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?

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'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. Not one night.' I was chilled to the bone. How could he say this, what did he mean, how had he lived through these forty years, indeed how would he live through the next forty, if this was what he felt? 'You see, my child,' he said, repeating something that was to become a sort of refrain in the days we spent together, 'somehow a convert is never forgiven. Your past follows you, it hounds you. For me, it's worse because

This is an NPTEL course entitled "Trauma and Literature" on Urvashi Butalia's book "The Other Side of Silence". The final sentence of the last session where Butalia, the narrator, over here she mentions that the only recollection that remains sharp and crystal clear is many conversations she had with her uncle Ranamama.

This is a very emotional memory for her going back and reconnecting to her roots. We talked about how there is a sense of time travel as well. It is not just going to particular space, it also seems to be going back in time to a certain extent and reconnecting to people that she had been partitioned away from. We were looking at how the whole event of partition becomes a political event.

An emotional event, an experiential event, and also to a certain extent an ontological event. It is something which changes, so there is a shift, an ontological shift. But then again, there is going back to Pakistan, going back to the home and reconnecting to a family over here seems to go back in time as well. The conversations with her uncle

seem to have the most, the fundamental feature of the entire memory of Lahore, the conversations she had.

It means certainly is very cognitive level, is a very interesting relationship between memory and storytelling because the conversations she had with her uncle were in the form of stories, the stories that uncle told her and the stories in the form our memories. We are looking at a very direct and cognitive correlation between storytelling and remembering.

Memory defined as form of memory over here emerges through a form of storytelling. “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 will be change, but why should we have to move?”

He had not 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. We are looking at the incompatibility of the emotional and political replications of partition because for certain people the partition at the initial stage did not seem to be such a big thing. They thought it is just some temporary thing.

But their lives will not be fundamentally changed or altered and they will just carry on living the way they did. It is just some political convenience that has been maneuvered around them. But then they very quickly realize that it is a permanent change, so permanent partition is a permanent disconnect and now they are not be able to be connected to people who are actually left.

He mentions over here so quickly as it may be, by the time it had been too late. It was impossible to change and go to India at that time. He goes to say that he was barely 20. “I had a little education. What would I have done in India? I had no qualifications, no job, nothing recommended 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 been taken on the responsibility of two other siblings." We can see how the family drama and the political drama are interestingly mapped onto each other and we can see like in the case of most family dramas there is anxiety, there is love, there is aspiration, but there is also pettiness.

There is also a competitive quality among the siblings as well, who is going get a position, who will not get a certain position. He flexed this up over here. He says the only person who wanted me there, only person who wanted me to come, who invited me to come essentially was your mother. But then again, she herself was barely taken care of. He did not want to impose himself on her.

He is going to give a rationale in terms of why he did not go to India after the partition or during the partition for the matter. "My grandmother, Dayawanti, died in 1956. "The first time anyone in our family learned of this was when I visited Ranamama in 1987 and he told me. For years, we had heard that she had been left behind in Pakistan."

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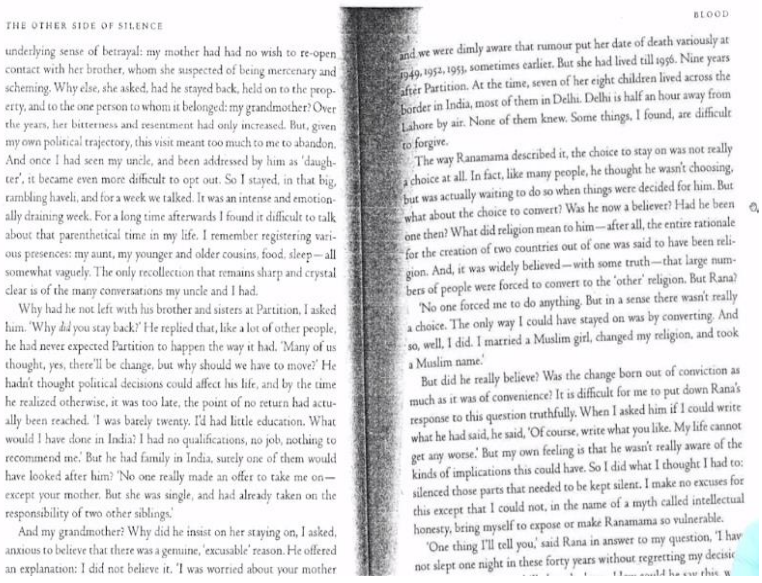

THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

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.

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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?

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We are looking at the irony over here because the proximity of Delhi and Lahore is half an hour in terms of the geographical distance, but of course, the geopolitical distance is massive. We are looking at an emotional distance is also massive. We are looking at three kinds of distances. The physical distance which is the geographical distance; the geopolitical distance, now the two nation states, it is going to take a long time; and the emotional distance.

Three different kinds of distances or three different degrees of distances are being talked about over here. We find out that again there is some kind of vague memory formation to storytelling. The grandmother of Urvashi Butalia who died in 1956, people across the borders in India thought that she had been dead and they had different dates for her death because there were no confirmed reports.

It all emerged out of some vague story that rumours and stories and half truths, but now she finds out that she had lived till 1956 and of course no one in India knew about this. The way Ranamama described it, the choice to stay on was not a choice at all. In fact, like many people he thought he was not choosing, but was actually waiting to do when things were decided for him.

This brings in the very key question of agency. Agency in a political narrative is the ability, the freedom of the human subject to do what they want to do in the hope of bringing about a change. We find that there is very little agency if any at all to the people who chose to stay back in Pakistan. They thought that the stay will be decided for them. Almost everything was decided for them.

He did not have much of an agency and he never thought he had any agency and never thought that he was choosing something. The availability of choice in his mind was not there, there was complete absence of availability of choice. “But what about the choice to convert? Was he now believer?” We know that he had turned into a Muslim from India because he thought it was a convenient and safe thing to do in the post-partition Pakistan.

“Had he been one then? How the religion mean to; what did religion mean to him, after all the entire rationale for the creation of the two countries out of one was said to have

been religion. And it was widely believed with some truth, the large numbers of people were forced to convert to the other religion. But Rana?" The shift across the border, we see a similar shift over here as well as a religious shift to many people as well.

They also cross the border, cross the boundary, and they go to the other faith, the landscape of the other faiths. So someone becoming the other religion person is also a form of crossing. We can see Rana did not cross the geopolitical border, but he did cross the religious border, so he became a Muslim. He is asked by his niece why he converted and what religion meant to him.

"No one forced me to do anything. But in a sense there was not really a choice." We can see that no one forced anything on him, but then there does not seem to be much of a choice. This is a question of agency which comes in. Agency is not always related to the compulsion or the lack of compulsion of freedom. Agency is a very complex category where sometimes you seem to have choices, sometimes you seem to have liberty.

But then we do not really have it, no one forces you to do anything and yet you end up doing something because there is not any other option available. It is a very complex category of presence and absence. It is like an interplay of presence and absence. Sometimes we seem to have choices, but then we actually do not have any choice, we are supposed to choose just one given the circumstances.

And again, equally sometimes you are not forced to do anything, but yet end up doing something because there does not seem to be any other choice. It is a complex category which is not always external, but also exponential in quality depends on the experience of the person. Experiential position is the subject in at any given point of time to act agentically or the absence of agency.

"No one forced me to do anything. But in a sense there was not really a choice. The only way I could have straight on was by converting. And so, well I did. I married a Muslim girl, changed my religion and took a Muslim name." We are looking at some kind of border crossing here as well, some religious border crossing. But did he really believe. "Was the change born out of conviction as much as it was of convenience?"

We are talking about how this is a convenient change because realizes in Pakistan, in a post partition Pakistan to be a Muslim he had more access to the basic rights of people and if you stayed on as Hindu or Sikh, then be discriminated with some extent and that was a part of the greater, larger, very palpable narrative in Pakistan. “When I asked him if I could write what he said, he said of course, write what you like.”

“My life cannot get any worse. But my own feeling is that he was not really aware of the kinds of implications this could have. So, I did what I thought I had to; silence those parts that needed to be kept silent. I made 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. And this is a very loaded point. And I want to spend a bit of time on this.”

We can see that the very title of the book is “The Other Side of Silence” and we see how silence becomes not necessarily an absence over here, but silence also becomes a very strong agentic presence. Agentic presence means active agencies over here. Urvashi Butalia is maintaining silence, she silences those parts which she thought out of her intellectual honesty or intellectual integrity as a human being.

As a human being with integrity, that certain parts should be kept silent, certain parts should be erased or should not be included. We are looking at how representation or remembering it entails right complex interplay of inclusion and exclusion. Certain things are included, likewise certain other things are excluded. This interplay of inclusion and exclusion is a very interesting model of memory so to speak.

In a way, remember there is always a play of presence and absence of production and de-production. She is leaving out certain bits which she thinks as an honest intellectual, out of her intellectual honesty that those things should not be mentioned, those things have no feature because that would make this person very vulnerable in quality.

We are looking at a complex politics of representation where exclusion plays a very important part where absence or the ability to be absent plays a very important part. We are looking at how absence not necessarily a bad thing over here or not necessarily a

negative thing over here. “Absence can be a productive thing. It can be an act of preservation, you preserving may be the honor of Ranamama.

You are preserving the integrity, preserving the status, preserving the respect of this particular person by remaining by choosing to be silent about certain things.” It is a very important point the decision to not include certain things.

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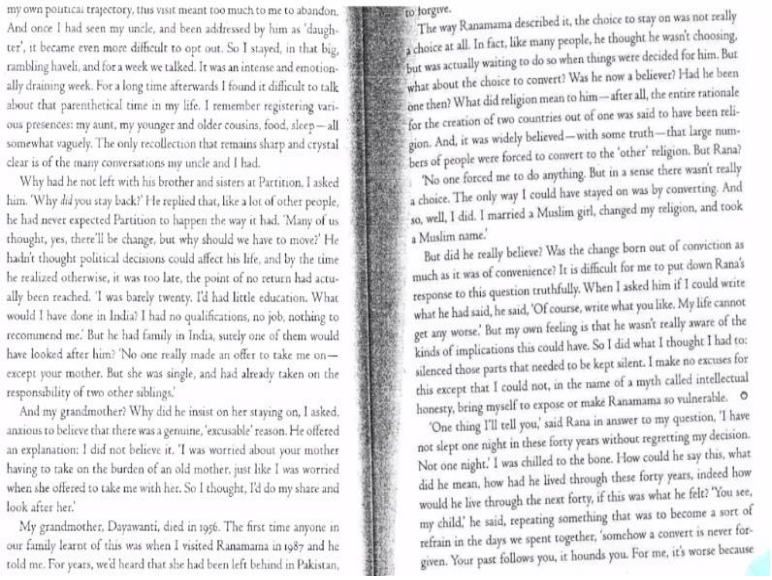

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“Now one thing I will tell you, said Rana in answer to my question. I have not slept one night in these 40 years without regretting my decision. Regretting not to have gone to India. Not one night. I was chilled to the bone. There seems to be some kind of almost corporeal quality about this memory. It affects you at a very bodily, visceral level. And when she hears that I have not slept one night, when I have not regretted that she feels this visceral feeling in her bones that this is so intense.”

This is something which is so honest, so brutal, and so tragic ay a very human level. “How could he say this, what did he mean? And how had he lived through these 40 years, indeed how would he live for the next 40 if this was what he felt? You see, my child, he said, repeating something that was to become a sort of refrain in the days we spent together, somehow a convert is never forgiven. Your past follows you, it hounds you.”

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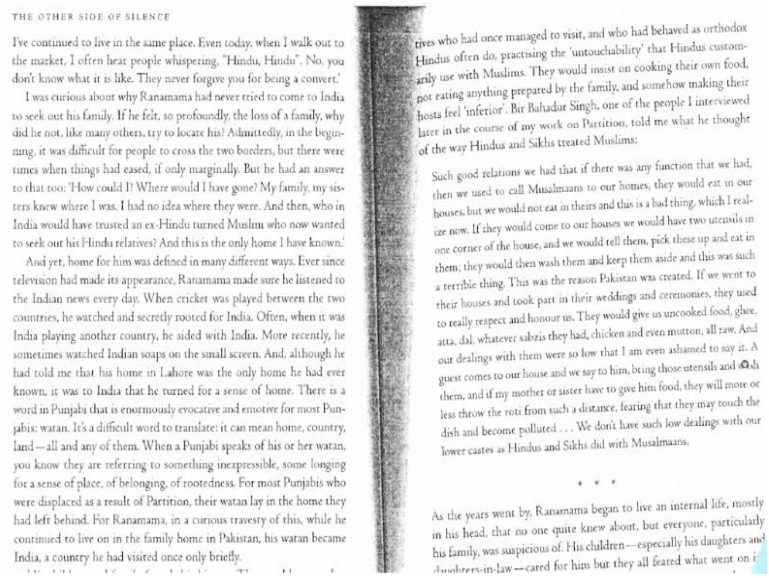

THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

I've continued to live in the same place. Even today, when I walk out to the market, I often hear people whispering, 'Hindu, Hindu'. No, you don't know what it is like. They never forgive you for being a convert.'

I was curious about why Ranamama had never tried to come to India to seek out his family. If he felt, so profoundly, the loss of a family, why did he not, like many others, try to locate his? Admittedly, in the beginning, it was difficult for people to cross the two borders, but there were times when things had eased, if only marginally. But he had an answer to that too: 'How could I? Where would I have gone? My family, my sisters knew where I was. I had no idea where they were. And then, who in India would have trusted an ex-Hindu turned Muslim who now wanted to seek out his Hindu relatives? And this is the only home I have known.'

And yet, home for him was defined in many different ways. Ever since television had made its appearance, Ranamama made sure he listened to the Indian news every day. When cricket was played between the two countries, he watched and secretly rooted for India. Often, when it was India playing another country, he sided with India. More recently, he sometimes watched Indian soaps on the small screen. And, although he had told me that his home in Lahore was the only home he had ever known, it was to India that he turned for a sense of home. There is a word in Punjabi that is enormously evocative and emotive for most Punjabis: watan. It's a difficult word to translate: it can mean home, country, land—all and any of them. When a Punjabi speaks of his or her watan, you know they are referring to something inexpressible, some longing for a sense of place, of belonging, of rootedness. For most Punjabis who were displaced as a result of Partition, their watan lay in the home they had left behind. For Ranamama, in a curious travesty of this, while he continued to live on in the family home in Pakistan, his watan became India, a country he had visited once only briefly.

tives who had once managed to visit, and who had behaved as orthodox Hindus often do, practising the 'untouchability' that Hindus customarily use with Muslims. They would insist on cooking their own food, not eating anything prepared by the family, and somehow making their hosts feel 'inferior'. Bir Bahadur Singh, one of the people I interviewed later in the course of my work on Partition, told me what he thought of the way Hindus and Sikhs treated Muslims:

> Such good relations we had that if there was any function that we had, then we used to call Musalmaans to our homes, they would eat in our houses, but we would not eat in theirs and this is a bad thing, which I realize now. If they would come to our houses we would have two utensils in one corner of the house, and we would tell them, pick these up and eat in them; they would then wash them and keep them aside and this was such a terrible thing. This was the reason Pakistan was created. If we went to their houses and took part in their weddings and ceremonies, they used to really respect and honour us. They would give us uncooked food, ghee, atta, dal, whatever sabzis they had, chicken and even mutton, all raw. And our dealings with them were so low that I am even ashamed to say it. A guest comes to our house and we say to him, bring those utensils and wash them, and if my mother or sister have to give him food, they will more or less throw the roti from such a distance, fearing that they may touch the dish and become polluted . . . We don't have such low dealings with our lower castes as Hindus and Sikhs did with Musalmaans.

* * *

As the years went by, Ranamama began to live an internal life, mostly in his head, that no one quite knew about, but everyone, particularly his family, was suspicious of. His children—especially his daughters and daughters-in-law—cared for him but they all feared what went on i

"For me, it is worse because I have continued to live in the same place. Even today, when I walk out to the market, I often hear people whispering Hindu, Hindu. No, you do not know what it is like. They never forgive you for being a convert." We can see how the tragedy of this person operates at so many levels. I mean, first of all, he is completely cut off from his family.

Secondly, he out of his own insecurity and sense of tragic experiences it converts into Islam, but at the same time everyone knows he is a convert and he is not really included in the normal social, dominant social conversations, the dominant social circles, everyone knows he is a convert and whenever he goes out in the road, people he can hear whispers behind him, talking about him, calling him Hindu, Hindu.

There are so many levels of discrimination, so many levels of tragedy that is operated over here, and we sort of see how this is a person who has suffered so much, he is a person who has suffered silence, suffered discrimination, suffered separation at so many levels. This is the most fundamental, the most basic, the most painful form of separation; the separation from your own core self.

"Your identity as a person, your identity, which is existential, religious, spiritual, social, everything is unsettled and shifted and changed and mutated at a very hardcore fundamental cognitive level. And that is something is very difficult to process and experience and that is the reason why he keeps saying that he has not slept one single night ever since he stayed back for the last 40 years.

I was curious about why Ranamama had never tried to come to India to seek out his family. So just the way she is doing at the moment, going back to Lahore and reconnecting with them she is wondering why did not he come to look up for his family in India? If you felt, so profoundly the loss of a family, why did he not like many others try to locate his?

So many people came back from Pakistan to India try to locate or to identify the family, trying to reconnect with them, but then why did he not do that? I mean, given that he is suffering so much, given that he is admittedly experiencing this tragedy and disconnect and alienation, why not give an effort to come to India and seek out his family in Delhi given that they are so close to each other, Lahore Delhi half an hour way in a plane.

Admittedly, in the beginning, it was difficult for people to cross the two borders, but there were times when things that had eased, if only marginally. But he had an answer to that too. How could I? Where would I have gone? My family, my sisters knew where I was. I had no idea where they were. And then, who in India would have trusted an ex-Hindu turned Muslim who now wanted to seek out his Hindu relatives. And this is the only home that I have known."

We are looking at a very interesting relationship and home and identity through speciality. Home is a form of speciality over here, which is ontological as well as experiential in quality, is always a feeling. Home is an immersion and he has always been there and he cannot see himself disconnected from here, so he cannot go to India for that reason.

He is at a very physical, pragmatic, commonsensical level he had no idea of the address of the people who lived in India and then of course the other added thing is that who in India would trust an ex-Hindu who turned to Muslim. So, in a way he feels abandoned from both sides. The Muslims will not accept him because they know he is an intruder into the religion, he is a convert into the religion, so he is not a pure Muslim in that sense.

The Hindus will not accept him because they feel he betrayed his faith; he betrayed his religion. Either way he is doomed to be alienated, he is doomed to be tragically alone and lonely in this world. “This is the only home that I have known. So albeit in Pakistan, albeit now in Islamic country, this is the home I grew up with a home in and this is the home that he can emotionally connect to at a very emotional experiential level.”

There is no other place where he would rather be. And yet home for him was defined in many different ways. Ever since television had made its appearance, Ranamama made sure he listened to the Indian news every day. We can see it is a very complex interplay between home as an emotional construct and home was a geopolitical construct. So geopolitically, his home is Pakistan, but emotionally his home is India.

He finds different ways to engage with India, Indian Affairs, Indian politics, Indian television, etc. The game of cricket, it becomes some kind of a symbolic icon, the sort of a proxy war between India and Pakistan, a proxy battle between India and Pakistan and things were very tensed and stressful and it was very polarized kind of thing and but we get to know that he secretly used to support India.

It is something he cannot admit in public, he cannot admit in the open. He has to lead a kind of a double life. He is a Hindu, who has now become a Muslim and after conversion because he wanted to stay on in Lahore, but at the same time in his mind, in his emotion he still feels like his old self which was a Hindu self, and of course he is completely disconnected geopolitically as well as existentially from his family members.

The cricket game, the cricket became very symbolic over here, as a ludic landscape, ludic means playful, is a ludic landscape which also doubles as a proxy battle, proxy war, proxy contest with Indian and Pakistan which brings in all the other kinds of attachments through nationality, religion, culture, etc. When cricket was played between the two countries, he watched and secretly rooted for India.

The key word, the operative word over here is secretly as he cannot acknowledge that publicly, cannot mention that he admires India because that will land him in trouble because he is in Pakistan, which is a different country which the very formation of Pakistan was breaking away from the Indian territory. He cannot support India

emotionally. We are looking at a very interesting relationship between emotionality and spatiality or shall we say emotional spatiality.

Spaces become not just physical places with roadmaps and coordinates, but also emotional investments, emotional performative investments, emotional performative constructs and that is something that he experiences over here. There seems to be some kind of incompatibilities between the geopolitical space which goes home which is Pakistan and the emotional space which he feels himself connected to which is India, although he has never been there and not likely to go either.

So, often when it was India playing another country, he sided with India. More recently, he sometimes watched Indian soaps on the small screen. We see how the television becomes some kind of a connector, some kind of a discourse network through which it so channelizes things on the outside, the other word comes in. Television becomes a kind of level of assets.

He would see; he relaxes to the Indian soaps, the television serials, sometimes to be able to see those. And although, he had told me that his home is Lahore and the only home he had ever known, it was to India that he turned for a sense of home. Physically he was fixed in Lahore, but emotionally and very utopian kind of a way he turns towards India, a place where he has never been too physically.

The Punjabi word used over here is called ‘watan’ that is a very emotional word and that again flags up the relationship between the physicality of land and the emotionality around the lands, the emotional investment one has in a particular land. It is the word that Butalia is picking up on and that is the word which we see that even this uncle Ranamama is also saying, is using in terms of connecting himself to the country the base of his home.

We are looking at the whole idea of nation as a very modern concept, as a very modern Western concept. Watan is not necessarily a nation, watan is something the soil that you grew up in, the emotional place that you were born into the kinship ties everywhere around a particular land, around a particular space that becomes watan. It is more of an emotional kinship system or the kinship connect.

The kinship ties to a particular land, to a particular space rather than just geopolitically defined nation. We have two different kinds of spatiality which are not necessarily always compatible with each other, so the word ‘watan’ is used over here. There is a word in Punjabi that is enormously evocative and emotive for most Punjabis, ‘watan’. It is a difficult word to translate.

It is not equivalent to that in English, English word nation or country or home where all these falls sharply it is a combination of everything. His country is also home, it is also land, it is also soil and it is also emotion that is the basic that is the most fundamental connect. It is a difficult word to translate. It can mean home, country, land, all and any of them. When a Punjabi speaks of his or her watan, they are referring to reference to something inexpressible.

Something very phenomenal in quality, very emotional in quality, inexpressible, some longing for a sense of place, of belonging, of rootedness. There is always a lot of nostalgia and emotion when talking about the watan. For most Punjabis who were displaced as a result of partition, their watan lay in the home they had left behind, the home they grew up in, the house, the mansion, the place surrounding the bricks.

The physical structure that they grew up and that was the watan irrespective of whether it was India or Pakistan. For Ranamama, in a curious travesty of this, while he continued to live on in the family home in Pakistan, his watan became India, a country he had visited once only briefly. So, we now get to see is almost dark humorous quality about his visits to India. And in a very emotional way India the other land becomes watan for him.

Because despite the fact that he is staying on in a place that he grew up in, because everyone had transported, everyone had so moved over to India that his emotional connect, his emotional ties, his kinship everything stayed on the other side. And that became ironically for him the watan rather than the physical place where he continued to live and we get to know now that is only one time when he went to India and that was a very strange experience for all of them and this is the account that we get.

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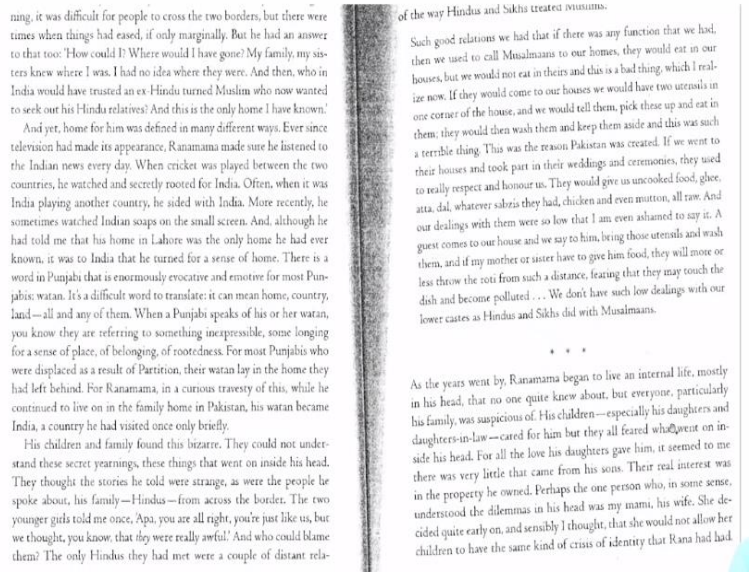

ning, it was difficult for people to cross the two borders, but there were times when things had eased, if only marginally. But he had an answer to that too: 'How could I? Where would I have gone? My family, my sisters knew where I was. I had no idea where they were. And then, who in India would have trusted an ex-Hindu turned Muslim who now wanted to seek out his Hindu relatives? And this is the only home I have known.'

And yet, home for him was defined in many different ways. Ever since television had made its appearance, Ranamama made sure he listened to the Indian news every day. When cricket was played between the two countries, he watched and secretly rooted for India. Often, when it was India playing another country, he sided with India. More recently, he sometimes watched Indian soaps on the small screen. And, although he had told me that his home in Lahore was the only home he had ever known, it was to India that he turned for a sense of home. There is a word in Punjabi that is enormously evocative and emotive for most Punjabis: watan. It's a difficult word to translate: it can mean home, country, land—all and any of them. When a Punjabi speaks of his or her watan, you know they are referring to something inexpressible, some longing for a sense of place, of belonging, of rootedness. For most Punjabis who were displaced as a result of Partition, their watan lay in the home they had left behind. For Ranamama, in a curious travesty of this, while he continued to live on in the family home in Pakistan, his watan became India, a country he had visited once only briefly.

His children and family found this bizarre. They could not understand these secret yearnings, these things that went on inside his head. They thought the stories he told were strange, as were the people he spoke about, his family—Hindus—from across the border. The two younger girls told me once, Apa, you are all right, you're just like us, but we thought, you know, that *they* were really awful.' And who could blame them? The only Hindus they had met were a couple of distant rela-

of the way Hindus and Sikhs treated Muslims.

Such good relations we had that if there was any function that we had, then we used to call Musalmaans to our homes, they would eat in our houses, but we would not eat in theirs and this is a bad thing, which I realize now. If they would come to our houses we would have two utensils in one corner of the house, and we would tell them, pick these up and eat in them; they would then wash them and keep them aside and this was such a terrible thing. This was the reason Pakistan was created. If we went to their houses and took part in their weddings and ceremonies, they used to really respect and honour us. They would give us uncooked food, ghee, atta, dal, whatever sabzis they had, chicken and even mutton, all raw. And our dealings with them were so low that I am even ashamed to say it. A guest comes to our house and we say to him, bring those utensils and wash them, and if my mother or sister have to give him food, they will more or less throw the roti from such a distance, fearing that they may touch the dish and become polluted . . . We don't have such low dealings with our lower castes as Hindus and Sikhs did with Musalmaans.

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As the years went by, Ranamama began to live an internal life, mostly in his head, that no one quite knew about, but everyone, particularly his family, was suspicious of. His children—especially his daughters and daughters-in-law—cared for him but they all feared what went on inside his head. For all the love his daughters gave him, it seemed to me there was very little that came from his sons. Their real interest was in the property he owned. Perhaps the one person who, in some sense, understood the dilemmas in his head was my mami, his wife. She decided quite early on, and sensibly I thought, that she would not allow her children to have the same kind of crisis of identity that Rana had had.

"His children and family found this bizarre. They could not understand these secret yearnings, these things that went on inside his head. They thought the stories he told were strange, as were the people he spoke about, his family Hindus from across the border." Because the next generation and they talked about remember in the previous class about post-memory and even Butalia for that matter is a post-memory generation.

She had consumed the stories about Pakistan and India listening to the stories from my grandparents, her parents, but she never been there, she never felt and experienced it. And likewise, so this uncle's children who were the equivalent to Butalia across the border, they never seen what India is, they do not know what India is. They just hear about it, they hear about the family.

And for them India or the pre-partition family systems very different kind of a story, which again only listened to, but not relate to at all. "Who were these people, the Hindus across the border? Who were his family? Who were his relatives that their father talks about and they do not understand. The two younger girls told me once, Apa, you are all right, you are just like us, but we thought you know that they were really awful.

Apa over here is the sister, they are addressing Butalia, so you are fine. You are just like us, but we thought they were really awful." There was this collective consciousness about the other, for the Pakistanis is about the Indians, for the Indians is about the Pakistani and their collective consciousness, very negative kind of an identity. There is always this fear of the other.

It is like xenophobia exactly, just out of political construction, out of an emotional ignorance and that everything comes together and the other is created through fear. They are seeing someone from the inside and they can relate to her and so that tell her that individually we find "you are fine, just like us, but then we have this fear of the other that they are just awful, they meaning the collective Indians. And who could blame them?"

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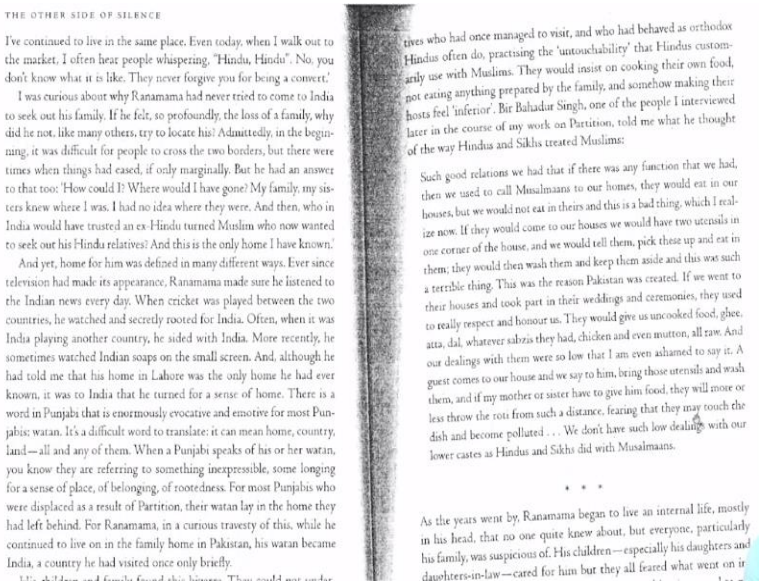

THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

I've continued to live in the same place. Even today, when I walk out to the market, I often hear people whispering, 'Hindu, Hindu'. No, you don't know what it is like. They never forgive you for being a convert.'

I was curious about why Ranamama had never tried to come to India to seek out his family. If he felt, so profoundly, the loss of a family, why did he not, like many others, try to locate his? Admittedly, in the beginning, it was difficult for people to cross the two borders, but there were times when things had eased, if only marginally. But he had an answer to that too: 'How could I? Where would I have gone? My family, my sisters knew where I was. I had no idea where they were. And then, who in India would have trusted an ex-Hindu turned Muslim who now wanted to seek out his Hindu relatives? And this is the only home I have known.'

And yet, home for him was defined in many different ways. Ever since television had made its appearance, Ranamama made sure he listened to the Indian news every day. When cricket was played between the two countries, he watched and secretly rooted for India. Often, when it was India playing another country, he sided with India. More recently, he sometimes watched Indian soaps on the small screen. And, although he had told me that his home in Lahore was the only home he had ever known, it was to India that he turned for a sense of home. There is a word in Punjabi that is enormously evocative and emotive for most Punjabis: watan. It's a difficult word to translate: it can mean home, country, land—all and any of them. When a Punjabi speaks of his or her watan, you know they are referring to something inexpressible, some longing for a sense of place, of belonging, of rootedness. For most Punjabis who were displaced as a result of Partition, their watan lay in the home they had left behind. For Ranamama, in a curious travesty of this, while he continued to live on in the family home in Pakistan, his watan became India, a country he had visited once only briefly.

tives who had once managed to visit, and who had behaved as orthodox Hindus often do, practising the 'untouchability' that Hindus customarily use with Muslims. They would insist on cooking their own food, not eating anything prepared by the family, and somehow making their hosts feel 'inferior'. Bir Bahadur Singh, one of the people I interviewed later in the course of my work on Partition, told me what he thought of the way Hindus and Sikhs treated Muslims:

> Such good relations we had that if there was any function that we had, then we used to call Musalmaans to our homes, they would eat in our houses, but we would not eat in theirs and this is a bad thing, which I realize now. If they would come to our houses we would have two utensils in one corner of the house, and we would tell them, pick these up and eat in them; they would then wash them and keep them aside and this was such a terrible thing. This was the reason Pakistan was created. If we went to their houses and took part in their weddings and ceremonies, they used to really respect and honour us. They would give us uncooked food, ghee, atta, dal, whatever sabzis they had, chicken and even mutton, all raw. And our dealings with them were so low that I am even ashamed to say it. A guest comes to our house and we say to him, bring those utensils and wash them, and if my mother or sister have to give him food, they will more or less throw the roti from such a distance, fearing that they may touch the dish and become polluted . . . We don't have such low dealings with our lower castes as Hindus and Sikhs did with Musalmaans.

* * *

As the years went by, Ranamama began to live an internal life, mostly in his head, that no one quite knew about, but everyone, particularly his family, was suspicious of. His children—especially his daughters and daughters-in-law—cared for him but they all feared what went on in

"The only Hindus they have met were a couple of distant relatives who had once managed to visit and who had behaved as orthodox Hindus often do, practicing the untouchability that Hindus customarily use with Muslims." This becomes interesting because some of the Hindu relatives who come to Pakistan because they have not become Muslims, they have practiced untouchability, which is one of the very orthodox Hindu custom.

We see how the whole idea of religion and religious identity becomes very complex over here because we do know these are people who have been converted into Islam because of convenience. Ranamama was not really a Muslim by birth, he just became Muslim because that was convenient thing to do because of his decision to stay back in Pakistan.

They would insist on cooking their own food, not eating anything prepared by the family and somehow making their host feel inferior. This inferiority comes from a sense of difference which is maintained. Bir Bahadur Singh is one of the people she interviewed

later in the course of my work on partition, told me what he thought of the way Hindus and Sikhs treated Muslims.

“There is one person who is talking about how Hindus and Sikhs treated Muslims, especially in Pakistan. Such good relations we had that if there was any function that we had, then we used to call Musalmaans to our homes, they would eat in our houses, but we would not eat in their house and this is a bad thing, which I realize now. So if they would come to our house, we would have two utensils in one corner of the house, and we will tell them pick these up and eat in them.

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A guest comes to our house and we say to him bring those utensils and wash them. And if my mother or sister have to give them food, they will more or less throw the roti from such a distance, fearing that they may touch the dish and become polluted. We do not have such low dealings with our lower caste as Hindus and Sikhs did with Musalmaans. So, what we see over here is very tragic and painful series of rituals of difference.

Social difference, religious difference and this kind of practice ritual is something that is constructed and orchestrated and carried on. And there is this fear of contamination, fear of pollution, and we can see that how all these fears are psychologically operated because of certain kinds of constricts, certain kinds of social constricts where the fear of the other, the phobia, the revulsion about the other, the fear of contamination.

There is a sense of hygiene over here that has been maintained and this is an anecdote and account why someone could be bothered saying what this account does at a very fundamental level in a very ashamed way. This is a retrospective accounting. Thinking of things that have been done and they voice very embarrassed and apologetic, the retrospective voice and they realize that this was a treatment done to the other, the religious other.

This means there was a very fundamental disconnect, a very fundamental phobia, a very fundamental fear of contamination and hygiene which is entirely socially manufactured, is entirely socially engineered. But that became very real, that became very experiential and this grew to the bigger event of partition. We can see how; again we are looking at the two models of difference, the macro model and the micro model.

The micro model connects to the macro model in very complex ways. This distance from the other, this revulsion of the other, this phobia of the other, this eventually became expanded and became this big political event which was Pakistan and India, the partition. But another important thing over here is to see how the little stories, the micro stories, micro accounts, micro memories.

All these become very interesting in terms of a more complex and fuller understanding of the broader event of partition. Butalia does not look at partition as purely a political event, as purely a geopolitical event. But she also looks at partition as an emotional event, as a phenomenal event, as something which really shifts the ontology, the subject, the identity of the subject, the experience of the subject, the exponential identity of the subject, so everything shifts.

We can see in the case of this uncle of Butalia, Ranamama when he becomes a convert, when he converts into Islam, he does it out of convenience, but at the same time he realizes there is no other choice. No one compelled him to do it, but that seem to be the only option available given the circumstances. We will see how that makes them doubly marginalized.

He is rejected and abandoned by the Hindus and so completely disavowed by the Hindus, he is disowned by the Hindus because he becomes the other religion. But then the other religion does not accept him either because they know that he converted out of convenience, so there is always this discrimination, this whispers that he hears everywhere he goes.

It makes him neurotic, that makes them depressed and he comes to confessing the confession that he had not slept a single night without regretting the decision to stay

there. We know the decision to stay there was not entirely a decision taken out of liberty or freedom, but something which came out of compulsion, but there was no compulsion, but that seemed to be the only option available.

We are looking at agency as a very complex category of will and freedom, it is not just having will, it is not just having freedom, but is only available option among the options which are supposedly there that converts into agency or the absence thereof.