Trauma and Literature

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Lecture – 42
Butalia's The Other Side of Silence – Part 6

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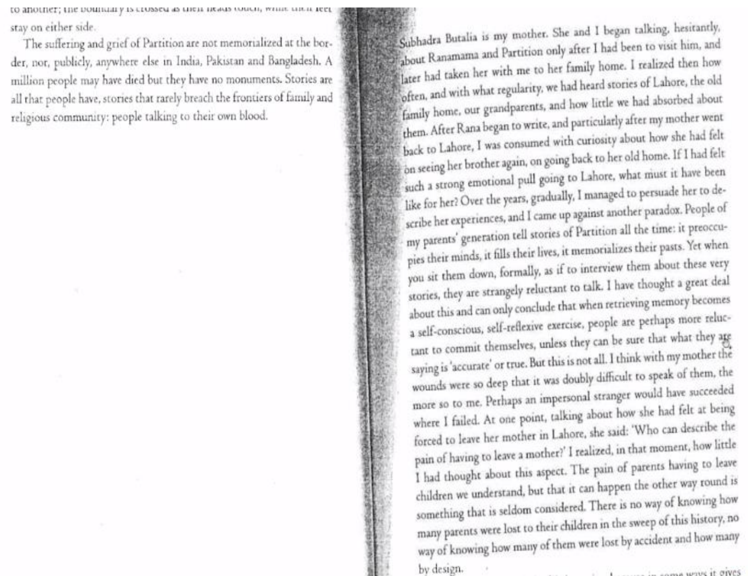

stay on either side.

The suffering and grief of Partition are not memorialized at the border, nor, publicly, anywhere else in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. A million people may have died but they have no monuments. Stories are all that people have, stories that rarely breach the frontiers of family and religious community: people talking to their own blood.

Subhadra Butalia is my mother. She and I began talking, hesitantly, about Ranamama and Partition only after I had been to visit him, and later had taken her with me to her family home. I realized then how often, and with what regularity, we had heard stories of Lahore, the old family home, our grandparents, and how little we had absorbed about them. After Rana began to write, and particularly after my mother went back to Lahore, I was consumed with curiosity about how she had felt on seeing her brother again, on going back to her old home. If I had felt such a strong emotional pull going to Lahore, what must it have been like for her? Over the years, gradually, I managed to persuade her to describe her experiences, and I came up against another paradox. People of my parents' generation tell stories of Partition all the time: it preoccupies their minds, it fills their lives, it memorializes their pasts. Yet when you sit them down, formally, as if to interview them about these very stories, they are strangely reluctant to talk. I have thought a great deal about this and can only conclude that when retrieving memory becomes a self-conscious, self-reflexive exercise, people are perhaps more reluctant to commit themselves, unless they can be sure that what they are saying is 'accurate' or true. But this is not all. I think with my mother the wounds were so deep that it was doubly difficult to speak of them, the more so to me. Perhaps an impersonal stranger would have succeeded where I failed. At one point, talking about how she had felt at being forced to leave her mother in Lahore, she said: 'Who can describe the pain of having to leave a mother?' I realized, in that moment, how little I had thought about this aspect. The pain of parents having to leave children we understand, but that it can happen the other way round is something that is seldom considered. There is no way of knowing how many parents were lost to their children in the sweep of this history, no way of knowing how many of them were lost by accident and how many by design.

This is an NPTEL course entitled "Trauma and Literature" on Urvashi Butalia's text "The Other Side of Silence". We start with the first interview of sorts today and that is the interview of Subhadra Butalia, who happens to be Urvashi Butalia's mother.

We talked about the complexities of memory about the partition, about the fact that there was no museum for partition for longest time and how memory and forgetting worked in a very entangled ways, not strictly or necessarily oppositional ways, but as connected categories; so forgetting, informed, remembering in certain sense.

We find the people who refuse to remember that also becomes some kind of agency, some kind of an assertion of agency that they do not want to talk about, that they do not want to remind themselves of that. They do not want to remember something which has been dismembered painfully and tragically. It corroborates the title of this work, "The Other Side of Silence".

The silence becomes an ontological condition, silence becomes an experiential condition, but also an equally silence becomes a narrative condition, not saying something also becomes some kind of narrative method and the silence becomes an act of articulation through absence. This articulation of absence in certain sense that becomes in certain ways, in certain situations the most authentic representation of this kind of memory, this kind of traumatic memory. The discussion of engagement with Subhadra Butalia, who happens to be Urvashi Butalia's mother and what does she recount or how does she recount rather the entire memory of partition is as follows.

"Butalia is my mother. She and I began talking, hesitantly, about Ranamama and partition only after I had been to visit him and later had taken her with me to her family home. I realized then how often and with what regularity we had heard stories of Lahore, the old family home, our grandparents, and how little we had absorbed about them. After Rana began to write and particularly after my mother went back to Lahore, I was consumed with curiosity about how she had felt on seeing her brother again, on going back to her old home."

We find that the focal perspective is very interesting over here who is remembering, who is the one, who is the agent of memory becomes interesting because that innovate, inform or influences the kind of memory, the act of memory, the nature of the scope of memory. Butalia wants to find out what her mother must have felt going back to her ancestral house in Lahore after some years and how she must have felt talking to her brother from whom she had been separated due to the partition.

This was a curiosity that she had in her mind. "If I had felt such a strong emotional pull going to Lahore, what must it have been like for her? I mean, she belongs to the post-memory generation." We did talk about that before how she did not experience partition, but she consumed stories about partition and that had shaped her memory of partition in a way which is the definition of post-memory.

The generation which comes after the act, but the generation still remembers the act through a consumption of stories, consumption of narratives. "She wonders if I had felt such a boom in going back to the house despite the fact I never lived there, what must

have been for my mother who grew up in that house entirely to go back to that space, to go back to the territory?

Over the years gradually, I managed to persuade her to describe her experiences, and I came up against another paradox. People of my parents' generation tell stories of partition all the time; it preoccupies their minds, it fills their lives, it memorializes their pasts. Yet when you sit them down, formally, as to interview them about these various stories, they are strangely reluctant to talk and this becomes an interesting episode in the whole book."

The reluctance to talk, the reluctance to recount, the reluctance to remember when it comes to a formal interview because informally effectively, they talk about these all the time in informal discussions and different stories, anecdotes, exaggerations, hyperbolic accounts of things which are very emotionally biased in quality. But when it comes to a formal neutral interview that is when the reluctance begins to happen.

They do not want to talk about this. This is a paradox that Butalia talks about over here and these are people who will tell stories, spin stories about partition all the time in informal intimate settings. But when it comes to a formal, neutral, objective setting of interview these are people who refuse to talk, refuse to narrate, refuse to remember anything. "I have thought a great deal about this."

And can only conclude that when retrieving memory becomes a self-conscious, self-reflexive exercise, people are perhaps more reluctant to commit themselves, unless they can be sure that what they are saying is accurate or true. This becomes a very important distinction in which she says that when memory is filled with emotion, memory is filled with affect, then people just pour out their hearts; pour out what they remember.

When retrieving memory becomes a self-reflexive, self-conscious activity your consciousness is being recorded, your consciousness is being just monitored and evaluated, then the whole idea of accuracy becomes a very important issue. And people are not sure about the accuracy of what they remember, what they recount, then they do not want to talk about it at all.

Accuracy becomes in a certain sense an impediment to memory rather than a part of memory, it is inimical to emotional memory, it is an impediment to memory. It goes against the grain of memory so to speak. Memory as an activity; memory as a recounting activity is essentially emotional in quality. "If you take the emotionality away, if you did affectivity away.

If you just focus on the accuracy quotient, the accuracy component, the memory then becomes a self-conscious act, a self-reflexive self-conscious act which produces reluctance, which produces hesitation, which produces ambivalence because the emotionality, the affectivity memory is gone." The formal interview in a certain sense becomes a more difficult way to render the memory.

This is what she realizes as a paradox during the course of her exercise in partition. But this is not all. There are other factors as well. She thinks with her mother the wounds were so deep that it was doubly difficult to speak of them, the more so to me. The trauma memory, the brutality of this, the wounds, the injury, the mental injury was so deep that she was still grieving.

It is very difficult for her to talk about this, not least to her own daughter who is just a complete legacy of that partition who embodies the legacy of partition to a great extent. "Perhaps an impersonal stranger would have succeeded where I failed. At one point, talking about how she had felt at being forced to leave her mother in Lahore, she said who can describe the pain of having to leave a mother?

I realized in that moment how little I had thought about this aspect. The pain of parents having to leave children we understand, but that it can happen the other way around is something that is seldom considered. There is no way of knowing how many parents were lost to their children in the sweep of this history, no way of knowing how many of them were lost by accident and harmony by design."

The experience of leaving one's parents behind is an understudied experience according to Butalia because she says we mostly focus our attention on parents who are forced to be separated from the children, what about the children who are forcibly separated from

the parents either by accident or by design and that becomes a doubly difficult experience to remember.

She talks about how emotionality and affectivity become very important parts of memory, parts of remembrance. She says at an emotional level it was difficult for a mother to talk about these things to her own daughter who happens to be Urvashi Butalia herself. She says maybe it had been easier for her to talk about this to a stranger from when there is this distance. There are two narratives over here.

One is the engagement with accuracy which makes things hesitant, which makes us reluctant and the other is too emotional closeness, being too close emotionally to the person you are talking to and that becomes a problem as well. There needs to be some balance between emotion and objectivity, which makes memory a seamless activity because if it becomes too objective then it is subconscious, if it is too emotional it is too painful. The balance between these two categories is the ideal position to be.

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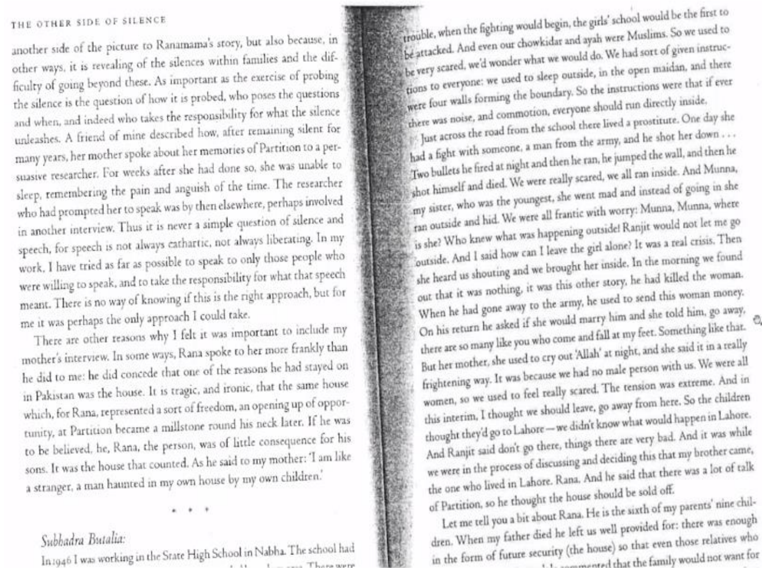

THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

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There are other reasons why I felt it was important to include my mother's interview. In some ways, Rana spoke to her more frankly than he did to me: he did concede that one of the reasons he had stayed on in Pakistan was the house. It is tragic, and ironic, that the same house which, for Rana, represented a sort of freedom, an opening up of opportunity, at Partition became a millstone round his neck later. If he was to be believed, he, Rana, the person, was of little consequence for his sons. It was the house that counted. As he said to my mother: 'I am like a stranger, a man haunted in my own house by my own children.'

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Subhadra Butalia:

In 1946 I was working in the State High School in Nabha. The school had

trouble, when the fighting would begin, the girls' school would be the first to be attacked. And even our chowkidar and ayah were Muslims. So we used to be very scared, we'd wonder what we would do. We had sort of given instructions to everyone: we used to sleep outside, in the open maidan, and there were four walls forming the boundary. So the instructions were that if ever there was noise, and commotion, everyone should run directly inside.

Just across the road from the school there lived a prostitute. One day she had a fight with someone, a man from the army, and he shot her down . . . Two bullets he fired at night and then he ran, he jumped the wall, and then he shot himself and died. We were really scared, we all ran inside. And Munna, my sister, who was the youngest, she went mad and instead of going in she ran outside and hid. We were all frantic with worry: Munna, Munna, where is she? Who knew what was happening outside! Ranjit would not let me go outside. And I said how can I leave the girl alone? It was a real crisis. Then she heard us shouting and we brought her inside. In the morning we found out that it was nothing, it was this other story, he had killed the woman. When he had gone away to the army, he used to send this woman money. On his return he asked if she would marry him and she told him, go away, there are so many like you who come and fall at my feet. Something like that. But her mother, she used to cry out 'Allah' at night, and she said it in a really frightening way. It was because we had no male person with us. We were all women, so we used to feel really scared. The tension was extreme. And in this interim, I thought we should leave, go away from here. So the children thought they'd go to Lahore—we didn't know what would happen in Lahore. And Ranjit said don't go there, things there are very bad. And it was while we were in the process of discussing and deciding this that my brother came, the one who lived in Lahore. Rana. And he said that there was a lot of talk of Partition, so he thought the house should be sold off.

Let me tell you a bit about Rana. He is the sixth of my parents' nine children. When my father died he left us well provided for: there was enough in the form of future security (the house) so that even those relatives who

"I have chosen to include this interview because in some ways it gives another side of the picture to Ranamama's story but also because in another way it is revealing of the silences within families and the difficulty of going beyond these. As important as the exercise of probing silence is a question of how it is probed, who poses the questions and when and indeed who takes responsibility for what the silence unleashes?

These other factors become very instrumental in terms of who is the question; who is the person asking the questions? Who is the person spoken to? And the whole idea of the location of the interviewer becomes very important category over here and you can see the metaphor of silence unleashing something and that becomes a very important factor as well on who is going to take responsibility for what the silence unleashes, what the silence unravels."

The pain and trauma, the traumatic memory that emerges out of the silence, will someone the interlocutor be equipped or fit to handle that has the human presence. A friend of mine described how, after remaining silent for many years, her mother spoke about her memories of partition to a persuasive researcher. For weeks after she had done so, she was unable to sleep, remembering the pain and anguish all the time.

The researcher who had prompted her to speak was by then elsewhere, perhaps involved in another interview. The fact that you reexperience it when you recount it to a researcher that makes one go through it one more time and that can sometimes have very serious psychological and bodily effects. In another instance over here of a friend's mother was unable to speak having recounted her trauma of partition again to someone, a researcher, and researcher was away by the time her difficulties began.

Researcher is probably interviewing someone else. Human connection is a very important factor over here and we cannot just unravel ourselves to anyone without any psychological impact again. Thus, it is never a simple question of silence and speech, for speech is not always cathartic, not always liberating. In the common presupposition that if we talk about something and releases us, it has a cathartic effect is always true.

Sometimes, silence can be more cathartic than speech. And mentioned silences and speech are not necessarily always ontological opposites, but they become connected categories, but not talking about it is also a way of articulating and articulating absence and that becomes a way of negotiating with trauma, way of navigating through trauma, self-preservation strategy.

"In my work, I have tried as far as possible to speak to only those people who are willing to speak and to take the responsibility for what that speech meant. There is no way of

knowing if this is the right approach, but for me it was perhaps the only approach that I could take." So, taking responsibility for speech becomes an important fact because what is revealed over here that the person who is listening must absorb it and must offer a human presence, must offer a human mode of absorption.

But if it just becomes a neutral, perfectly machinic presence, just takes us away and goes away to someone, that story does not relieve the teller, the story stays with the teller and it becomes compounded with trauma. The person who is listening to story must be able to absorb it in a way that it takes the trauma away from the teller of the story and that is something which Butalia talks about.

"That you should take responsibility of listening to the story, the speech of trauma because if you do not do that, then talking about it is not precisely cathartic, talking about is not necessarily liberating thing because it still stays with you because the listener, the interlocutor, the researcher who prompted you to speak just disappears, does not offer this human absorption of the trauma, the traumatic memory.

There are other reasons why I felt it was important to include my mother's interview. In some ways, Rana spoke to her more frankly than he did to me. He did concede that one of the reasons he had stayed on in Pakistan was the house. It is tragic and ironic that the same house which for Rana represented a sort of freedom, an opening up of opportunity, at partition became a millstone around his neck later."

"If he was to be believed, he, Rana, the person was of little consequence for his sons. It was the house that counted. As he said to my mother, I am like a stranger, a man haunted in my own house by my own children." The whole idea of being haunted becomes important and we are told that the house just exists some kind of metaphor for Rana's children and that he feels alienated.

He feels isolated, he feels victimized in his own house. So, ironically the same house which prompted him to stay becomes a problem for him in subsequent years.

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In 1946 I was working in the State High School in Nabha. The school had a large compound and building. It was surrounded by a slum area. There were prostitutes, and there were some very poor Muslims who lived there. So on all four sides it was a Muslim-dominated area. At one stage, people began to talk of Partition and the discussion always was about whether it would happen or not. And I and the headmistress, Ranjit, and my mother and my brothers and sisters, we all lived together. We were always fearful, because the stories that were circulated made it sound as if whenever there would be

had a fight with someone, ... Two bullets he fired at night and then he ran, he jumped the wall, and then he shot himself and died. We were really scared, we all ran inside. And Munna, my sister, who was the youngest, she went mad and instead of going in she ran outside and hid. We were all frantic with worry: Munna, Munna, where is she? Who knew what was happening outside! Ranjit would not let me go outside. And I said how can I leave the girl alone? It was a real crisis. Then she heard us shouting and we brought her inside. In the morning we found out that it was nothing, it was this other story, he had killed the woman. When he had gone away to the army, he used to send this woman money. On his return he asked if she would marry him and she told him, go away, there are so many like you who come and fall at my feet. Something like that. But her mother, she used to cry out 'Allah' at night, and she said it in a really frightening way. It was because we had no male person with us. We were all women, so we used to feel really scared. The tension was extreme. And in this interim, I thought we should leave, go away from here. So the children thought they'd go to Lahore—we didn't know what would happen in Lahore. And Ranjit said don't go there, things there are very bad. And it was while we were in the process of discussing and deciding this that my brother came, the one who lived in Lahore, Rana. And he said that there was a lot of talk of Partition, so he thought the house should be sold off.

Let me tell you a bit about Rana. He is the sixth of my parents' nine children. When my father died he left us well provided for: there was enough in the form of future security (the house) so that even those relatives who came to our house to condole commented that the family would not want for anything. But something else was in store for us: Bikram, my eldest brother, was a college dropout. He decided to start a business, took money from my mother, but the venture failed. Still, the impact of the loss was not felt so much, and Bikram later joined the Royal Air Force. When he brought home news of his appointment he brought with him a beautiful Muslim girl,

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Now we get to see Subhadra Butalia's story and this interview appears in first person. She is telling the story and that is something we will pay some attention to. "In 1946, I was working in the State High School at Nabha. The school had a large compound and building. It was surrounded by a slum area. There were prostitutes, and there were some very poor Muslims who lived there. So on all four sides, it was a Muslim dominated area.

At one stage, people began to talk of partition and the discussion always was about whether it would happen or not. And I am the headmistress, Ranjeet, and my mother and my brothers and sisters; we all live together. We were always fearful because the stories that were circulated made it sound as though whenever there would be trouble and when the fighting would begin.

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Just across the road from the school there lived a prostitute. One day she had a fight with someone, a man from the army, and he shot her down . . . Two bullets he fired at night and then he ran, he jumped the wall, and then he shot himself and died. We were really scared, we all ran inside. And Munna, my sister, who was the youngest, she went mad and instead of going in she ran outside and hid. We were all frantic with worry: Munna, Munna, where is she? Who knew what was happening outside! Ranjit would not let me go outside. And I said how can I leave the girl alone? It was a real crisis. Then she heard us shouting and we brought her inside. In the morning we found out that it was nothing, it was this other story, he had killed the woman. When he had gone away to the army, he used to send this woman money. On his return he asked if she would marry him and she told him, go away, there are so many like you who come and fall at my feet. Something like that. But her mother, she used to cry out 'Allah' at night, and she said it in a really frightening way. It was because we had no male person with us. We were all women, so we used to feel really scared. The tension was extreme. And in this interim, I thought we should leave, go away from here. So the children thought they'd go to Lahore—we didn't know what would happen in Lahore. And Ranjit said don't go there, things there are very bad. And it was while we were in the process of discussing and deciding this that my brother came, the one who lived in Lahore, Rana. And he said that there was a lot of talk of Partition, so he thought the house should be sold off.

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The girls in school would be the first to be attacked and that is the defeat, the fear of being sexually attacked, the fear of being bodily attacked and that fear is something which experiences a woman, especially in a troubled time like this, troubled time like partition. And even our chowkidar and ayah were Muslims. We used to be very scared. We would wonder what we would do."

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It was while we were in the process of discussing and deciding this that my brother came, the one who lived in Lahore, Rana. And he said there was a lot of talk of partition, so he thought the house should be sold off. This whole incident as we can see begins to become interesting because we have presences over here of different kinds. There was headmistress, the school teacher, there is also a prostitute, an army officer.

The violence which goes on between the prostitute and the army officer in a way become quite a microcosmic representation of the bigger violence of partition where someone can just be killed randomly and this random loss of life, the failed promises, the rejection, the violence; all these come together in a very domestic, personal or sometimes at a petty level to be reflective of the larger absurdity of partition.

Something we have seen already how the personal petty narratives are mapped onto the bigger wider cultural narratives of partition and was also interested in a way as how this conspicuous absence of the protecting male becomes a problem. There is no male protector and that is a big issue over here. The arrival of Rana at a certain sense becomes a very welcome arrival.

But then we get to know he comes into talk about the house and finally it should be sold off. Now we get to hear about Rana. This is again in first person told to us by Subhadra Butalia.

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had a fight with someone, a man

Two bullets he fired at night and then he ran, he jumped the wall, and then he shot himself and died. We were really scared, we all ran inside. And Munna, my sister, who was the youngest, she went mad and instead of going in she ran outside and hid. We were all frantic with worry: Munna, Munna, where is she? Who knew what was happening outside! Ranjit would not let me go outside. And I said how can I leave the girl alone? It was a real crisis. Then she heard us shouting and we brought her inside. In the morning we found out that it was nothing, it was this other story, he had killed the woman. When he had gone away to the army, he used to send this woman money. On his return he asked if she would marry him and she told him, go away, there are so many like you who come and fall at my feet. Something like that. But her mother, she used to cry out 'Allah' at night, and she said it in a really frightening way. It was because we had no male person with us. We were all women, so we used to feel really scared. The tension was extreme. And in this interim, I thought we should leave, go away from here. So the children thought they'd go to Lahore—we didn't know what would happen in Lahore. And Ranjit said don't go there, things there are very bad. And it was while we were in the process of discussing and deciding this that my brother came, the one who lived in Lahore, Rana. And he said that there was a lot of talk of Partition, so he thought the house should be sold off.

Let me tell you a bit about Rana. He is the sixth of my parents' nine children. When my father died he left us well provided for: there was enough in the form of future security (the house) so that even those relatives who came to our house to condole commented that the family would not want for anything. But something else was in store for us: Bikram, my eldest brother, was a college dropout. He decided to start a business, took money from my mother, but the venture failed. Still, the impact of the loss was not felt so much, and Bikram later joined the Royal Air Force. When he brought home news of his appointment he brought with him a beautiful Muslim girl,

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He decided to start a business, took money from my mother, but the venture failed. Still, the impact of those loss was not felt so much and Bikram later joined the Royal Air Force. When he brought home news of his appointment he brought with him a beautiful Muslim girl, Ameena.

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Ameena. He said he would marry her the day he got his first salary. But this never happened. The day Bikram went to office to collect his first salary, the office was not yet open so he decided to take his small aircraft out for a brief flight. He crashed into some electric wires and died.

For some reason Rana's life was the most affected by Bikram's death. One of our uncles, a judge at the Lahore High Court, decreed that Rana should be sent to the village. So, at age twelve or thirteen, he was pulled out of school and sent off to Paragpur. He hated it. He wrote a letter home one day saying: 'Here I have to wash my own bedsheets. I don't want to stay here, if you don't call me back I will run away.' Shortly afterwards we heard that he had disappeared – but we did not know what to do, how to find him. My mother was by this time an epileptic, my elder sisters were married and had left home, I was barely twenty . . .

I don't remember how we discovered that Rana was with my aunt, my mother's sister. We tried to get him back, and he ran away again. He could not be traced for two years and we began to think we had lost another brother. I felt the loss more than anyone else . . . And then one morning my elder sister walked in with Rana. She had found him, waiting tables at a railway restaurant. The prodigal had come home. He had become a stranger to the family but he had also learnt the art of survival.

Later, when all of us moved to Nabha, Rana stayed on in Lahore. I took up a job in Nabha and kept my mother and my younger brother and sister with me. Rana stayed in the family home. How he maintained himself no one knows. Often he would ask me for small loans . . .

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There was no reply from my uncle

There I learnt that my uncle had warned Rana against me, saying that I would grab the property. Rana had actually brought my mother back so that he could hold on to the Lahore house. When I asked him about this he said, 'I am an uneducated man. What will I do in India? How long will you support me? Soon you'll get married and then your family will be your priority. Here at least this house will give me shelter.'

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What about Mother? I asked him. He told me she was his mother too. He said he would become a Muslim, he'd marry this girl, Fawzia, and would keep Mother with him.

Who can describe the pain of having to leave one's mother? . . . I pleaded with Rana to let me take my mother and my younger brother. I felt I could not trust him any more. I thought, in his lust for property he might even kill my mother or my brother . . . There was so much tension. I was frightened. I did not want to stay in the house at night. But finally, I had to leave. I left my poor, ailing mother behind and I have never forgiven him for this cruelty. As I was leaving, I wept. He looked at me and said, 'You are unhappy because I am converting to Islam.' I just held his hand and cried. I told him to look after Mother. I told him it was immaterial to me whether he was a Hindu or a Muslim—after all our father was a very secular and forward-looking man. But the woman he was snatching away from me, she was ill and frail and needed care . . . I came away with a heavy heart. I hoped that one of my sisters would be able to persuade him to let Mother go. But that did not happen. How she lived, whether she was looked after, was she fed properly or starved . . . I never came to know any of this. In my heart I yearned for her. After my father had died, Mother had lived with me . . . She was a staunch Hindu, she would pray every evening . . . I wondered what her daily

He said he would marry her the day he got his first salary. But this never happened. The day Bikram went to office to collect his first salary, the office was not yet open so he decided to take a small aircraft out for a brief flight. He crashed into the electric wires and died. Now, again; this is a personal tragedy, a personal loss, a personal family story. But the sense of loss, sense of death or the abruptness and randomness of death these become very symbolic acts in the context of partition.

We have a story of Bikram who married a Muslim girl called Ameena and then he said he would marry her; he did not marry her, but he brought on the girl and he said he would marry her the day when his first salary was received, but that never happened because he died of a plane crash and that is almost like a domestic death. He went out for a small trip and then the planes crashed into a small electric wire and he died.

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"But we did not know what to do or how to find him. My mother was by this time an epileptic, my elder sisters were married and had left home. I was barely 20. So again, the migration, the epilepsy, and this absence of family protection all become part of the emotional tension which anticipate the bigger, wider, more extreme tension of partition. I do not remember how we discovered that Rana was with my aunt, my mother's sister."

We tried to get him back, but he ran away again. He could not be traced for 2 years and we began to think we had lost another brother. "I felt the loss more than anyone else. And then one morning my elder sister walked in with Rana." She had found him waiting tables at a railway restaurant. The prodigal son had come home. He had become a stranger to the family, but he had also learned the art of survival.

We find Rana picked up from a railway restaurant and he was working as a waiter and then he comes back home and this prodigal son narrative becomes easily mapped on to

this particular story. “Later, when all of us moved to Nabha, Rana stayed on in Lahore. I took up a job in Nabha and kept my mother and my younger brother and sister with me. Rana stayed in the family home. How he maintained himself no one knows. Often, he would ask me for small loans.”

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There was no reply from my uncle but a few days later Rana came to visit us. He was pleased that I had tried to arrange this exchange of property and said he wanted to take Mother with him to sort out some details on this. I agreed. I was happy that my efforts had succeeded. When she did not come back after many days, I began to worry. She was not well. So I went to Lahore to see her and find out.

I tried to argue with him. How would he continue to live here if Pakistan became a reality? Rana was quite clear. He said, religion is not more important than survival. He told me he had planned everything. 'You know the girl whose mother lives in the quarter next to Jatinder's house? I have known her a long time and she is willing to marry me if I convert to Islam.'

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And so, we can see how this house becomes some kind of a shifting signifier which takes up different associations, protection, security, and deception, family ties, family disruptions, so different kinds of significations are created around the house or generated around the house. It just becomes more than just a space, becomes some type of symbolic architecture with us which has different kinds of affective associations and affective investments.

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We have seen how marriages and conversions become a convenient identity formations and reformations which are done in a very ad hoc basis following partition. "Even Rana tries to get in marriage of convenience where there is this Muslim girl who can marry him if he becomes Muslim, if he converts to Islam. What about mother? I asked him. He

told me she was his mother too. He said he would become Muslim, he would marry the girl, Fawzia, and then keep mother with him."

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"We can see this shift of religious marker also comes with an existential shock because the rituals change, the names change, the time, identity, the social level changes but that also begins to affect your existential behavior. Because your prayers, routines, or rituals begin to change that in a way reshapes you as a human subject. And that conversion becomes very symbolic conversion to some kind of a new citizenship."

A new kind of existential identity in the story, which is something which we see right away. "Rana became Abdulla and Fawzia became his wife. The house of our childhood was now the abode of a committed and converted Muslim family. Was he happy? Did he look after my mother? There was no way of finding out. Once or twice, he wrote to my younger sister Munna, but then she had to ask him to stop. Her husband was in the defence forces and there would have been too many questions."

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THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

have been too many questions . . . As time passed and Rana began to feel more and more isolated, I think he began to miss us. But he never wrote to me. And then, years later, you established contact with him. He sent a letter through you. He wrote that he was the father of four sons and three daughters. He said, 'I have never forgiven myself for what I did in my youth. I can't retrace my steps. I have never been accepted here, not even by my own family . . .'

His letter made me uneasy. I wrote back. I told him I thought he was lucky—at least he had stayed on in the family house. 'Don't call me lucky, dear sister,' he said, 'do you know that ever since I have converted I have not had a single night's peaceful sleep. Every brick in this house seems to curse me. I rejected what was mine and I have not been accepted by the faith I adopted.'

When he took my mother away I had no idea that Rana had any dishonesty in his head. But I was very worried, I didn't know what to do. I thought I'd send the children to Suniti, my elder sister, in Mussoorie. So I wrote her a letter—saying this place is not safe and I am sending the children to you, keep them with you for some days and when things improve I'll bring them back. Thinking that now that they were taken care of, and I had some time, I thought I would join Miranda House and take up Russian. I had always wanted to study Russian. I stayed in the hostel. That was in July 1946. There was a lot of tension, and things were very bad, but I thought at least the children were safe. But Suniti sent the children back, saying we are here on holiday and I can't look after them. But then Ranjit told me don't worry, we are going to the village, we'll take the children with us, they'll be fine and you carry on with your Russian. So—because Ranjit was a very good friend—I continued with the Russian.

The first six months passed well, and then there were holidays and I went to Nabha. When I came back after the summer vacation, suddenly things

BLOOD

towards Rajpur Road. There was a police station there and he said let's go and inform the police. He went and informed the police, but they said we have no police force at all, we can do nothing. And then, I don't know for what reason, he went to the railway station, and the place was full of blood and all that. And then, he said I don't think we should go any farther, and we came back. He dropped us at the hostel.

In my room there was a Muslim girl whose name was Zahira Ilahi, I think she was Sir Syed Ahmed's niece, she was very well connected . . . There was a lot of loot and arson there in the University . . . There was a history professor, Quereshi; I remember seeing boys, I still remember, a boy holding his coat and tie. And I heard from people that he had some very valuable paintings etc., they looted all of that and took it away. We were told that . . . there was so much tension that we were all frightened. I think there were only some six or seven of us girls in the hostel. There was the warden, and she had a plump daughter, and we used to wonder how we could keep ourselves safe inside. One day we had just sat down to eat, and one man came running and he caught hold of Zahira by the hand and he said let's go. He didn't even wait and we were completely stunned as he dragged her out. Later we came to know that he was her brother and he had got to know that there was a mob which was going to attack the hostel or something like that. So he took the girl away, and all her stuff, big boxes and all that, remained behind. Later we heard that they were living in a place called Kota house. Then he took her to Hyderabad or somewhere and I lost track of Zahira. But the mob came, and they kept shouting, 'We want Zahira, we want Zahira, bring her out'. We were all locked in one room, and after that the warden rescued us all and sent us to Rajaram's house.

Since Zahira wasn't there, the mob realized she had escaped. After that we stayed at Rajaram's house for some days and I remember when people went from here, they took big boxes full of looted stuff. A couple of times they

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We can see how Rana essentially inhabits an interstitial position, an in between position, between the Hindu and Muslim, between being a Pakistani or an Indian, he does not quite belong at any level and this liminality about Rana informs his identity, informs his

subjectivity in a way which is irredeemable, he cannot retrace his steps, he says quite clearly.

“His letter made me uneasy. I wrote back. I told him I thought he was lucky, at least he had stayed on in the family house. Do not call me lucky, dear sister, he said. Do you know that ever since I have converted I have not had a single night’s peaceful sleep? Every brick in this house seems to cause me. I rejected what was mine and I have not been accepted by the faith I adopted.”

This lack of peaceful sleep, this guilt and guilt-ridden conscience in a way becomes a marker of the trauma partition as well as the forced and convenient conversion to a different kind of religion for convenience sake which does not have; it keeps him protected at a legal level, but then it does not give him the existential happiness that he had before. He is not accepted by the Muslim community there.

“For the Hindus he is seen as something of a betrayer of faith. When he took my mother away, I had no idea that Rana had any dishonesty in his head. But I was very worried. I did not know what to do. I thought I would send the children to this place, the children to Suniti, my elder sister in Mussoorie. So, I wrote her a letter saying this place is not safe and I am sending the children to you.

Keep them with you for some days and when things improve, I will bring the back. Thinking that now that they were taken care of and I had some time, I thought I would join Miranda House and take up Russian. I had always wanted to study Russian. I stayed in the hostel. It was July 1946. There was a lot of tension and things were very bad, but I thought at least the children were safe.

But Suniti sent the children back saying that we are here on holiday and I cannot look after them. But then Ranjit told me do not worry, we are going to the village, we will take the children with us, they will be fine and you carry on with the Russian. So, because Ranjit was a very good friend, I continued with the Russian.” We find that this learning Russian becomes a symbolic aspirational activity for this woman.

Who wants to have an identity of her own beyond the Hindu Muslim binary, beyond the India Pakistan binary and this choice of Russian language becomes quite symbolic in that sense as an appropriation of another world order, it is very far away from the world orders which dominate and cause a trauma and suffering to so many people.

We find that this narrative becomes a very complex depiction of female agency and agency lessness and that how little rituals of remembrance or two different activities that become aspirational in quality in terms of how we can transcend the trauma memory and make memory of your own reencode information. This learning of a new language becomes more symbolic because quite literally it is a re-encoding of information.

We are learning a new set of codes through which we can orient and reorient yourself and carve out a subjective identity of our own or establish a new form of subject that we have add on experience. This becomes the effort, this becomes the aspiration, this becomes part of the negotiation to deal with the brokenness of trauma, learning a new language, learning a new set of codes, learning a new narrative which can hopefully be used to map onto the present circumstances, present existential conditions.