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**Material Memories as Ambassadors to Lost Histories and Homes in Aanchal Malhotra's
*Remnants of a Separation***

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ABSTRACT: The article reconstructs the history of Partition from the vantage point of personal memorabilia like clothes, jewels, vessels, coins and photographs etc. The emotions ingrained in these objects detangle the unspeakable feelings of sadness and shame that the victims experience in the course of events that unfolded during the Partition. The research paper traces the forgotten family histories of the families through the contested objects which withstood the ravages of time more than memories could. These documented experiences of Partition will stir many debates around the silenced subject of Partition. Though there are cases of constant violence, conflicts and tensions from moment to moment but India's common heritage of plurality and oneness, irrespective of different religions, beliefs and faiths engages its people, in an unending endeavour to live in peace and prosperity. Politicians and political parties exaggerate and overplay the hatred and violence which harm mankind on the whole. On the contrary, Partition narratives reveal the efforts of ordinary citizens to bring to a close the cycle of retaliation and vengeance. Partition as a history refuses to be past and demands an interrogation for understanding better the contemporary turmoil over religion. The bruised selves of the victims and witnesses of ethnic conflicts demand redressal which can come through dialogue initiated by representations through diverse mediums of art and literature. Reconstruction of communities and of local sociality depends on particular reconstructions of the past. So while



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

recovering memories, sensitivity has to be maintained in retrieving and preserving gestures of kindness reflected by all the communities towards each other during the tumultuous times also. Societies conceive images of them, and maintain their identity through the generations by fashioning a culture out of memory. Cultures rediscover their past while developing, producing, and constructing a future. Social constrictions and pressures always lead us in the direction of uniformity, simplification and one-dimensionality. Memories offer access to a different world, facilitating detachment from the absolutism of the present given reality. The ultimate aim is to expose how these memories can sublimate, express and give language to a subject that evades expression. Keeping politics apart, memory narratives reflect how common people upheld values of love and brotherhood even under the threat of hatred, terror and violence.

Key Words: Partition Narratives, Material Memory, Collective Memory, Digital Repository, Reconstruction of Past.

People construct a relationship to their past through collective memories of shared experiences and cultural practices. French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs' ideas on collective memory connects the dots between memories, events, narratives, communities and traditions, and presents them as strands of the same thread. Memory as the product of multiple competing discourses takes in its sweep, the sites and symbols of remembering such as monuments, museums, materials, and landscapes. For somewhat similar reasons, the opening of the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor in November 2018 is hailed as a welcome move equivalent to the fall of the Berlin Wall as the project facilitates a free commune to Sikh devotees to revered religious institutes left behind in Pakistan on being uprooted by the great divide of 1947. Coined as the "commemorative fever" (2) the passion for the social nature of memory is not just a popular



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

orientation towards past, but as a connectedness to people's history; for the process of recollection offers immortality to historical and life events.

Memories are inherently malleable and when time begins to wear them down, the many free spaces that crop up get filled with some imagined and fabricated experiences. It cannot be assumed that our experiences are stored as an exact mnemonic trace and it is quite possible to alter one's original memory depending on the conditions in which it is recalled. Dominiek Dendooven confirms the transience of reminiscences while authenticating the power of contested objects to "withstand the ravages of time in a way that memories do not" (Malhotra 63). Memories are bound to dilution but the objects and sites weave around them unforgettable episodes narrating the whataboutery and howaboutery of them being valuable.

Material memory imbued in preserved objects and sites can be a wellspring to delve deeper into the culture and civilization of a particular place and time. The modern era being uniquely structured by trauma of Partition, wars, and genocide poses challenges for societies to remember their collective wrongs and move towards forms of reconciliation. As the movement of population is never an isolated event, rather it's often accompanied by a movement of memories and possessions. Hence is felt the import of pulsating-with-life, contested possessions that the refugees took along during the time of Partition of Indian subcontinent in 1947 or, were forced by circumstances to leave behind, and bewailed later for the memories that were infused within them. In a tangible manner, the objects as the 'portals into the past', entwined with personal life histories, are used to draw out previously suppressed memories. Silence can be the material for history writing and on a similar premise, objects which cannot speak in an expected stereotypical sense act as an evocative archive of the history and help to redeem the lost times.



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

The Divide will always hold utmost importance in the minds of those affected by it, but viewing it through the alternative lens of oral histories helps in distilling an enormous cataclysmic event down to one which is palpable to senses.

In Aanchal Malhotra's, *Remnants of a Separation* (2017), the history of Partition is reconstructed from a post-memorial vantage point vis-a-vis the personal memorabilia like clothes, jewels, vessels, religious books, coins, photographs, and reminisces of intangibles carried across the inflamed borders. The shared personal narratives of the people affected by the Partition, totally ignored and untouched in the official state narrative, makes it a 'people's project' unravelling the pre-Partition bonhomie amongst communities, the sudden burst of violence and the accompanied hasty departures with the most loved possessions.

Author Aanchal Malhotra is an oral historian and lithograph artist working with memory and material culture. Her maiden book, *Remnants of a Separation* is a unique attempt to revisit the Partition through articles that refugees carried with them during the migration. These belongings absorbed the memory and trauma of a time and place, remaining dormant and unshaken for generations. They now speak of their owner's pasts as they emerge as testaments to the struggle, sacrifice, pain and their belonging to an unparalleled moment in history. For memoirists and oral historians, memorialisation is not a passive practice but an active conversation. And in regard to Partition, Malhotra believes that by studying the evolution of personal histories of Partition, the legacy of it can be understood better (9).

The cache of emotions ingrained in an object or a landscape hauls it from being mundane to invaluable. Malhotra evinces how for the migrants a 'dusty and torn out old book, an old shawl or a rust-encrusted lock' that guarded their pre-Partition home gained proprietorship with



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

the passage of time and expressions such as ‘mine, my mother’s, and my family’s’ beamed straight from the cockles of their heart while remembering their prized possessions of Partition days.

The narratives in *Remnants of a Separation* decode how the objects as reservoir of memory and experience, unearth the social culture of those terrible times and detangle the hidden, unspeakable feelings of sadness, shame, and trauma that the victims experienced. The oral histories of Partition accentuate the relevance that the objects hold for their bearers today, and occupying the ‘weight of the past’ how they struck a fulfilling companionship with the migrants on the road to a new citizenship. The migrants’ fervent possessiveness for these souvenirs from their home or childhood is understandable as these once mundane objects now become tangible links of belonging to a place at a certain period of time, which is rendered inaccessible by the newly carved borders. It is a belongingness that is claimed through the pathway of belongings- idolised possessions that survived through the Partition and exist in the present too, in sight or in memories.

The inclusion of narratives from Pakistan in the text reflects a holistic understanding of our shared Punjabi culture, and promulgates how the citizens of new nations defended with all earnestness the Punjabiya despite the Partition, and an infused air of enmity between the communities and nations.

The narrative, “The Hockey Field I Left Behind: The Photographs of Nazeer Adhami” is the story of Nazeer Adhami whose parents were staunch followers of Muslim League, and yet believed in the solidarity of Hindu-Muslim peaceful coexistence. The family migrated to Pakistan from Aligarh in 1953. About the political scenario in the country nearing Independence,



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

Nazeer is quite candid about the apprehensions that the Muslim community had regarding the denial of equal rights and representation to them, he shares how the basic cause for the demand for Pakistan was the inherent concern of Muslims to “not get drowned in an unseeing, uncaring sea of majoritarianism” (Singh 58). He further dwells on the intrinsic cultural differences between the two communities and deeply believed in the historic lineages of these differences, which led to the Divide.

Cultural Memory Studies theorist Andreas Huyssen interprets the growing use of the past as a “screen into which different groups can project their contradictions, controversies and conflicts in objective forms” (qtd. in Misztal 95). Besides all this crisis, Nazeer recounts with much fervour his university days at AMU, the hockey field, the campus, and his most beloved possessions are the photographs from that period. He emphatically avows that Pakistan was his inspiration but India is his homeland, which though inaccessible physically is tucked in lovingly in the folds of his memories kept afresh by the photographs lugged along.

In the recountal, “The Musical Solace in My Mother’s Prayers: The Guru Granth Sahib of Sumitra Kapur”, music acts as a peg to recall all the pre-Partition life events, the musical recital from Shri Guru Granth Sahib that the Kapur family religiously participated in. The protagonist reminisces how her family as residents of Rawalpindi were caught in the turmoil of Partition and were ever bound to be at Simla, where they were on a brief vacation during the time of the Divide. And when a neighbour of theirs who had also moved to India from Rawalpindi during the bedlam, intended to visit his pre-Partition home to recover back his hidden cash, Kapur’s mother, a non-Sikh had just one priority: to get back her holy book of Guru Granth Sahib with them in their new home. ‘Guru Babaji’ as it was fondly called by her mother,



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

who being an orphan, found solace in teachings of the faith. And it's gladdening to know how Sumitra Kapur venerated this over eighty years old holy book as an insuflating entity through which flows the wisdom of the Gurus and the consciousness of her parents.

The chronicle, "The Light of a House That Stands No More" recounts the tale of the palatial house 'Shams Manzil' and its natives in the pre-Partition 'Jullundur'. With the drawing of borders, Faiz Rabbani's world came crashing down when abandoning the affable, he and his family had to trot towards the alien land in the midst of chaos and violence. The dislocation from Jullundur to Lyallpur was one of upheavals, but a sense of gratification chanced upon them some twenty-five years later on a post-Partition visit to Jullundur, basically to visit the graves of their ancestors. Visiting their ancestral home which was now owned by a Sikh gentleman, was an altogether enlivening experience, and being addressed as the original owner of the house by the new inhabitants was heart-warming. The lady of the house and her husband greeted them well, took them around the house lovingly and both were delighted to see them safe. The narrative accentuates the aweless plunge Rabbani's niece Samar takes to bring back the fifteen kilos stone plaque of Shams Manzil to Lyallpur. For Rabbani, the plaque had incarnated within itself memories of his childhood and the celebrated seasons, his parents and their refugehood.

The tale "The Dialect of Stitches and Secrets" introduces us to the *Phulkari bagh*-a large heavily embellished dupatta of Hansla Chowdhary. The protagonist harks back to the past and narrates the entire process of sewing a *Phulkari bagh*. Akin to Alice Walker's symbol of 'quilt' in the story, "Everyday Use," the *Phulkari bagh* too evokes the idea of creative activities women luxuriate in to pass down their history and culture from generation to generation. For Hansla, it's the only thing that remains of her maternal grandmother's life in Pakistan and she traces her



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

lineage through it, fondling the entire persona of the women of her family who wore it before her.

In “A Ghara for My Father and a Gaz for My Mother” Aanchal Malhotra shares how Vij Bhawan, the ancestral house of her mother’s side of the family stood as a symbol of the firm bonds of ancestry, joint family structure and lineage, and inside its archaic structure she always found comfort. The villa housed many material markers of the passing of time like an old and quaint lock and key, dusty and yellowed with time old photographs, and a few dog-eared books. But the most treasured hoardings of the house included a *ghara* or a vessel used to churn buttermilk and a yardstick or a *gaz*. Malhotra wonders how these banal objects laid claim to her family’s historic past, making their journey through generations. The *ghara* made of German silver was part of author’s great grandmother’s trousseau, used by three generations to prepare *lassi*. The *gaz* or the yardstick was used by the great grandfather in his clothing store at Lahore. Both these items were brought unfailingly by the Vij family’s ancestors in their journey from Lahore to Amritsar during the Partition turmoil. This was the first time that Malhotra realised the power of an object to retain memory. Just by touching these objects, the family members drifted back to the time where they could see their ancestors using these objects in their everyday life. One could see how “the texture, scent, surface-of an object served as a catalyst to preserve and invoke the memory of the times gone by and remember the most catastrophic event in the contemporary history of the Indian subcontinent” (44). Orhan Pamuk rightly surmises: “We can bear the pain only by possessing something that belongs to that instant” (Pamuk, *The Museum of Innocence* 73).



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

“Utensils for Survival” narrates how Balraj Bahri- the dignified and renowned bookseller of India, had never ever in his young and middle age dwelled on the times gone by. But during the last few years of his life, passion for the past caught him. Holding on to his wife’s hand tightly, he would ask her, “Shall we go? *Dilli chale?* The wife tense and disturbed at his husband’s indisposition would answer, “*Dilli mein hi toh hain, ji*, we are already here” (73). He was often found stroking tenderly his old books, photographs, letters, journals and notepads. The mutilated atmosphere of the days of Partition rumbled on the slightest prodding.

Modernity is prone to social amnesia due to the clash between the traditional and modern means of cultural communication. Memory as a site for the recovery of trauma calls for linking traumatic memories with the spirit of justice to challenge “societies to remember their collective wrongs while moving towards forms of reconciliation” (Misztal xi). And the process of remembering helps us perceive the world, for memory “functions in every act of perception, in every act of intellection, in every act of language” (Terdiman 9).

“Hereditary Keepers of the Raj” is the story of Englishman John Grigor Taylor who spent his childhood in pre-partitioned India. Son of a soldier in British army, John was born in 1921 in Ahmednagar, near Bombay. India is a second home to him and he often remembers with fondness the time spent here. His parents moved to England in 1935 and amongst the prime belongings carried back was a thick photo album full of beautiful memories. John prefers to forget memories of India seething in pain and hatred during the days of Partition, and loves recollecting his childhood days spent in the subcontinent. John’s wife, Sophia shares that not every Englishman wanted to leave India after its Independence. For those who spent major part of their lives in India, finding new homes in the unfamiliar England was not easy. On joining



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

diplomatic services in England, John was deputed to set up the first British High Commission in Delhi, and got a chance to revisit India. Ninety-four years old John, who now resides in the heart of London remembers sights and smells from his childhood home in India, and still yearns for the unforgettable scent of *geeli mitti* or of earth watered by rain.

“The Lexicon of My Land is Devoid of Emotions”, talks about the military memorabilia of Lt Gen S.N. Sharma carried across the border after the division of the Indian subcontinent. He was a cadet with the Madras Sappers in 1944 and was posted at Rawalpindi in 1946-47 when he travelled to India post-Partition. The military trucks carried along were all stuffed with uniforms, decorations, certificates, and photographs only. Though a battle-hardened soldier, Sharma was deeply moved by the partitioning of the land. His views about the same are heart-tugging and wise: “I am a military man, someone who has been at war with men who became Pakistanis, but I am also someone who has been to war with the men who became Pakistanis. There are some passages in time whose horrors should never be repeated. The Partition was one such horror” (282). He is disturbed by the reality that how preoccupations of people change with time. His team of Madras Sappers included Tamils, Telugus, Kannadigas and Malayalis; yet they all in solidarity with the Sappers spirit, spoke its language. A language which was a deadly mix of Hindi, Urdu, English words and expressions. They proclaimed with all honour, their belongingness to the Sappers tribe.

“A Conversation of Eroded Memory” narrates the pre-Partition memories of Sunil Chandra Sanyal about his life in East Bengal, before his migration to Calcutta. It’s an emotional tale of how Bharti Sanyal becomes a medium for preserving her husband, Sunil’s fading memories, as she remembers for her husband, what his clouded mind is unable to recollect after



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

a lapse of time. Bharti Sanyal shares, “How else will memory be passed down, how else our children will know of it? You see, the details of years have blurred into each other, making his mind cloudy” (350). The wife fills in the gaps and stitches together the isolated instances of his husband’s life into a flowing narrative. This is how the migratory nature of memory helps in archiving a fading past. The family after some thirty years unearthed the belongings carried in an old suitcase from Mymensingh zila in East Bengal during the exodus of Partition. Many old, faded and worn out documents were recovered; prime among them was the matriculation certificate of Sunil Chandra’s father. The family holds pride in their father’s education who earned a matriculate way back in 1931. Malhotra adds that exactly like one’s memory, the story of a family too is “perforated, additive, subtractive, and a cohesive amalgamation....The story of a family was after all, spun from the memories of many” (323).

In “From the Folds of Life”, Sitara Faiyaz Ali, sitting in her Lahore home longs for her house with green shutters in Dalhousie which her father built with much love and passion. She shares, “sometimes when I close my eyes, I can still see the house. Even after seventy years, in my memory that house is still a home” (319). Holding photographs of the house, she remembers with an ache the smallest detail of her father’s dream house in Dalhousie that included the profile of the house, the hills at the back, the planted trees, layout of various rooms, the window designs and the curtains too.

Certain unforgettable episodes of life sit at the very core of a person’s existence. Commenting on the Partition riots and their journey to the right side of the border, Sitara shares her fear, confusion and grief:



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

I still don't understand; despite having lived through it, I cannot explain what exactly happened at that time. It was as though we were living through some awful dream....But it was real and unforgettable....My husband drove the car through the violence with two young children and a wife, all the way to the middle of the new country. When we reached Mianwali, our belongings hadn't yet arrived. But still we were happy to have a roof over our heads....Who was safe, who could be trusted, when all the men and women of Undivided India were considered the same, brothers and sisters of the same soil, up until then? (326)

Sitara is disturbed by the fact that gradually people forget the shared values. And images that were once so deeply engrained in one's memory like a house, a landscape, a possession get swallowed in the whirlwind of time as life folds over it seamlessly.

Nazmuddin Khan of the narrative "This Bird of Gold, My Land" is quite passionate about India's glorious past. In a zesty and animated manner he speaks at length about the country of his birth using many adulatory phrases: "Sone ki chidiya... a country of riches and wealth; of countless jewels, gems and gold; of trade routes; of ancient civilizations; and of discovery. It was once a country of powerful ideals, where people lived in peace and life flourished" (193). He is deeply saddened by the fact that his dear motherland lost its magnificence on being divided and dissected time and again. He recollects the values his father embodied and instilled in them: "My father used to say to us-Hindustan is our *vatan*, our land. It didn't matter that we were *Musalmaan*; what mattered was that we were born here and here is where we would die. We didn't belong anywhere else except on this soil. And ever since we were very young, he made sure we knew the importance of being loyal to the land" (194).



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

Memory is a significant element in the development of social and cultural identities. Influencing the legitimisation of identities, memory becomes a surrogate religion. Personal testimonies are the favoured form of memory production as its intensely individuated meanings differentiate it from the monumental, official and collective markers of memory (Ashplant *et al.* 48).

Halbwachs was the first to explore the ways in which present concerns determine what of the past we remember, in continuation with the Durkheimian belief that every society requires a continuity with the past. And a collectively imagined and shared past offers solidarity to a society. Both Halbwachs and Durkheim assumed that the function of remembering is not to transform a past but to promote a commitment to the group by symbolising its values and aspirations (50-51). Shared stories define the nature and boundaries of entire societies to whom the stories belong.

In recollecting memories, we do not retrieve images of the past as they were originally produced but rather as they fit into our present conceptions, which in turn are shaped by the social forces that act on individuals. Schwartz argues that memory is a “cultural program that orients our intentions, sets our moods, and enables us to act” (251). Memory is a product of narrative activities and an individual experience is always structured and understood through these cultural narratives. Nussbaum while highlighting memory’s role in constructing identities argues that “a really successful dissociation of the self from memory would be a total loss of the self and thus of all the activities to which a sense of one’s identity is important” (177).

Narrative “The Inheritance of Ceremonial Servings” unfolds the family history of Narjis Khatun who was born at Patiala, India. Her family lived with her maternal grandfather who was



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

a revenue collector. She exuberantly shares her childhood memories of her Nana's *haveli* with fourteen rooms. Narjis was of ten years at the time of Partition, but she remembers everything about it so clearly, how the Maharaja of Patiala provided shelter to large number of Sikhs and Hindus and urged all to remain united regardless of their religion. Despite all this, Patiala witnessed much bloodshed and Narjis' family fled to Lahore during the Partition riots.

Amongst the kitchenware carried from Patiala was also a *khaas-daan*, which had two dome shaped, beautiful and intricately carved vessels cast in bronze. The *khaas-daan* was used to make and serve *paan*-a digestive made with betel leaves, areca nut, tobacco, and an edible mixture of slaked lime and *kattha* or catechu. The ritual of making and serving a digestive and delicious *paan* to special guests on special occasions, was part of their Muslim culture, and every woman needed to master the art of it. The *khaas-daan* being part of Narjis' trousseau had a nostalgic value for her.

Not all were lucky to carry along their valuable or mundane yet important belongings when they were fleeing their homes in the fury of Partition. Author Gurcharan Das's maternal grandmother locked every room and almirah of her home in Lyallpur, Pakistan before moving to Ludhiana. She was convinced of returning back to her pre-Partition home when the turmoil of the Partition riots settle down. But the bunch of fifty-one rustic keys was of no use as the permanence of the Radcliffe line made their return impossible, and the old home was lost forever.

Preet Singh of "The Pashmina Shawl of Preet Singh" too yearns for her lost home in the mountain trails of Quetta in the Balochistan region. She treasures fondly her pure Pashmina shawl with Kashmiri embroidery on it, as the shawl reminded her of her mother. Truly objects



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

inspire mind to remember the forgotten times. In the summer of 1947, the family was on a holiday trip to Mussoorie, and the Partition made the retreat back to Quetta impossible. The shawl survived as Preet Singh was wearing it on her journey to Mussoorie. She also remembers her eldest brother Waryam Singh who was separated for few months from his family in the flare-up of Partition. Preet's memories of Partition are entwined with the memories of her mother and brother who are no more now, and she cherishes their presence in these memories

“Stones from My Soil” traces author's grandmother's Partition trauma and family history. Aanchal Malhotra is alarmed by the urgency of her grandmother's words “Ask me quickly before I forget” (95). Bhag Malhotra's eagerness to narrate her story was a new revelation as throughout her life she never spoke about the tragedy of migration that she and her family experienced. They went through a series of dislocations from their house in Muryali in North West Frontier Province to the refugee camp in Dera Ismail Khan and later to her sister's home in Delhi. Bhag Malhotra expresses about their state of homelessness:

It felt strange. Of course it did. It was so difficult to leave our house in the Frontier. In the haste with which we fled, it was as though we had left some part of ourselves behind. So much of us belonged there; so much of us remained there. Here we had nothing, we came with nothing. You could say we were like beggars...no clothes to wear, no place to sleep at night, no sheet or blanket to sleep in, no utensils to cook with and no money to even drink a cup of tea. We had nothing to our name. (103)

Caressing the *maang-tikka* (a jewellery worn on head) her mother gifted her, Bhag Malhotra shares how the savagery of the times didn't deter her mother to bring all the way from the Frontier, this special heirloom of the family that is passed on to the coming generations much



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

like a legacy. The *maang-tikka* adorned with some precious stones in it, was carried by Bhag's mother with the purpose that it could be sold to raise money for her children's education in the new land. But its precious emotive value didn't allow Bhag's mother to ever part with it. And now in its present state, the *maang-tikka* always drew Bhag closer to her mother Lajwanti. Bhag remembers how her mother an empowered woman was emotionally attached to this piece of jewellery.

"Gifts from a Maharaja" is the story of Azra Haq who was born in 1925 in Ludhiana, and spent much of her life in her parents' ancestral haveli at Jullundhar. She led a life of affluence and was educated in convent schools, learning English and foreign languages like French and Latin. Her prized possessions from India carried all the way to Lahore during the days of Partition included a long necklace and a pair of earrings made of exquisitely rare Basra pearls gifted by the Maharaja of Bikaner. Her paternal uncle, Mian Ehsan-ul-Haq was the chief judge for the princely state of Bikaner under Maharaja Ganja Singh. A string of pearls gifted by a Maharaja reveals the grandeur of a life that once Azra and her family lived in India. But the value of this jewellery transcended the parameters of royalty and resplendence. For Azra, the pearls personified her childhood in India. She talks about the emotive value of this piece of jewellery and in the process also shares the turbulent times of Partition during which she migrated to Lahore along with her family: "As I'd take out the maharaja's pearls, I'd think about the summer spent in Bikaner. I'd remember how I carried them with me from Dalhousie, how scared I'd been to lose them, to lose even the memory of them. *Bachpan*, they represented childhood for me" (69).

Studies of memory are research investigations into memory and remembering involves tracking down what is concealed in memory. Malhotra believes that remembering the past is always



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

a tedious and gradual exercise, and the slightest indelicacy in handling such memories could tarnish or distort them forever (322). She distinguishes the migratory objects by categorising them into various groups. In category first are the objects that bind several generations of a family together like the kitchenware of Balraj Bahri, the Bagh of Hansla Chowdhary, the *maang-tikka* of Bhag Malhotra, the *khaas-daan* of Narjis Khatun and the Pashmina shawl of Preet Singh. The second category included the objects that were retrieved after the Partition as the family made the journey back to their pre-Partition homes. Even sometimes the objects were brought back by friends and relatives for the families who had migrated. This category includes the stone plaque of Mian Faiz Rabbani and the Guru Granth Sahib of Sumitra Kapur. These objects were carried back for their great emotional value. Then there were objects recovered decades later through sheer serendipity and the objects whose stories and memories have been unearthed by children and grand- children of the migrants. The memories stored in these objects are passed down through a particular genealogy that is inherited by descendants of those who actually witnessed the Partition (28-29).

The Partition of India remains a nightmarish event even seventy years later. No singular community- the Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs or even the British can be held responsible for the atrocities that transpired. Ultimately everyone suffered in their own ways. Malhotra feels that history can draw on from the treasure of truth hidden in memories and there is no one true memory. There is the official memory of the state, and the political memory that is stored in journals and newspapers. Geographic memory includes the recollections of one's soil, while personal memories are made up of one's personal experiences and collective memory is the memory of a society and its people. The objects as relics of the past store in them the material memory of the particular times. One needs to study an amalgamation of the various kinds of memories to have a holistic understanding of past.



**A bi-annual peer - reviewed journal of Department of
English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University,
Chandigarh**

Exploring over nineteen of such Partition's oral histories, the selected text as an archive of memories trapped in objects and sites, and as an 'empowered keeper' of Partition's collective ancestry traces the forgotten family histories. Each narrative though unique in itself infuses the same sense of longing. The digital repository of material culture from the Indian subcontinent intends to museumise more such personal experiences of Partition, with the belief that this array of documented experiences will stir many conversations around the silenced subject of Partition raising a cross-border community of peace-loving generations who remember experiences of bonhomie and have learnt lessons of coexistence.

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