(18) in the nature of life stories is their incompleteness – just as any other kind of historical account can only be partial, because of the impossibility of representation, because imposition of beginnings and endings (excerpt in biology) is always artificial, any such account will always be a fragment, a shard, a non-sequential act

This lack of sequence, the erratic ordering of events, marks the trauma of recollection, and of the events recalled 'a reliving of time past even as time present interrupts memory. Everyday time and life-time overlap, and each woman's story reveals how she has arranged her present within the specific horizons of her past and her future

telling stories naturally breaks off and may or may not return to former themes, contradictions emerge through lapses of time, of recollection and of perspective; memory can also refuse to enter speech, 'Some memories are elaborated, some elided, some never summoned up at all; thus it is that from the totality of a life only a fragment is offered here, some part of the broken line

the process of representation is always and only provisional, yet comes to appear fixed and immutable – with a beginning and an end, with an apparently seamless continuity, remembering is itself important, remembering to others even more so, because the listener gives a sense of value, (19) the flow of words is in this way not directed, but co-created

while stories themselves may not be different, 'how events have been grasped' can vary: remembering / forgetting, understanding / misunderstanding, assimilation / rejection; very many were resettled, and sometimes there are only echoes of these events in the stories here; at other times there are much more detailed, substantial versions of events

what they show together is 'the gendered nature of historical experience and its recording' based around six themes: violence; abduction and recovery; widowhood; women's rehabilitation; rebuilding; and belonging; within each account there are clustered connections between women, religious communities, state and nations; (20) also 'new' and 'old' families and their members

forced migration also meant mass abduction and conversion of women and children; families, communities, governments and political parties converging with the intent to 'recover' and 'restore' women to their "rightful" place; the figure of the abducted woman came to symbolize the crossing of borders as well as the violation of social, cultural and political boundaries

(21) the partition of 1947 amounted to an undeclared civil war, and it has led to continuing border disputes in every country of South Asia: divisions of religion led to further splits along ethnic, and communal, fundamentalist and cultural nationalist

'Learning to Survive'

(205) many women claimed that before partition they were leading lives within the domestic realm, but one effect of partition was that circumstances, economic necessity and the need to rebuild homes & futures pushed women of all classes into earning or supplementing family incomes

The effect was to delay many marriages and prevent them often too; many found training and work via the Women's Section, and their 'rehabilitation' was also enabled by the breakdown of traditional constraints on their mobility: they now went into offices, schools and colleges or hospitals – or stayed at home and worked – in either case making a living

the Jan 1949 issue of *Rehabilitation Review* records, for instance, that in Delhi 100 girls were enrolled in the Mahrauli Residential School for girls, and 225 in the Balniketan and Gram Sevika

Shiksha Kendra; eight primary schools – 1000 children, half girls – were started; others were now trained in nursing, basic education, as well as fruit and vegetable preservation
(206) the unexpected burst of education for girls immediately after partition was a reflection of figures put out by the Women's Section for government initiated schemes, also of the record number of voluntary organizations across North India, groups engaged in many kinds of relief and rehabilitation

The Sharanarthi Sahayek Trust and the Mahila Udyog Mandir in Meerut, for instance, helped women and girls gain admissions to schools; the Arya Samaj, which was especially important in Punjab, was very engaged with women's education, but few such organisations left any records

Karuna Chanana's 1993 study of family survival strategies post-1947 notes how Partition narrowed the physical space available to women, but enlarged their social space, so that traditional seclusion and marriage practices were changed, but also educational and employment chances; a large part of this change was refugees now pursued their higher studies in Delhi rather than in the Punjab

So relocation rather than dramatic new enrolment is part of the change; nevertheless, there was (207) an increase; also in West Bengal for instance, with scores of women entering the labour force in the 1950s as teachers, office-workers, tutors, tailors and small shop managers; these women also ensured that their daughters had education and work

(220) Bibi Inder Kaur died in 1996, at which time she owned three houses, in Delhi, Amritsar and Dharmashala respectively; [the woman with whose account Bibi's is contrasted] Somnavati's belongings, when she died in 1993, were packed into a neat bundle and handed over to her daughters

She had taken solitude in the past and found an equivalent physical space within a caring, close-knit community; this the result of a drastic switch from a childhood of security and stability to the fear, dislocation and physical labour of the Partition era and after; (221) Somnavati was not especially unusual in this respect

Dehra Dun's study notes that 67% of both women and men believed they would not be able to return home or regain their lost status, while the over 50s were more pessimistic than others; [it makes sense to see these sets of conditions as a reflection of actual experience

So, when Bibi Inder Kaur joined Miranda House, it was the first women's college in Delhi University to offer degrees to women; 'Anji' seized the opportunity to carry on with her studies, which had been interrupted in Karachi; she continued with an active career until the age of 75, and 'was filled with the peace that seemed to have eluded Somnavanti all her life'

(222) Anji's independence gave her perspective on the past and on relationships, allowed her to situate herself as a woman in a society undergoing enormous change – to recognise the possible benefits and to persist in pursuing them, for instance by re-taking exams when she failed them; by leaving her husband and going to live in a hostel with her three daughters

She faced resistance, for example from her husband, but she also had no sense of obligation that overwhelmed her self-interest; it was the failure of her husband's medical practice which allowed Bibi to become more economically independent; while trauma, violence and dislocation are rightly seen as predominant in accounts of Partition , opportunity could arise too

(207) **Bibi Inder Kaur:**
How partition affected men and women . . . . You see . . . men . . . either they were killed or they escaped. Both ways they were . . . spared. If they died the problems died with them; if (208) they survived they were resettled, they earned their daily bread and carried on. [But the women] were either left behind and treated like outcasts, often raped and brutalised – I mean of she came, she came with a guilty conscience, with the stigma of having been "soiled". And even if they were kept back and sent on later, the younger ones were never the ones to be returned. When the Pakistanis did send some young girls back, they were never able to resettle here. Many were sent back forcibly, they didn't want to come, they had married there, they had children . . . Many young Muslim boys had married Hindu girls, very honourably. Then the government told them they had to return to their own country, and they didn't want to leave their husbands and children – there was no future for them here. Then the government arranged mass marriages for many of the women who did return – well, that's also like being raped, isn't it? After all, if they were happy there they should have been allowed to remain. So in every way, you see, women suffered much more. Then those whose children died there, they didn't stop crying their whole lives. A man adjusts more easily, emotionally; even if he loses his children he adjusts, if he loses his wife, he adjusts. A women is more emotional, that's why she cannot forget it ever . . .

Even now, after 1984 [retaliatory attacks on Sikhs following assassination of Indira Gandhi - PL], we were in Punjab and we knew the women suffered terribly. They were raped, their daughters were carried off by the jhuggi [slum - PL] dwellers, they were abandoned or killed . . . it was the women who suffered more. And only some of them can recover and stand on their own two feet. You know, we think we've done this for them, we've done that for them . . . even in Punjab they were given sewing machines thinking that, well, they can stay home and earn a few rupees by stitching a few clothes. But you can't call that being settled. A woman who has lived well, had a comfortable home . . . what can a sewing machine do for her? Give her five or seven rupees? One square meal? I grant you some of them were married, people took it upon themselves, thought it their duty to have them married without dowries . . . . they were the saints, they fed them and clothed them. But 50 or 100 got married? Maybe even a couple of hundred? Out of 13,000 families? That's no percentage at all. And that's why they were never resettled.

For me, when we came from Karachi to Bombay . . . you (209) see, I suffered no irreversible loss. It was like this: we were in a queue to get into the ship; there were no tickets for berths, all we could hope for was deck space. So my husband was in the men's queue and I was in the women's line with my three daughters. One was in my arms and the other two behind me. And there were two more, my cousin's widowed sister's children. More precious than my own because she wouldn't be able to have any more. So there were three of mine and these two, five children and me. My husband was on the men's side. And the crowds! The rush! Because everyone wanted to get into the boat somehow. The coolies threw in our luggage. Now with all the pushing and jostling, my two young daughters got left behind. When I reached the deck I realized they were not with me. I thrust my youngest daughter into the arms of a Sindhi [ethnic group – PL] woman standing next to me and, wailing loudly, went to look for the other two. My god! What if someone had seized them and whisked them away? Pulled them to one side? I was no worried but at last I found them right at the back of the queue. How did you get left so far behind, I asked them. We don't know, they said, there were so many people pushing us . . . we had these children and we were being pushed around so we thought we would wait at the end of the line. How would they know what might happen to two young girls in such a situation? I thanked god that my girls were unharmed and that my honour was intact. I boarded the boat and thought now even if the boat sinks I don't care, I'm not worried.

. . . I now have my own house in Nizamuddin, I educated myself, I worked, everything sorted itself out in time . . . . I can't say I suffered as much, I can't say I suffered any real loss. But those who lost everything, whose daughters were left behind, whose children were killed . . . how can they ever forget?

You see, we have never really thought about leaving Karachi . . . but after '47 we sau that our neighbours were looking at us differently, looking askance at us. Where my husband's

clinic was, that was the place where they started killing Sikhs. Their intentions took practical shape. But you can't blame them alone, people here also misbehaved. Now the way things happened in Rawalpindi, our original place . . . the way the Muslims (210) slaughtered children, women . . . in Pindi Muslims were in the majority, they started attacking. After a while things cooled down a bit. But as soon as Partition happened the "work" that had been started by the Muslims was picked up here . . . we were no less. We also raped women, we also murdered and burnt houses here. It was a questions of action and reaction. That was bound to have an effect on Karachi, wasn't it? The second time I went to Karachi the Junagarh [India's 1947 occupation and annexation - PL] business had already taken place. Muslims suffered terribly there – they had to leave their homes. How could they let the Hindus rest in peace after that? You know, in this business of hating and killing – there was great affinity between Muslims and Sikhs . . . our culture was the same . . . our food, our dress, our language, everything was the same. As I told you, in Rawalpindi we had very good relations with the Muslims, with their pirs [holy men ? Sufi teachers]. When my nani passed away the pirs read from the Qoran Sharif, we had a path of the Guru Granth Sahib, of the Gita . . . people lived together there because their culture was the same, their attitudes were similar. . .

I don't want to sound as though I'm praising my own community, but what I mean is . . . well, Sikhs are definitely a little more "broadminded", they intermingle . . . . What I'm trying to say is that Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were not divided then, they were not separate. They lived together even though their eating habits might have been very different . . . Sikhs would not eat halal meat. So there were these differences. But we could have continued to live together . . . why would we have gone to Karachi otherwise? There was no ill-feeling in our hearts.

When Partition took place on this side, what I think is, I may be wrong . . . we didn't want Partition on this side . . . our government didn't want that Pakistan should be a separate country. But they why did it come about? The root of this lies in the fact that, deep down, people did think the Muslims were different. In their hearts Hindus actually hated them. I remember we used to have *chics* in our house – they were old-fashioned houses – and I used to have an old woman come to massage me, she was Muslim. Now she would have to lift the *chic* aside to enter, wouldn't she? Well, my neighbours who were typical old-fashioned Hindus, they would say to us, you lift your *chics* and only then will we enter. Because they had been touched (211) by a Muslim! Hindu women wouldn't eat in train compartments because of the presence of Muslims there. We Sikhs did not do such things.

I don't know, during Mughal times, Hindus were very badly treated . . . . naturally, all that became part of our "inheritance" somehow, a deep-seated dislike took root which began to show itself in such actions. Our family, we had very close relations with Muslims . . . my maternal grandfather had exchanged turbans with the local elite Muslims to say that they were like brothers. But we never ate at their homes, our daughters never entered their houses, theirs didn't come to ours . . . but the men were like brothers. We attended their weddings, they gave us dry rations, *mishri* (crystallized sugar) . . . Now of course, it's not like that at all, there's no difference any more. At that time there was. And it rankled among the Muslims – because they had rule here, the Hindus had been their subjects and slaves . . . they couldn't accept being ruled by Hindus.

Now about the immediate cause, my own feeling is that that Jinnah was a very clever man and he had been part of the congress and seen its attitudes. Now, I'm not being prejudiced but my own thinking, from whatever I've heard and read, I'd been hearing Mahatma Gandhi's lectures also . . . he was first a Hindu. He was a great man, no doubt, but he was first a Hindu. He had no real regard for the Sikhs even – "they eat meat and fish, they dress well –." He was a good man, I'm not saying he was not . . . but he disliked Muslims and Sikhs because they eat meat, etc. I am not denying that when the Hindus started harassing the Muslims he was the first person to condemn it. When the incidents in Dehli took place he started fasting, made conditions . . . but that Jinnah was very shrewd . . . . He had realized that no Muslim could be secure or at peace under Hindu rule – something the Sikhs didn't understand because they were so close to the Hindus, closer than they were to the Muslims. Jinnah stuck to his demand for a separate country

because he had been in the Congress, he had seen what all went on in it . . . he was close to Mahatma Gandhi, to Jawaharlal, to Motilal Nehru, all of them. No matter how much they tried to persuade him, with love, with friendship, he had made up his mind. (212)

And to some extend Jinnah was right. Muslims were a minority, there were economically backward and they were also conservative. So all these factors made them feel they could only prosper in a separate nation, they couldn't do so in undivided India where they would have been a minority and their share of power, facilities and resources would have been marginal. He was right, because in spite of all the inner conflicts within Pakistan Muslims are the rulers. India is a little afraid of Pakistan because it is a separate nation – it wouldn't have been afraid of Muslims if they were part of India. Those people who go to Pakistan now, like Sikh groups who visit Gurudwara Nankana Sahib [Sikh temple in Nankana Sahib & shrine of founder Guru Nanak Dev's birthplace - PL], they say Pakistanis are very well off. Most Muslims who stayed on in India are not that well off. Now, Pakistan is a military dictatorship and we know the problems in such a rule, we know they cannot be very happy under such a rule, but at least they have a separate *identity*, a separate *existence*. We are afraid of that separate identity even though it is much smaller than ours and India is much larger, with vast resources. But we are afraid of their separate existence – and this is what Jinnah wanted.

I feel religion also played an important role. Jinnah might not have been a staunch Muslim himself but he went along with the Muslims. He couldn't have survived without their support. He wanted Pakistan to be a secular country like India, a free and democratic country. But other Muslims were old fashioned and conservative.

The economic reason was also an important reason. Hindus and Sikhs owned land, Muslims laboured on their land. In a way, they were exploited by is, they were under us. The close relationship which I spoke about was between us and a handful of well-off Muslims. But the majority were poor and they were exploited by us. For them Sikhs and Hindus were the same because they were close to each other. And the Sikhs also played dirty. They tore their flag, insulted it. Because of this the Muslims were more upset with the Sikhs and they would not have allowed the Sikhs to stay on. They took their revenge. Servants killed their masters. Those servants who could barely stand straight in front of their masters abducted the women of landlords and expressed their anger. It is these sections who turned into mobs. Jinnah was unable to control these elements. (213) Muslims were uneducated, not so enlightened and that contributed to their fanaticism. You see a similar tendency among the Sikhs, a kind of weakness. They also get easily agitated in the name of religion . . . it was this religious feeling which was used to mobilise Muslims.

. . . In Karachi I had only studied up to class VIII. My husband allowed me to learn sewing but not to study. Once he went out to war for a year and during that time I did Punjabi Honours. I began studying English also but couldn't finish because he came back, and I also had my third child. I wanted to study to stand on my own feet but was not allowed to. Since everyone did this to their daughters and women, I was not angry. So we came to Delhi . My husband who was a doctor, started his clinic. I used to see a young boy studying and I felt like studying too. I said to Doctor Sahib, let me do my Xth class, how will it matter? I won't start reaching for the stars. I was about 40 then, and mother of three girls. So I did my matric in two months! I became a little more confident.

I started teaching in a school, then I began teaching Punjabi at Miranda House. [Residential University College for Women, University of Delhi – PL.] My husband agreed to my working but didn't want me to take any money for it. But the school insisted on paying me Rs. 50 and Rs. 30 for transport. I taught at Queen mary's for two years. Then I was asked to do my F.A. and B.A. by the Principal of Miranda House – if I was teaching F.A. I should at least have a degree myself! My husband had to agree.

So I was earning but couldn't spend anything without his permission – I had to ask him to pay Rs. 150 for tuition fees from my own money. I used to study and teach – my students would give me a ride to college on their cycles.

I failed my F.A. and my failure became my husband's victory. *Meri har ona di jít ho gayi.* I said, okay, not this time, but next time I'll pass. I took the exam again and passed – but failed my B.A.! I appeared again and this time I got 64 per cent. I was thrilled. I used to cycle 20 miles every day, work for 18 hours. When I said I wanted to do my M.A., my husband had a big fight with me. I felt, B.A. is a big achievement but I want to do an M.A. now. He was furious. He said, do a B.Ed. But I [214] wasn't interested in teaching in schools only, I wanted more. This time I revolted and got admitted into a regular college against his wishes. My brother helped. I got a scholarship as a refugee and studies in Delhi University. Tolerance beyond a limit is wrong – after a point you must revolt.

Economically, of course, we were ruined. We had to struggle to educate our children, but for me there were also opportunities. Because I got out of the house my daughters benefitted. They became confident, and flourished. We had bought a house in Nizamuddin which we rented out and lived in Khyber Pass which was close to the University. I taught at Miranda House in the mornings and studied in the evenings. I stayed in the hostel for three months because my husband shifted to Khan Market.

We had our differences, my husband and I. He was angry with me because my daughter married a non-sikh and I didn't put my foot down – he didn't speak to her for eight years. Blamed her for being my daughter, blamed me for having given birth to her! He was also proud of me, but only in my absence – he would never attend any programmes at Miranda House. I used to say, I'm not a sweepress there, you know!

Soon I got a lectureship in Punjabi M.A. classes at Khalsa College and started living in a Working Girl's Hostel. In the Working Girl's Hostel I saw how women suffered – they couldn't get married because who would look after their parents? So many women had to support their families. Then they had to deal with their male bosses, men in the office . . . I taught at Khalsa College for nine years and then when Matta Sundari College for girls started, I went there as a Senior Lecturer. My confidence increased. Quite soon, I became Vice-Principal for nine months and then Principal. Then I went to Amritsar where I became the first Principal of a new college. I took no salary, only an honorarium and worked till I was 75. My two elder daughters and my brothers helped me out financially – my husband never earned enough to help. Now I divide my time time between Amritsar, Delhi and Dharamshala where I spend the summers. I'd be lost in Delhi – in Amritsar I have the Darbar Sahib, friends, my lecture on Guru Nanak . . .

. . . It was my husband who left me, really speaking, I (215) always tried to keep some sort of relationship going with him. But I wasn;t too unhappy because I had my job, a future. In a way I was glad with the opportunity to get out of the four walls of my house. I had the will power, the intelligence, Partition gave me the chance. In Karachi I would have remained a housewife. Personally I feel Partition forced many people into taking the initative and finding their own feet.

When we came we were bankrupt. Educating the children was difficult. But social values were changing, they had to. Early on, I made the connection between economic independence and education. Our relatives helped us but after all, how long could I be dependent on them? But where I benefitted from this change, my husband lost. He felt a terrible loss upon Partition – his practice sufferedm he was under great mental tension, he became more authoritative. I was happier, I was doing what I wanted. He wasn't. Then when we separated he no longer even had a stable family life.

There are millions of women like me who waht to do something but cannot. I managed to because Partition gave me a chance. My husband feared that this would happen, that when i became independent I would be free – and he was right. I think he knew that if I got educated, became economically independent he would have no control over me, he would lose me. That is why he opposed the steps I took to get educated, to work. In a way he was right, because he did lose me. I gained much more than I lost. Only he lost. I felt sorry for him but I never wanted to go back, back to that life.

I had spread my wings.

Ritu Menon & Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries. Women in India's Parition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2007). 7