

Partition Story Part 1

Harjit K Dhillon

Partition Story Part 2

Manjit Singh Dhillon

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(Based on Interviews with Harjit K Dhillon and Manjit Singh Dhillon)

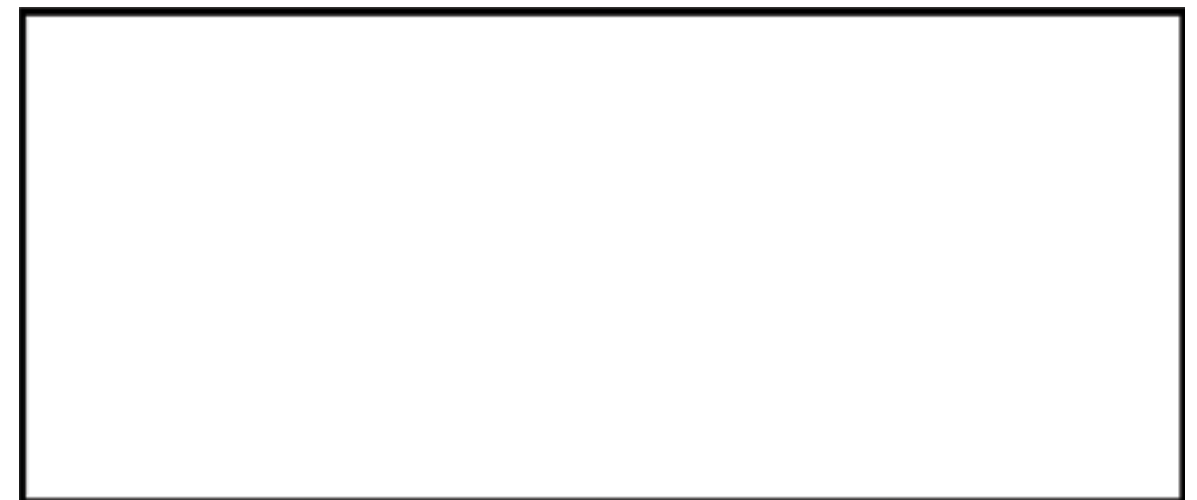
Illustration: Raghavendra Rao K.V.

Partition Story Part 1

Harjit K Dhillon

Harjit Dhillon had an idyllic life in Punjab. During Partition, a young Harjit went to stay with her sister in neighbouring village. Although she was homesick, Harjit found comfort there. One night without warning, her father's friend came and escorted her and her sister back to their village. It was for their safety but it was a scary journey. Her father was also persuaded to go along with a group of villagers as they attacked a neighbouring Muslim village. It was a harrowing night. Finally, Harjit remembers seeing her Muslim neighbours being taken away. She still wonders where many of them have gone.

"Harji, my name is Harjit Dhillon. And I born in 1937. October 11".





I born in my village Bahbal district Hoshiarpur. And it's a small village with very beautiful surroundings.

The mountain range is only 4-5 miles from there. And the sandstream runs beside my village



And the main GT Road that, you know, goes to the border now. They widened the road now and it's a beautiful area."

We had such a different life from the regular people because my dad was in jail. British jail. Before he was released in 1946, he had been in jail many times and when we collect his year its almost 16 years he spent in British jails! Everytime he comes out he spoke at the functions, then they catch him again.



I only finished grade 2 then my sister -she's five years older than me - found a teaching job after grade 8. And the village was almost 20 miles from our village. So when she went alone, she felt really homesick, then she took me along. I could make rotiyaan and she couldn't so maybe that's why she took me along!

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So we lived there for two years in that village. I was 10 years old. There was one big family. Not even that rich. And that lady had 5 daughters and I was so homesick and she loved me like a sixth daughter.

I pray for her every night.

When the riots were happening and my dad at that time was in the village, he sent his friend to bring us back to our village. We couldn't travel by bus and we couldn't go on the main streets, you know. So we walked all that area to middle of the night. Then we stayed one night in another village. And grandfather went to some houses to bring food for us.

And we stayed in the Gurdwara.
And the next morning then we start walking and we come to our village.



It was very hard and my dad didn't want to go with the other people to attack the musulmaan village. That village was where we stayed overnight - Haltabadla. There was a very bad people in my village and they start threatening my dad that if you don't cooperate with us we will took your daughters away. So that was very scary time. And one time my dad talked to his party people* asking what should I do. And they said try to go one day and see what's happening there. So he went along and he saw the cruel moment he saw those times.



(He said those bad people ask the girls - my dad said they were just like my older daughter. And they said come with us, come with us. And they said no we don't want to go. So with a big sword they cut their necks. My dad he was feeling so bad..

One person was running and running and trying to save his life so he climbed on a tree so no one can see him. But those people took some women and used them for month to two months and then they sold them.)



Then our village has 4-5 muslim families. Those were our age kids. Fajan was my age. Fajan was her name. And the younger ones were Rashida and Boota. (And the older sisters were Karmi and Rahmatein. And Jaanvi was their oldest.) And their house was three blocks from our house. But there was no other houses in between. We could see their lights on, cooking, singing. When Eid was happening they used to cook meat. The smells and aroma all around. There is one tradition in the village when it does not rain, the girls get together and make a doll and perform its funeral. And then the rain comes. So we use to go together and play in the mango gardens. And we were very close.



Muslims leave her village

When my dad went to a small town called Maalpur, he met with some military people. And they sent a message with him to tell your people to get ready we will come and collect them. They got all their jewelry and valuables together. And then I still remember, the truck came and the military put the whole family in the truck and drove away.

But the houses are still there and my dad opened a school in that house. When he opened that school, I taught in that school for almost six months and then I went to college.



The little girls that went with the military from village, I always wonder how I can find them but it's too late. Maybe those two little girls, Rashida and Boota are still somewhere.

When we cross the border there was gate with a line written, "Children of a common mother" and I always think of Pakistan...



After the war was stopped, I still remember I went to see a building where our close family was living and I said "Chachchi, larai hat gayee" was 10 - 11 year old! "Chachchi larai hat gayee" I still remember all those songs

Partition Story Part 2

Manjit Singh Dhillon

My name is Manjit Singh Dhillon. I was born on March 20, 1930 in the village of Pandori Ladda Singh in Punjab, India.



My grandfather went to Russia in 1935 and he returned to our village in 1943. My grandfather's name was Niranjana Singh. In Russia, they learned how to take down the English people and how to bring revolution.



The whole village came to see my grandfather when he arrived. So many people thought my grandfather was dead already. He was 61 years old.

I would volunteer with my grandfather to sign up new members for the Communist Party. In those days, there was so much oppression from the police and people were so scared. The Communist Party took stage shows from village to village and the police sat their taking note of who was speaking and what they were saying.

The Party said don't take any fear from them - and they pointed them out - and after a few times the fear had gone away. I was only 13 years old. I helped make the stages but I was too young to act in the plays.



There's one story the day that partition happened. A village about three miles from our village. They were all Muslims. One family was hiding in the sugarcane field. When night came they sent a message to our village person that they need help.

We were sleeping in the middle of the night and my grandfather came to me and said wake up. We are going to give shelter to those people here. So the whole family came to my village and they stayed in our home.

When Partition came, we were thinking that everyone would stay where they were. We thought how could such a big population move, you see? It's very impossible. The Gandhar party of America and Canada fought for the one India. Not for partition.

They were three brothers and two women and children. About 7-8 people. And they were so shivering that maybe someone is going to kill them. So my grandfather told them you are in a safe place and nothing to worry about.



They were feeling very sorry. At the same time my grandfather and his friends were helping the Muslims for their safety.

They stayed with us for two nights. Then the third day my eldest brother took them to a Muslim refugee camp in Brahm.



One day, during partition, I went with my grandfather to visit his sister. When we went about three miles from our village, we came across a small village named Gujarpur. And we saw – because that story I will never forget – we saw about 7-8 older people and they were two 10-12 year old boys.



They were all Muslim but they had put on yellow turbans. They said, "we have now become Sikh" and they put their hand together as a disguise you see, for their own safety.

And then my grandfather asked the eldest man his age. He said he was 70 years old. So my grandfather say, did you ever say namaz? He replied he's been doing namaz all his life. My grandfather told him to protect himself in his new dress. But keep on saying the namaz because you might find god, you see. I can still see him, the old man shook hands and bowed to my grandfather and he was crying.

He told my grandfather you have a big heart.

I can still see all those people in front of my eyes.



Naveen Girm is a community engagement specialist and award winning curator whose practice centers on fostering intergenerational and intercultural dialogue in Metro Vancouver. He works to curate exhibitions and public programs that provide marginalized voices a space to be heard. He was Project Manager for the multi-institutional 1914-2014: Komagata Maru: Generations, Geographies, and Echoes centennial commemoration and he curated Simon Fraser University's definitive online exhibition for the Komagata Maru Episode.

Naveen has worked on exhibitions for: the Museum of Vancouver, the Surrey Art Gallery, Surrey Museum, New Westminster Museum and Archives, Centre A Asian Art Gallery, and Royal BC Museum.

Raghavendra Rao K.V. has built up a multidisciplinary art practice in Vancouver that integrates public art, multi-media work, painting and graphic design. A number of recent projects demonstrate the diversity of his work as an artist, curator, and project manager. As a co-founder and ongoing Artistic Director of the South Asian Canadian Histories Association, he has been involved in a number of public art and multi-disciplinary arts projects. He curated the exhibition that comprised the central piece of SACHA's Canada 150 project, "Trauma, Memory and the Story of Canada" in 2017. He has participated in many International Residency programs, giving him opportunities to understand different processes of making art, but also to create technically complex art. Most recently, he worked as the artistic director for an international project Creative Interruptions' Punjab, which for its India segment was led by Churnjeet Mahn (University of Strathclyde, Scotland) in partnership with Dr. Anne Murphy (UBC, Canada). A multi-arts Mela (Festival) was developed to exhibit work undertaken during artist residencies over October and November 2018.

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