

## **Review Article**

# **HISTORY, MEMORY AND THE NATION: REMEMBERING PARTITION**

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Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xiii + 218pp. ISBN: 0-521-00250-8 (paper).

A marked feature of recent South Asian cultural life has been the creation of a growing body of intellectual and artistic work that reflects critically upon the Partition of August 1947. While India and Pakistan marked the fiftieth anniversaries of their independence in 1997 with state-sponsored celebrations, over the past decade writers, film directors, historians, literary critics and activists have instead highlighted the trauma and turbulence of decolonisation in South Asia. Older narratives, dating from the immediate aftermath of Partition, which celebrated 1947 as the culmination of a successful anti-colonial struggle and, in the Indian case at least, the birth of democracy, have been increasingly challenged over the last decade. Novels such as Amitav Ghosh's *Shadowlines* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, films such as Deepa Mehta's *Earth* (based upon Sidhwa's novel) and Pankaj Butalia's *Karvan*, and studies of the gendering of Partition such as Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries* and Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* have rematerialised the conflict, upheaval and pain of these momentous events, focusing on the violence that left approximately one million South Asians dead and at least ten million displaced from their homes. The celebratory narratives of anti-colonialism and nationalism have been called into question by these new visions that emphasise the centrality of gender, sexuality, caste, religion and nationalism in mediating the violence that swirled around the end of empire in India. This review essay focuses on a recent and important work on Partition – Gyanendra Pandey's *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* – to assess the key concerns and contributions made by this new scholarship on Partition and its legacies.

While Gyanendra Pandey's *Remembering Partition* engages with an international debate – stimulated by work of historians such as Giorgio

Agamben, Dan Diner, Pierre Nora and Peter Novick – over the relationship between history and memory, it is primarily an intervention in the burgeoning scholarship on Partition.<sup>1</sup> Pandey's examination of the place of memories of Partition in the constitution of social collectivities in South Asia extends his earlier work on communalism in colonial India (*The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, 1990), identity in contemporary India (his edited collection, *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, 1993) and Partition itself (*Memory, History and the Question of Violence*, 1999) and confirms his standing as one of the foremost cultural historians of South Asia. This volume stresses the complex interdependence between 'events' and 'interpretations', and the shifting meaning of Partition for individuals, communities and nations in South Asia.

Fundamental to this project is Pandey's willingness to call into question the unitary notion of Partition fostered by the Indian nation-state and affirmed by many historians of South Asia. This 'official Partition', Pandey suggests, co-exists with various other views of the events of 1947. Most obviously, it is explicitly challenged by Pakistanis who frame the events of that year as marking the achievement of the independence of Pakistan. Both the received Indian and Pakistani historical interpretations give meaning to the events of 1947 by moulding them into a key moment in the realisation of the destiny of the nation-state. However, Pandey underscores the ways in which these nation-focussed interpretations of Partition sit uneasily alongside the "'partition"/"uproar"/"migration"' that survivors of 1947 speak of' (13):

Against the unitary vision of national history, Pandey reconstructs the complex webs of ideology, political activity, violence, and migration that characterised 1947 and as a result identifies three distinct 'partitions'. The first of these 'partitions' was the Muslim League's demand for Pakistan, which was articulated from 1940 onwards. The idea of Pakistan, a new state or states in those regions of northwest and northeast India that had Muslim-majority populations, was seen by many South Asian Muslims as a necessary check upon the growing power of a Hindu-dominated Congress party and they hoped Pakistan would balance 'Hindustan' in any possible configuration of state structures after independence. Pandey rightly reminds that the idea of Pakistan remained 'vague' right up to 1947: it was unclear how South Asia's disparate Muslim communities would be united into one 'nation', what the geographical boundaries of such a nation might be, how older attachments that individuals felt to their '*watan*' (homeland) in Punjab or Bengal would be accommodated by this new nation and how Pakistan might relate to, or even fit within, an independent India (25-30).

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g. Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz. The Witness and the Archive* (New York, 1999); Dan Diner, 'Historical Understanding and Counterrationality: the Judenrat as Epistemological Vantage', in Saul Friedlander, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the 'Final Solution'* (Cambridge, MA, 1992); Pierre Nora, 'Between memory and History': *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, *Representations*, 26 (Spring 1989), 7-25; *Rethinking the French Past. Realms of Memory. Volume I: Conflicts and Divisions* (New York, 1996); and Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, 1999).

If the idea of Pakistan as a land or nation separate from India constitutes Pandey's 'first partition'; his 'second partition' is the willingness of Sikhs and Hindus to have the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal partitioned. In March 1947, the leaders of the Indian National Congress voted to both accept the division of Punjab into two parts, one Muslim dominated and the other under the control of Sikhs and Hindus, and a similar partition in Bengal. Congress's acceptance of the splitting of both Bengal and Punjab was supported by the Sikh leader Master Tara Singh and conservative Hindu groups like the Hindu Mahasabha and, ultimately, it was this willingness to see India divided that set the framework for the Radcliffe Award which formalised Partition in August 1947.<sup>2</sup>

While Pandey's first and second partitions are ideological, reflecting competing understandings of the nation, his 'third partition' is the massive upheaval where 'hundreds of thousands were uprooted and slaughtered, raped and forcibly "converted" in a display of almost unimaginable malevolence' (35). Pandey stresses that the actual processes of Partition (his 'third partition') was characterised by an enormous uncertainty and an 'extraordinary volatility' (39). Massive chains of migrants moved east and west and minority communities were increasingly anxious for their property and lives. Old patterns of cultural accommodation and co-existence became increasingly precarious and violence erupted in villages, towns and cities across north India. Abduction, sexual violence, murder and forced migration became tools through which community identities and national allegiances were tested and ultimately defined. Many groups, who previously straggled religious boundaries or practised syncretic forms of devotion, were now redefined and recategorized. Pandey notes, for example, that the land-cultivating Meos of Mewat, whose strong engagement with Hinduism and their Hindu neighbours was such that they were widely called 'half-Muslims', simply became 'Muslims' and as a result were 'free-floating and faceless examples of the "other"' (39).<sup>3</sup>

By identifying these three partitions, or, at least, highlighting these three distinct aspects of Partition, Pandey underscores the variety of intellectual, ideological, social, religious and material processes that operated in the massive transformations of 1946-8. This approach allows Pandey to reconfigure the singular 'Partition' that historians, of various ideological persuasions, have traditionally treated as a key point within the narrative of national development in South Asia and builds upon the work of other scholars who have recently challenged narrowly nationalist or ideological readings of 1947. 'Partition' no longer simply stands as the mechanism through which decolonisation was implemented, but rather is recast a complex of inter-related processes through

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that from June 1947, when the British articulated their commitment to the principle of Partition, many Sikh community leaders and intellectuals were critical of the support that leading Sikh politicians, especially Master Tara Singh and Sardar Baldev Singh, had earlier lent to Partition.

<sup>3</sup> Meos, for example, observed Hindu wedding rituals (*phera*) in addition to the traditional Muslim observances. See Shail Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity* (Delhi, 1997).

which the boundaries of religious and national communities were demarcated, enacted and policed. The strength of this approach is that the violence and ‘madness’ of 1947 are now seen as integral to both the short and long-term effects of Partition, rather than being cast as a regrettable, even curious, footnote to the achievement of nationhood as was customary in Indian historiography until the late 1980s. Thus, Pandey recasts Partition as a ‘moment of nationalisation’, where visions of the nation were constructed, contested and consolidated, through processes of ‘renegotiation and re-ordering’ that were central in the making of the modern nations of South Asia (17).

From this foundation, Pandey offers an extended meditation on the place of Partition in both memory and history. He explores how violence in particular locales has transformed those centres (Delhi) and the ways events in a specific locality (such as the violence that broke out at the *mela* held at Garhmukhteshwar in Uttar Pradesh in November 1946) has been inserted into the framework of nationalist ideologies and national histories. Most importantly, however, Pandey traces the divergence between the history of historians and the memories of those who lived through 1947. Official and academic histories of Partition have traditionally relied on the archives produced and maintained by the state and, as a result, have often made sense of Partition by locating the events of 1947 within an account of nation building. Both imperial and nationalist historians have seen the achievement of independence as the endpoint of a particular narrative (whether the development of colonial rule or the evolution of the anti-colonial struggles) and therefore have tended to direct their attention to explaining the lead-up to the event, historicizing its occurrence.<sup>4</sup> This strategy has allowed historians (until recently), to efface the brutality of Partition and see murder, rape, and abduction as both inexplicable and as ‘little events’ (59) marginal to the larger political processes that constitute the core of their story.

On the other hand, memories, oral histories and memoirs produced by those who lived through 1947 articulate a starkly different and competing vision of the period. Pandey notes that survivors of Partition rarely separate the politics and violence of 1947. In South Asian languages terms such as *raula* (disturbance) *maar-kaat* (mass-killing) or *miyan-maari* (the killing of Muslim) are used interchangeably with ‘Partition’ and its vernacular cognates. In short, Pandey argues that for survivors ‘Partition is the violence’ (189). Pandey explores the variety of mechanisms that those who lived through Partition have used to process their experiences. He reminds us that one common response, ‘widely enforced by individuals and communities’ was to ‘silence or ‘suppress’ Partition (175). Many survivors do reflect on Partition, even if their stories are shared only with much reluctance or pain. Once elicited, these survivors’ narratives explicitly challenge the celebratory accounts produced for, or

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<sup>4</sup> Pandey cites Dipesh Chakrabarty’s observation that the work of historians on Partition has focused on ‘explaining why it happened and why it happened at the time it did’. Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘Remembered villages: representation of Hindu-Bengali memories in the aftermath of Partition’, *Economic and Political Weekly* (10 August 1996), 2143.

supported by, the nation state. On the basis of such narratives, Pandey notes that it is possible to distinguish an additional ‘two faces’ of Partition and Independence, grounded in distinct class-based perspectives. While the ‘ruling class’ celebrated the achievement of Independence, a much larger ‘refugee class’, whose class position did not afford them some of the mechanisms of protection (*chowkidars* (gatekeepers), fenced houses and access to political power and protection) that the elite enjoyed, found little to celebrate amongst the realities of Partition. Pandey underscores this by juxtaposing the discrepancy between Jawaharlal Nehru’s famous Independence speech that signalled that independent India would ‘awake to life and freedom’ with the memories that common folk have of 15 August 1947. When asked ‘What were you doing on 15 August 1947?’, a Sikh shopkeeper originally from Multan district of Punjab who fled to Bhogal *mohalla* in Delhi (sandwiched between three refugee colonies), answered ““Wondering where we’d be the next day – whether we’d be able to stay on, even in this place ... That’s what we were doing”” (126).

*Remembering Partition* identifies two key narratives that survivors have used to make sense of the violence of Partition. One way in which violence was justified at the time, and explained away since, was by assimilating the conflicts of the 1940s into a narrative of war. Violence is justified because it defends community interests, redresses the wrongs visited on a community, and, in the case of pre-emptive violence, protects the community from potential threats. By framing conflict in such a way, Pandey suggests that narratives of Partition have ‘served to naturalise pre-existing notions of fundamentally opposed Hindu, Sikh and Muslim communities. Since then, the nation-states of South Asia, as well as ethnic communities that aspire to nation status, have continued to construct, commemorate and consolidate themselves through a constant retelling of tales of sacrifice and war’ (176). Thus, accounts of 1947 are not simply testimonies that relate to a momentous series of events that occurred over fifty years ago, but rather are a crucial mechanism for the articulation of subjectivities, communal identities and political ideologies within South Asia today.

The other key narrative Pandey isolates is the insistence that violence occurred ‘out there’, as participants in Partition have tended to displace physical conflict and its consequences from within a village or community. While collecting oral histories in Gharaun, a village about twenty miles from Chandigarh, Pandey heard a ‘standard story’, one that insisted on the ‘exceptional peace and harmony of this large Sikh village’ (181). Pandey’s Sikh informants insisted that Muslims were ‘unharmed’ in the village, even though Muslim men were forced to eat pork as a symbol of their renunciation of Islam. Pandey was also reassured that women and children were not targets of violence in Gharaun, even though forty or fifty Muslim women were killed in a *gurdwara* just beyond the edge of the village. Yet, these same informants remembered that men from Gharaun roamed the nearby countryside ‘settling scores’ with Muslims and recounted instances of the abduction and murder of Muslim women in nearby villages. Pandey argues that the consistent emphasis

in oral histories that such violence took place *outside* the physical and cultural boundaries of the village is significant. This strategy of insisting that violence occurred ‘out there’ functions as a mechanism that allows the surviving villagers to insist that “‘our village’ was something of an exception, that the violence did not take place here, and, when it did, it was “outsiders” who were responsible’ (182).

Victims as well as perpetrators can displace violence and replicate this tendency to silence or mask the atrocities of the past. During his research on Gharaun, Pandey interviewed one man who moved from Calcutta to his family home in Gharaun in September 1947, before being forced to flee back to Calcutta in fear of his life. This man, in his sixties or seventies, is a successful businessman and Congress politician in a town close to Gharaun. Now a respectable Sikh, he had actually been forced to convert from Islam during Partition, but unlike many other forced converts had not only clung to his new faith, but also had become a prominent member of his new community. In his interview with Pandey, however, this convert stressed the ‘huge’ and ‘terrible’ nature of Partition and asked rhetorically why Sikhs take to arms at times of crisis, but he ‘refused in any way to acknowledge that he had once been a Muslim’ (180).

For Pandey, Gharaun is a telling case because it demonstrates the ways in which a small community copes with the legacies of extreme conflict, murder and mass-violence. Pandey ends *Remembering Partition* by stressing that the legacies of Partition are very different for villages and towns than they are for nations and states. In contrast to these larger institutions and collectivities, which ‘are able to insulate themselves behind grand, rhetorical propositions about “national” interests’, small-scale communities have to struggle with the pain of Partition on a day-to-day basis. Villagers, like the people of Gharaun, have to struggle with the reality that it was their family members who were perpetrators or victims (or both) of violence, they were witnesses to a horrifying range of individual or collective violence, and their homes, businesses, and places of worship were the physical setting for the life and death dramas of 1947.

The final pages of *Remembering Partition* firmly connect narratives of Partition to debates over the nation in contemporary South Asia. Pandey notes that “face-to-face” (203) communities such as Gharaun were not only transformed by 1947, but also have been reshaped since 1947 by the growing power of the state and forces of economic and cultural globalisation that transect national boundaries. Within these larger frameworks, communities are frequently invoked as fixed, stable and clearly defined, but Pandey suggests that accounts of 1947 should teach us that even the most clearly defined nations should be recognised as ‘alterable, malleable, historical constructions’. This recognition, Pandey suggests hopefully, might form the basis of new forms of political community and enable ways of imagining communities that are ‘more self-consciously historical and more self-consciously accommodating’ (205). Events in South Asia since the publication of *Remembering Partition* – including the ongoing conflict over Kashmir, the December 2001 attack on the

Indian Parliament, but especially the Godhra massacre (where 59 Hindus were burnt alive on a train) in February 2002 and the subsequent wave of rapes and 'revenge killings' of Muslims in Gujarat – suggest that while the need to re-imagine the politics of community in South Asia remains pressing the creation of such a pluralistic and flexible understanding of history and identity seems a long way off.

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It is useful to view *Remembering Partition* against both Pandey's earlier work on communalism and against other recent studies of Partition. One way to read Pandey's *Remembering Partition* is to imagine it as a companion volume to his *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (1991). Pandey does not encourage us to do so, even though this seems an obvious strategy given that there is a continuity between the two works in terms of their thematic focus: the history of communalism. In this earlier monograph, Pandey examined the construction and policing of the cultural boundaries between communities under British colonialism. In short, Pandey argued that colonial historiography and the colonial state produced an understanding which conceptualised India as an overwhelming religious society which was structured around clearly-defined and competing religious communities: Hindu, Muslim and Sikh. Thus, for Pandey, British colonialism marked a rupture in South Asian history, marking a moment where long-established traditions of tolerance and co-existence were eroded by an alien state whose Orientalist sociology quickly carved Indian society into mutually exclusive and antagonistic communal blocks. As I have suggested elsewhere, arguments such as Pandey's rest upon the occlusion of the pre-colonial world and the communal conflict in the pre-1765 period documented by C.A. Bayly and others.<sup>5</sup> In seizing upon the ability of the colonial state to reshape colonized communities, Pandey's earlier work also erased the role of indigenous elites in propagating and cementing community boundaries, a process delineated in Katherine Prior's careful examination of the interaction between community leaders and the colonial state.<sup>6</sup> *Remembering Partition* marks a significant advance on *The Construction of Communalism* as here Pandey displays a greater sensitivity to the role of various South Asian actors, political parties, writers *and* the colonial state in engendering and contesting community boundaries. The definition of community now becomes a more fluid, complex and 'fuzzy' process, rather than being imposed on the colonised 'from above', community boundaries are

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Ballantyne, 'Archive, State, Discipline: Power and Knowledge in South Asian historiography', *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies* 3:1 (2001), 87-105; C.A. Bayly 'The Prehistory of "Communalism": Religious Conflict in India, 1700-1860', *Modern Asian Studies* 19:2 (1985), 177-203; Cynthia Talbot, 'Inscribing the Other, Inscribing the Self: Hindu-Muslim Identities in Pre-Colonial India', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37:4 (1995), 692-722.

<sup>6</sup> Katherine Prior, 'Making History: the State's Intervention in Urban Religious Disputes in the North-West Provinces in the Early Nineteenth Century' *Modern Asian Studies* 27:1 (1993), 179-203.

produced, often violently, through the actions and arguments of a multiplicity of South Asian groups that occupy a variety of distinct locations.

It would be extremely interesting to know how Pandey now views the rather mechanistic and reductive view of communalism articulated in *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*: would he now place more emphasis on the role of South Asians and perhaps temper his vision of an all powerful colonial state? One also wonders what has prompted Pandey to place greater emphasis on the agency of local agents in this later work. Does it reflect his turn to oral history and his ability to use a multiplicity of narratives produced by South Asians themselves, rather than relying on the archives produced by the colonial state as he did in his work on the nineteenth century. Following the same line of thought, Pandey's newfound emphasis on South Asian agency seems to reinforce a firm divide between the colonial period and the age of decolonisation. Suddenly, in the age of nationalism, the voices of South Asians are discovered; this is laudable, but throws the silencing of indigenous voices in the historiography of the nineteenth century into even starker relief.

In *Remembering Partition*, Pandey draws upon much of the recent research on Partition and it particularly bears the imprint of the work of Menon, Bhasin and Butalia on the gendering of Partition. Pandey displays a deep sensitivity to both the role of gender in determining experiences of 1947 and the ways in which gendered identities – both masculinity and femininity – mould narratives of Partition. Pandey's *Remembering Partition*, however, does not pay much attention to caste as a determinant of individual or collective experience of the upheavals of Partition or the ways different caste groups remember Partition. In *The Other Side of Silence* Urvashi Butalia documented some of the distinct ways that Harijans, 'untouchables' or Dalits negotiated the violence, mobility and upheaval of the mid-1940s.<sup>7</sup> More recently, Ramnarayan S. Rawat has examined the ways in which Dalit leaders challenged the nationalism of Congress during Partition and attempted to mobilize a separate Dalit identity as they strived to gain access to political power for the first time.<sup>8</sup> Pandey's discussion of violence in Punjab, for example, pays little attention to caste traditions or the divergent ways in which castes imagine gendered identities, codes of proper behaviour, and relate to nationalist movements or the state itself in differing ways.

Surely, even when we are dealing with moments when the social order unravels or is ruptured by extreme violence, we should try to anthropologise as well as historicise perceptions, actions and reactions. Closer attention to the peculiarities of local caste configurations would also, of course, help to contextualise patterns of violence within the complex social histories of specific locations: are there any connections, for example, between the extensive

<sup>7</sup> Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, N.C., 2000), 235-55.

<sup>8</sup> Ramnarayan S. Rawat, 'Partition Politics and Acchut Identity: a Study of the Scheduled Castes Federation and Dalit Politics in UP, 1946-48', in Suvir Kaul, ed., *The Partitions of Memory; the Afterlife of the Division of India* (Delhi, 2001), 111-139.



violence against women in Jat-dominated areas of Punjab and the hyper masculinity of Punjabi Jat culture and the particularly high premium on women's 'honour' and the maintenance of *izzat* (face; respectability) in Jat tradition?

Pandey largely neglects one other variable that shapes representations of Partition: age. Individuals who were children during the time of Partition produce almost all of the oral histories he draws upon: how does this affect their content, structure and impact? Butalia's work has drawn attention to the particular difficulties of accessing the experience of children during Partition. As she notes '[n]o history of Partition ... has had anything to say about children.'<sup>9</sup> This, of course, is a major problem given that children were not by any means immune from the effects of Partition; indeed, there is considerable evidence to suggest that children were particularly prone to kidnapping and violence (enacted by both members of other religious communities and from within their own community, or even, their own family) during Partition. Butalia notes that the plight of children presents a particular challenge. While there were concerned efforts to repatriate abducted woman and even address the problematic plight of Harijans (Dalits), children lacked advocacy, received no special attention, and were generally overlooked in debates over repatriation, citizenship and community. Nita Kumar has recently explored another way in which age shapes visions of Partition, as she has assessed the competing histories of Partition offered by the modernizing educational agenda of the postcolonial nation and the more particular and 'sectarian' vision of Partition provided to children in madrasas. Kumar's work suggests that a child's geographical location, religious affiliation, caste status, and educational experience will shape how they imagine the meaning of Partition and its relationship to their own life and community.<sup>10</sup>

In criticizing Pandey's neglect of caste and age, I am not discounting the value of his work, but rather suggesting that paying careful attention to these variables will allow us to push his insightful deconstruction of unitary understandings of Partition even further. Age, gender, religion, caste, education, location and political affiliation all mediate visions of the past, relationships to the nation-state and its official histories, as well as determining particular connections to the events of Partition. This means that an almost bewildering array of understandings of Partition can be found in South Asia and even as many survivors die without sharing their memories, old narratives are being reworked (particularly in moments of communal or international conflict) and new narratives are being generated. Given the centrality of Partition in the definition of both religious and national identities within contemporary South Asia it seems likely that such narratives will continue to multiply and compete.

I would like to end with three quotations taken from Sanjeev Saith's 1997 photo-essay on the fiftieth anniversary of Partition/Independence. These

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<sup>9</sup> Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence* 197.

<sup>10</sup> Nita Kumar, 'Children and Partition', in Kaul, ed., *Partitions of Memory*, 269-301.

recollections underscore the interplay of gender, education, age and geographic location in moulding the place of 1947 in popular memory within South Asia.

C. Narayani, a domestic worker from Kerala who resided in Madras during 1947, recalls:

We got to know what was happening from the papers: they said there was a lot of fighting and people were dying. But there was no special occasion to celebrate. For us every day was the same. But someone gave us flags, and we celebrated ... The country has changed now; they are all sorts of bad people. I don't like it. I don't do anything except my work. I just stay in this house. I don't want to meet anyone. I just don't feel like it.<sup>11</sup>

Pachi Bewa, a Bihari Muslim migrant to Calcutta, remembers:

I'm not sure how old I was in 1947 – I know I was married then and had two or three children. I was married when I was thirteen. Independence meant little to us – we women, what could we know? We hardly moved out from inside our houses. Yes, there was some shouting here in Calcutta, some sounds of rioting, and we could see smoke. [...] What was there to celebrate? Half our people lost their lives; the whole place was destroyed. Many of our relatives left to go to east Pakistan and after that, well, between us there was no going and coming. [...] What's there to feel happy about? We have no peace, there's looting and killing – we were here in the 1964 riots. There is no sense of belonging. If a person has given birth to a child, and then the child does not even get to see his birthplace – what kind of freedom is that?<sup>12</sup>

Harpiyari, a Hindu washerwoman from Aligarh, reflects:

I can't say what age I was in 1947 – even now I don't know my age – but I was quite small. In my village there were a few poor Muslims, and they were very frightened. They thought the people were coming to kill them so they ran away. But there was no rioting or killing, so things went back to normal. The poor Muslims never came back though. And then one day someone gave us flags and we waved them around.<sup>13</sup>

These three quotes capture something of what we might call the 'texture of memory' in the case of Partition. For people in South India, direct experiences of the violence and displacement of Partition might have been rare, but

<sup>11</sup> Sanjeev Saith, 'Freedom', *Granta*, 57, 32.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

Partition might nevertheless function as an important rupture in both personal and national histories. For migrants to Calcutta from East Bengal, Partition marks the loss of family, the collapse of community and the beginning of a cycle of violence and upheaval. For a low-caste Hindu from Uttar Pradesh, Partition created communal fear (and violence maybe, given Pandey's identification of the 'violence other there' narrative), initiated an important demographic shift, but Independence itself was empty and meaningless. The daily, monthly and yearly rhythms of work and life persist despite the tremendous upheavals of decolonisation.

Hopefully, future scholarship on Partition will continue to pay close attention to this 'texture', exploring the ways in which location, caste, gender and age mediated both experiences of 1947 and continue to shape memories and understandings of the genesis of independent India, Pakistan and (after 1971) Bangladesh. Pandey's work clearly points to the role that representations of Partition play in the continued calcification of religious boundaries, the power of communalism in the symbolic repertoire and language of South Asian politics, and the growing global reach of the Hindu right. These processes underpin the periodic eruption of communal violence within South Asia and the terrible cost of this violence means that tracing the history of contemporary identities, recording a full range of historical narratives and reflecting critically upon Partition remain crucial political as well as academic functions. In this light, Pandey's *Remembering Partition* is an important intervention, but much work remains to be done.