

Writing on wall of Mandi House Metro station: Partition stories

On Friday, Delhi and California-based non-profit oral history organisation '1947 Partition Archives' set up two exhibits at the Mandi House Metro station — 'Women during Partition' and 'My heart belongs in Delhi'.

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“My father was posted in Algon Kahlon when Partition was announced... he sent knives for my sisters and me.”

“A neighbour of ours killed his daughter because he feared she would be killed or raped on their way to the border. The air was full of fear.”

“In the midst of chaos at the platform, a fellow passenger got violent and my father intervened, pacifying the situation.”

The walls of the Mandi House Metro station are full of stories of the women of Partition — from Gopi Bhatia, who migrated to Bombay from Pakistan’s Sindh, to Hamida Bano Begum, who left Ferozepur in India for Jhang in Pakistan. On Friday, Delhi and California-based non-profit oral history organisation ‘1947 Partition Archives’ set up two exhibits at the Mandi House Metro station — ‘Women during Partition’ and ‘My heart belongs in Delhi’. The exhibit is on display till September-end.

Commuters linger as they read the memories of Partition of these women, written in Hindi and English, under their big black-and-white photos.

The exhibit at Mandi House Metro station has been designed by architect Aurggho Jyoti. “This is the first time we have exhibited this at a transport hub, and there is huge symbolism in showcasing this work at a Metro station as millions of people relied on trains to cross the border in 1947. Many lives were lost on the trains. We also wanted to exhibit at the New Delhi Railway Station, but they don’t have the provision,” said founder of ‘1947 Partition Archives’ Guneeta Singh Bhalla.

It was in 2009 that Bhalla, who grew up in the US, began documenting the oral history of Partition with a visit to Punjab. “Till now, the Archive has recorded 8,000 stories from 12 countries in 36 languages. In 2017, ‘Women during Partition’ was curated and a portion of it is exhibited at the Metro station,” said Bhalla. The ‘Women during Partition’ exhibit has been curated by author Aanchal Malhotra and researcher Ritika Popli.

Next to the women’s testimonies are memories of Delhi, as a part of the “My Heart Belongs in Delhi” exhibit. Yasmin Aftab, who migrated from Delhi to Lahore, told the Archive about growing up in “elite suburb Karol Bagh”, and “secret visits to the hospital when her younger sister was born during Partition.”

Usha Chhabra, in the exhibit, recalled living with an aunt in Gole Market after migrating from Rawalpindi in Pakistan, while Abdus Salam told the Archives about a bookstore his father ran near Jama Masjid in Delhi in 1937.

Bhalla said, “People have given us positive feedback about stories from India and Pakistan.”

The exhibit has been curated by researchers Erin Riggs and Ritika Popli, and art curator Arshiya Lokhandwala.