Flood havoc in Maharashtra, 30 dead

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Recording Partition memories online

TANVEER KAUR

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"Naseem Mirza Changezi was born in 1910 in his ancestral home at Pahari Imli near the Churi Walan (bangle sellers) area of Old Delhi. He belonged to a family of freedom fighters who fought alongside the likes of Rash Behari Bose, Bhagat Singh and Shivaram Rajguru. He recalls assisting as a secret messenger for freedom fighters, passing on messages and pretending to be a street vendor. When Bhagat Singh came to Delhi with intentions to bomb the Central Legislative Assembly, Changezi's family sheltered him in Daryaganj in Old Delhi. After Bhagat Singh executed his mission in 1929, Changezi went into hiding in Gwalior. Changezi's ancestors came to Shahjahanbad in the early 17th century when Mughal emperor Shahjahan laid its foundation. Old Delhi was known as Shahjahanabad in those days...."

"Abdul Ghaffar belonged to Hoshiarpur, India. There he had Hindu and Sikh friends who were like brothers to him. He also celebrated Holi with them and they would celebrate Eid with him. Gaffar remembers how the families had to move to camps during Partition because of riots and increasing danger, while the boys stayed back to guard the houses. The only thing he worried about during his journey to Pakistan was his box of books. He saved his books at every point. He was in grade 9 during Partition. After moving to Pakistan, he couldn't carry his studies. After a few years, when his family sold his books considering it trash while he was out of city, he cried a lot for his books. Talking about freedom he says, 'This is not freedom. We actually lost our freedom.'"

These are just two of the poignant stories one comes across at **https://in.1947partitionarchive.org (https://apac01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fin.1947partitionarchive.org&data=02%7C01%7Crajasekhar.vm%40thehindu.co.in%7C61fed41711b042c9c** a project that compiles oral history and documentation relating to survivors of the violence during Partition.

The project recently made news when the former Indian Army officer Kamaldeep Singh Sandhu, a Graduate Teaching Assistant (Department of War Studies) in King's College London, ran 200 kilometres on the streets of London in December 2018 as part of a fundraising campaign. It is approximately the distance that Kamaldeep's father, the late Naranjan Singh Sandhu, had travelled during Partition from Lyallpur (now Faisalabad) to Jalandhar along with many others.

Kamaldeep Sandhu, who is in his 40s, is an active member of The 1947 Partition Archive. Sandhu has recorded various Partition stories of people now living in India, the United Kingdom and France. One of these is the story of his own grandmother, Gurmit Kaur, 84, who lives in Ajmer. Sandhu has inspired many around the globe to join his online campaign, launched on December 1, 2018, to run in their respective countries on a particular day and at a given time to raise funds for the archive.

To institutionalise the oral history of Partition, Guneeta Singh Bhalla, a former physicist at the University of California, Berkeley, established a digital archive, 'The 1947 Partition Archive', and began with the recording of stories of survivors on the streets of Amritsar in 2010. A visit to the oral testimony archives at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial inspired her to undertake this task of memorialising Partition. She belongs to a partitioned family herself and grew up listening to the traumatic stories of that tragedy.

The head office of the project is based in Berkeley, California, U.S. The other office is in Gurgaon, Haryana. Guneeta Singh Bhalla grew up in Florida before moving to Berkeley to work at the University of California as a research physicist. She launched the 1947 Partition Archive while she was still a physicist.

It works in the form of a charitable trust in the U.S. and India and is an online archive where one can document and share stories in interview form. Anyone can volunteer to be a "citizen-historian" by taking the simple online training offered by the archive, interview the person concerned and share it on the website. The archive has 7,500 stories recorded by citizen-historians spread all over the globe and aims to archive 10,000 stories by the end of 2019. Apart from ensuring that the stories are not lost forever, the archive's major purpose is to offer an astounding primary database for future academic research.

For a project like this the main challenges are financial and logistical issues. Paying honorarium to scholars, acquiring the necessary equipment, setting up offices to store the archives, and legal expenses require constant funding, which the project aims to raise by organising annual runs. Fund raising is a major part of the charitable institution's activity and happens extensively at the year's end. Plagiarism of content from the online project is another challenge that Guneeta Singh Bhalla and her exceptionally devoted team members, many of whom share a similar background as hers, face in the absence of strong copyright laws or ethical awareness on the part of those accessing the project.

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