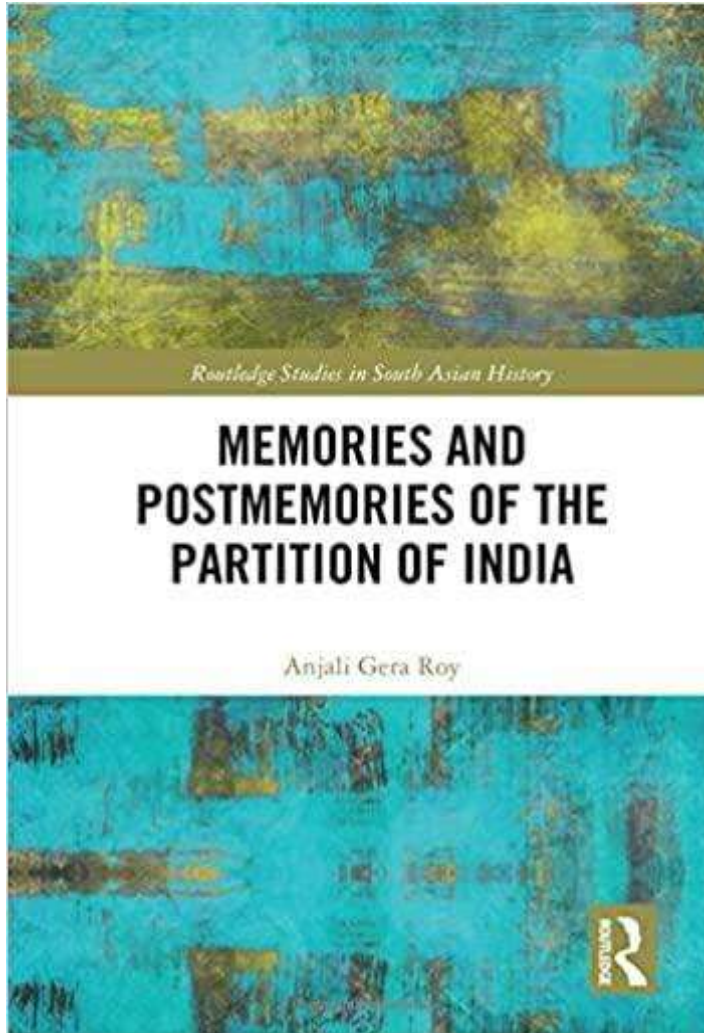


Anjali Gera Roy, *Memories and Postmemories of the Partition of India*. London, New York: Routledge, 2020. 234 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-58028-2.



Batwara leaves scars. The colossal *batwara* (the Partition) of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 has left deep chasms, a tectonic one. While to Partition the subcontinent into new nation states was a political decision, it has lasting ramifications in social, economic, cultural and psychological spheres of life, which continue to unfold in so many new ways that *batwara* no longer remains an event locked in specific contextual frame. It has become a process, an

unfinished saga obfuscating the boundaries between past, history and memory. The scale of violence, depth of its penetration and the enigmatic nature of this obfuscation have attracted a fair number of scholars in the last three, four decades, going back to late 1980s. This scholarship is highly provocative, disconcerting and deeply humanistic. The book under review is a welcome addition to this growing body of scholarship, one that provides a comprehensive treatment of the subject.

Mobilising conceptual tools skilfully, Anjali Gera Roy anchors her analytical focus on the obfuscation between history and memory I have pointed above. To be more specific, she aims at unpacking the trauma and its entanglements with memory, history and societal subjectivities. At each level, she successfully points towards the porous nature of these categories and the capacity of violence to destabilise our dominant understanding of them and leak the raw puss of “the knowledge of poisoned relations and loss of intellectual uncertainty... translated as the loss not only of privilege and status [of the refugees and their future generations] but also of language and culture through the pressure on survivors to assimilate into host cultures” (14). The extreme forms of violence and sufferings expose the very structure and the capacity of language to articulate and express this pain and we stutter. Along with us, the author initiates us to think that due to this inherent inability of the language, history stutters, language stutters and lived experience itself stutters.

An outcome of a prolonged fieldwork in scattered geographic locations, the book’s core strength rests in casting a wide analytical net, in its garnering of conceptual apparatuses from a variety of academic disciplines and scholarships, in bringing together narratives gathered from the fieldwork and textual utterances left behind by earlier raconteurs of the trauma, and in offering us fresh ways of asking questions about the trauma of the Partition. However, what the reader found strikingly missing was a substantial figuration of the author’s own immersed voices, beyond few occasional and momentary surfacing of her own cultural lineage. Does this hamper? The answer would be an emphatic “no.” Her deep cultural embeddings, in what may be called as Punjabi social and cultural milieu, comes quite effortlessly, particularly in the later chapters (which engage with home, displaced belongings, linguistic ramifications and everyday practices, habits and affective spatial everyday-ness of refugee lives). It is here, I would argue, the partition scholarship has acquired spatial turn with its conceptual nuances and deep cultural sensitivities. It is here the wide sweep has acquired regional anchorage and depth.

Divided into ten chapters (including an Introduction), we are initiated into the book through a discussion on trauma studies and a debate on memory, history and forgetting. The author follows Marianne Hirsch in her usage of the term postmemory as a specific trope when victimhood of trauma gets passed on to the second generation of the survivors of a catastrophic event of the past. It

is this “indirect impact of suffering,” this relationship of the second generation to traumatic experience preceding their births but transmitted to them, nevertheless, provides a unique window to a researcher to ask a whole range of questions about traumatic memory and its fluidity in social and spatial domains. What is wonderfully revealed then is how these postmemories are grounded in the soil like falling roots of an old banyan tree. The author then picks up any number of these falling roots as tropes and allows us to see the linkages between memory, history and forgetting. For example, how tropes of *dabsat* [horror], *himmat* [courage] and *mehnat* [hard work] constitute a force field (social-psychological one may say) in which mourning and an inability to mourn oscillate. On the one hand, these are coordinates of “vernacular remembering processes” and, on the other, as key constituting elements of “ethics and aesthetics of remembrance.” Conceptualising a field in this way has allowed the author to discuss *Ghallughara* (general massacre of Sikhs in 1984 and its *vadda* version in 1762, the significance of engaging with *shabr ashob* [a genre of engaging with cities as a form of lamentation; “the disturber of cities”], linguistic heritages of *Saraiki* and *Mianwali*, hierarchies in Punjabi food culture and its transformation in Delhi in the aftermath of the Partition, the affective space of *chulha chakki* by way of creatively mobilising insights from Gaston Bachelard, and the changed aesthetics of embroidery, to name only a few such threads which can never fail to go unnoticed for their potentials in opening up new ways of thinking about the trauma, its memory and post memories. This is an amazingly rich tapestry of remembrance shaped by a trauma called the Partition.

The studies of memory have been shaped by writings of four scholars: Aby Warburg (*Mnemosyne Atlas*; begun in 1924 but published in 2000, long after his death in 1927), Maurice Halbwachs (*La Memoire Collective*, 1950), Pierre Nora (*Les Lieux de Memoire*, in three volumes, published between 1984-1992) and Paul Ricoeur (*Memory, History, Forgetting*). Among these, while the author has used insights from Nora to privilege memory over history, her reliance on Ricoeur has primarily been to achieve hermeneutic and phenomenological routes to memory. However, in this framing, I have uneasiness over her excessive reliance on trauma studies discourse and the Holocaust discourse coming from the western academia. This reliance has somewhat led to a historiographical misjudgement and a neglect towards the contextual significance of anti-Sikh riots of 1984 in providing a decisive new orientation to scholars to study memory, trauma and the Partition.

In the aftermath of 1984 riots, when scholars and civil society activists visited Sikh victims, they were often directed to the trauma of the Partition in their encounters with these victims. They returned reflecting on discursive forgetfulness and amnesias of nationalist history which had till then only two vantage points: either to look at the Partition through the eyes of conspiracy theories or from the prism of the transfer of authority in the history of

decolonisation. This history had till then kept a blind eye to literature and cinematic representations of sufferings and was not ready to lend its ears to stuttering and silences of ordinary men and women who had suffered and were alive to tell tales. Except for a few exceptions, one is surprised about the analytical neglect to 1984 anti-Sikh riots in this account. Similarly, one is quite struck by no reference to Ashis Nandy's seminal essay on Ambiguous journeys undertaken by Partition refugees and a mere mention (without any analytical engagement) of his essay on history's forgotten doubles. The later would have allowed a far better purchase for a study which squarely aims at vernacular remembering.

Besides these minor lapses, one gets the impression that the first half of the book is overshadowed by stale criticism of specific constellations of dogmatic and disciplinary history. This becomes ironical when one unearths thick layers of immensely insightful empirical material underneath these references of secondary theoretical literature. One feels tempted to go back to this richness more and more.

It is here, in the domain of unsettled memory, that one finds a rich engagement with stuttering. On stuttering, the author draws insights from Deleuze's three ways of representing the stutter (by *doing it*, by *saying it* and by *saying and doing it*) and Veena Das's concept of poisoned knowledge. The author, while reading Sa'adat Hasan Manto's ("Toba Tek Singh," "Khol Do" and "Thanda Gosht") writes,

Manto's graphic description of the amorous foreplay between the conjugal couple [in "Thanda Gosht"] in a language of circumlocution that bristles with aggressive sexual energy and culminates in Eesher Singh's impotency makes the language itself stutter, get charged, tremble and rise to a frenzy as Kalwant, suspecting him of being with another woman, stabs him. Here, stuttering no longer affects the words but itself introduces the words it effects, which cannot exist independently of the stutter. (90)

While an engagement with stuttering allows us insights into representational dynamics of partitioned bodies, later chapters on loss of home, displacement, resettled homes and partitioned subjects, we move to issues pertaining to relation between the bare bodies (*homo sacer* of Giorgio Agamben) of the refugees and the complexities of experiential dynamics of space. As mentioned earlier, this investment into space opens up a whole new terrain of sensorial and imagined geographies. This is a new nomadology (a term coined by Deleuze to critique sedentary-ness of history) where we find that "Unlike *udbastu* [uprooted], the Bengali term for refugee, *jorhon puttna* [pull out from the roots], its colloquial Punjabi equivalent has not entered literary or academic jargon even though the rhyming phrase *lutte putte* [looted and uprooted] was naturalized in the survivors' vocabulary to describe the partition experience" (199).

Anjali Gera Roy argues that “the anti-sedentarism of the Partitioned subject is forced by the recognition [and, I would add, through a reconfiguration] of the precariousness of life, livelihood and lifestyles through the survivors’ occupation of the precarious subject position of the refugees” (201). With this subjectivity of recognition and reconfiguration of their *own* bare bodies, they rebuilt their lives and redesigned the landscapes since the Partition. And we enter into neighbourhoods like Aminabad and Adarsh Nagar of Lucknow and find ourselves among resettled subjectivities of people from Dera Ismail Khan and Dera Ghazi Khan in Delhi and Gurgaon among other places. This is also a story of the transformation of *sharmarhi* into *purusharhi*.

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