Between Two Worlds:
Long Term Effects of
Communal Violence on a
Multi-religious, Marginalized Community

Chavi Bhargava Sharma
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Multi-religious, Marginalized Community

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I personally believe that my encountering the Pranami was possible only because Prannathji willed it. I bow in reverence to that spirit. I am grateful for the tremendous love, acceptance and faith the Pranamis placed in me to let me have a copy of the Swaroop Sahib. I know I can never thank them enough for the help I have received from all the people of the community. I am grateful to Sohanlalji, Rajan Swamiji, Indu Behenji and many others who were generous in their hospitality and time, and the knowledge they shared with me without any qualms and reservations.

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Chavi Bhargava Sharma
The Scholar of Peace Fellowships awarded by WISCOMP for academic research, media projects and special projects are designed to encourage original and innovative work by academics, policy makers, defense and foreign policy practitioners, NGO workers and others. The series WISCOMP Perspectives in conjunction with WISCOMP Discussion Papers brings the work of some of these scholars to a wider readership.

The twenty-first in the series, the present monograph explores the Pranami community, with a focus on the extreme violence its members suffered during August 1947. The writer examines how and why this multireligious community became a special target of violence during partition, and the long-term impact of this violence. Community members are still suffering the effects of trauma despite the passage of several decades, as is clear from the powerful narratives presented here. The narratives are searing, haunting. The psychosocial significance of this research lies in the fact that facilitating expression of trauma is essential for any process of healing.

Chavi Bhargava Sharma reconstructs not only the stories of individuals, but also of the group as a whole. The Pranamis are a community in which Hindu and Muslim tenets are completely intertwined. It has a very rich textual tradition, traceable from the time of its founder, Prannath, i.e. the era of Aurangzeb. There are over 400 Pranami temples in north India, Gujarat, the Northeast, and even Nepal. In Pranami temples, traditionally the Koran is placed side by side with the Puranas, and the priests as well as laypersons are well versed in both texts. This religion invited the wrath of those who wanted clear demarcation of people on the basis of religion.

The traumatic events they have experienced, and the vitiated communal atmosphere, has pushed Pranamis to effect a change in their own self-definition, from a multireligious to a mono-religious community. They have by and large shifted to a self-definition as ‘Hindu’, thus cutting away a part of their own selves. As Bhargava Sharma notes, contemporary politics is leading to a denial and numbing of pluralistic tendencies within our culture and traditions.
Mahatma Gandhi’s mother Putlibai was a Pranami, and it is fascinating to note the influence the faith has had, consciously or subconsciously, on Gandhi’s values and beliefs. He recalls the temple his mother took him to in his childhood, where Koranic and Pauranic sources were respected. Today, however, the priests are reciting only Hindu verses, and maintaining silence as regards the Muslim verses. Partition thus is not only a partition of two countries, and of two religious communities, but also a partition within individual selves.

This work has many rich insights to offer. The long-term impact of violence is clear from the narratives. Not only is it experienced as depression, guilt and pain by the affected person, but also passed on to the next generations. To mitigate the long-term impact, a process of conscious healing has to be set in motion. What happened needs to be brought out of hiding, spoken out, acknowledged. Only then will it be possible to make any authentic move beyond the wounds, hurts, and anger that overwhelm individuals and communities in the present, and threaten our future too. Examining the affect of partition is essential for healing of not only individuals but also communities and nations.

Bhargava Sharma reflects upon why a multireligious community should be a special target of communal forces. She proposes that this is so because such a community threatens the attempts by sections of Hindus and Muslims to define themselves as distinct religions with fixed boundaries. Neither religion, which seeks to define itself so sharply, can tolerate a ‘bridge’ community like the Pranamis. The violence of 1947, which they suffered disproportionately, was an attempt to shatter the ‘bridge’.

According to the Anthropological Survey of India (1994), 15% of Indian communities practice double, multiple or intermediate religious identities. These bridge communities defy the logic of fixed boundaries and mutual antagonism. Themselves the historical product of interaction, dialogue and shared understanding between different cultures, such communities could actually help show ways to resolve religious intolerance.

The researcher’s intense engagement with the subject and process of her research renders it all the more powerful. Brought up in a spirit of inter-faith understanding, various members of the community come through as extremely inspiring in their resilience, tolerance and humane
understanding. The religious literature extant within the community is also fascinating and rich. Thus the study highlights internal sources within our composite culture, which could be tapped in the course of conflict transformation and peacebuilding endeavors.

The WISCOMP Research Team
Introduction

This is a study of what violence can do to a person and his entire inner and outer world, not just when it occurs – because violence does not end when the act ends – but through a person’s entire life cycle, affecting the next generations, too. Passed and transmitted through memories, it seeps into every sphere of life and relations and is often the genesis of interpersonal and communal violence and hatred. This is a study of the effect partition violence has had on people’s entire lives.

Religion has been the basis of the partition of undivided India. Hinduism and Islam seem to be two mutually antagonistic identities with irreconcilable differences and worldviews. But the existence of multireligious or bridge communities like Pranamis seems to defy and question this logic of internal uniformity, fixed boundaries and rigidity of different religions and cultures, and suggest interaction and exchange. Studying these multireligious communities provides invaluable insight into the psychology of a genocide that involves communities close to rather than distant from each other.

One such community and its individuals within the context of partition is the Pranami community that bridges Hinduism and Islam and was the target of organized, planned violence. Mahatma Gandhi’s mother belonged to this community and Gandhi is said to have taken the concepts of religious tolerance and non-violence from his mother. The ideology of this small community has larger implications. The way its members have coped with genocide, with the help of their religious beliefs, may have lessons of tolerance that far transcend its community boundaries and apply to whole societies that are grappling with communal tension.

The exigency of the study comes from the fact that after 1947, many such people and communities are dying out because of alterations, deliberately introduced so that they conform and fit into modern stereotypical ideas of Hinduism and Islam. Soon direct testimonies of both individuals and communities may not even be available.
Chapter 1

The Summer of 1947: Two Personal Narratives

The Pranami community is a small religious community that is quite closed and tightly knit. Bahawalpur State was a Muslim state, and is now a part of Pakistan. It had a population that consisted of 90% Muslims and 10% Hindus. It is 6 miles from the Karanpur border and two miles from Nakki check post.

Three or four months before August 1947 the Pranami community, fearing violence, had moved to Karanpur and Abhor, which were on the Indian side, with some of their clothes and valuables like gold and silver. But then their Muslim neighbors had called them back to Bahawalpur assuring them of safety and peaceful co-existence, asking them to return to the land of their forefathers. The people went back because at that time it was unthinkable that they would leave the homes where their ancestors had lived for years. Further, they felt such skirmishes were a regular feature and since things eventually settled down, it was unthinkable that people will have to give up their place of origin.

After the partition of India on 15th August things became very difficult for them in Bahawalpur. Their temple was vandalized; meat pieces dripping in blood were hung on their temple gate. As the people recollect, once they returned to Bahawalpur those same people who had assured them of safety now changed their attitude. On 26th August, in collusion with the military, Muslims attacked them. Only one person in the community had a gun, the rest were unarmed with not even a lathi in their houses. The lower middle class took refuge in the temple presuming it to be the safest place. At the other end of the mohalla or neighborhood, the landlords and the richer class had stayed put in their houses. They were attacked from both sides simultaneously. All the houses had connecting terraces. People were hiding everywhere, on the terrace, inside the house and in the temple. When the Pranami with the gun fired, for a very short period he stopped the mob, but then the army opened fire on the Pranamis and they lost the one-sided fight.
The mob attacked the temple, killed the unarmed, helpless people there, and set fire to the temple before leaving. This killing according to the witnesses continued for two to three hours. In this time almost all the adult men were dead and though they killed anyone indiscriminately, it was the male population that was almost finished. Help was provided almost 24 hours after the massacre. They lay there injured and bleeding, with no water to drink as the Muslims specifically broke the ‘matka’ or urns where they stored their water. After those three hours no other episode of violence occurred. According to the witnesses it was preplanned and organized, with other motives besides property and gold. As they had already once left for India earlier than 15th August, even though they went back they left their gold and silver with their relatives in Abhor. Their being called back to Bahawalpur by the Muslim neighbors, then being told by those same people that it was unsafe for the community and they would be unable to protect them, leads to a general theory among the survivors that it was a scheme of the Muslims to kill them. The situation was so bad that they could never return to Bahawalpur.

I have presented two life stories. The first person belonged to the upper class of Pranamis at that time and he was in his house where the violence occurred. The other person was from the middle class and had taken shelter in their temple, which was at the other end of the locality. These two people represent at the community level the entire gamut of what occurred to the community in 1947. Whereas the middle and lower classes took shelter in their place of worship, the upper class people, who lived at the other end of the mohalla, stayed in their homes.

**Narrative One: BC**

I have called the first person BC. This detailed life history helps in discovering the psychodynamics of violence and its effect on a person’s life. By not analyzing the story I have tried to avoid the psychologist’s defensive tendency to render all life histories into antiseptic case studies.

I was interviewing another person and she gave me BC’s reference. She did not have his exact house number so she described the house and the lane to me. As I was looking for the house in the described lane, I saw a short man standing and talking to the vegetable vendor near the main gate of his house. It was afternoon. I stopped and asked this old man for the directions and whereabouts of BC’s house. He said that I was at the right house and he was BC. Though he did not
invite me in, nor did he open the gate, we spoke standing there for 40-45 minutes. He was very enthusiastic and keen to talk to me and share his experiences when I told him about the project and my reason for interviewing him. He said that what he has seen and experienced is unbelievable. His father and brother were killed in front of his eyes and his son got left behind. He also told me that some years ago a Pakistani researcher had come to interview him. He asked me to come after a week at 8 am. Then he repeated thrice that he was a very busy person, he had to take care of the construction of the temple too and was a very punctual person so I had better be on time. He also asked me to call him before coming to reconfirm the appointment. When I telephoned him he was apprehensive and reluctant and asked me specifically how I had got his address and from whom. Later towards the end of the interview he told me that he had checked out my credentials with my earlier interviewee before he let me into his house. He explained that they were old and today’s world cannot be trusted so he had to be cautious.

BC’s interview was in Hindi and took approximately 16-17 hours in six sessions. I also went to him for two healing sessions. I interviewed BC in his house on all six occasions. For the healing sessions I went to the temple. In each session he reminded me at least four times that he was a very punctual person and did not like even a 5-minute delay. This was in spite of the fact that I reached his house at 8:00 am sharp on all occasions.

BC’s house, allotted to him after partition, is located in the resettlement colony. It is a 200-square-yard house. As soon as one enters the main gate there is a porch and an open drain running along the wall. After the porch in front is the chowk (courtyard) with a water tank and space for washing utensils. The utensils were visible from the main gate itself. Just near the washing space were stairs leading to the terrace. Near the main gate on the right was a small veranda with an aluminum stand for drying clothes, and then a toilet. On the left of the veranda two stairs led to the drawing room and the bedrooms. The drawing room had a very old sofa, an old centre table and a chipped divan. There was an old black and white TV. The floor was very clean: it was shining. On all the occasions that I met BC he was dressed in an old styled Pathani white kurta with a white lungi. The kurta had a collar and was full sleeved with cuffs.
BC, a short fair man with a slight hunch, was 87 years old, but looked much younger. He was a little hard of hearing. He had a small round face, was clean-shaven with a small Charlie Chaplin style moustache (this was a style that many people from Multan wore). He had a broad nose and large ears, which were pierced, but he wore no earrings. His face was full of wrinkles with four dominant lines on his forehead. He had very short white hair. He did not wear spectacles and was proud of the fact that even at this age he did not need them. I noticed that he had cataracts in both eyes. In certain ways physically he resembled Mahatma Gandhi. He was very energetic and mentally restless. He would talk about one thing and then very fast move over to another theme; he would not dwell for very long on a single theme except his spiritual experiences and visions, which were his current preoccupation. Most of the time he would begin talking about his visions, and getting him to talk about partition, and the associated major losses, was difficult. I had to be direct and specific. He also repeated every incident twice, and some things several times – not continuously, but over the sessions. For certain incidents which he was repeating for the fourth time I tried to tell him subtly and very unobtrusively that he had mentioned it before – but he would still narrate the entire incident, and perhaps repeat it again yet once more.

BC’s memory was very sharp. He could recall names and dates easily especially those related to partition. The only issue that I kept going back to concerned his son. He kept giving diffused and ambiguous answers to my questions regarding his son. He was evasive about it even when I asked him directly – ‘Did you try to get your son back?’

BC was a middle class businessman who had a retail shop of bags in the main market of Jaipur. He handed over the shop to his son 10 years ago and concentrated his time now on social service and the temple that was being constructed by the community under his supervision. The current value of his house now was around 40-45 lakhs. BC was educated up to the VII Standard. He could read and write in English, Urdu and Hindi. English was his favorite language.

His wife Chandani (not her real name) was thin, short with a very bent back, almost parallel to the ground. She had a wrinkled face, was fair with startlingly young eyes that were a lighter shade of brown. She was very agile and active and still did a lot of housework, supervised the maid, etc. For the first session she sat on the floor on a mat near the entrance and just listened. After the first session she sat on the divan
and joined in the interview in the subsequent sessions. Her feet were severely cracked and black as she was always barefoot. She had a very loud voice. She had a nasty scar, about 4 inches long, on her head and no hair had grown there. Her left arm was deformed: near her elbow there was a very deep scar with a mound of flesh. She showed me both the scars that she got during the violence. She also had marks near her wrist and on the lower arms. She was around 80-82 years but looked much older. She was married when she was around 12-13 years of age. All her memories are associated with her marital house as she was married so early. She could not recall her exact date of birth.

BC’s birth order was second; he had an older brother and three younger brothers and two younger sisters. He had four daughters and two sons. One daughter and one son were born in Pakistan and three daughters and his younger son were born in Jaipur after partition. He was around 32 years old at the time of partition.

BC narrated the 26th August incident: My son was born in Pakistan. In our house 95% servants were Musalman and only the cook was a Hindu. My father was a Jagirdar and also the head of our community and when Pakistan was made, the local Muslim elders called my father for a meeting. My father Morishah (not his real name) was 85 years old. The meeting lasted for 2 1/2 hours. The other members of the community thought he had been killed inside. The Muslims told my father that you can leave your community and go with your family and extended family to India; we will personally leave you till the Ganganagar border and guarantee your safety. My father was representing the Pranami samaj and as the head too he had to stand by the Samaj, it was his duty. He told the Musalmans that I have given my word to my people that I will go with all of them to safety, not alone. No solution came out of the meeting because my father said that he would not desert his community (‘chalunga to sabko sath leker chalunga’). Therein then the Musalmans put my father’s and our family’s name on the top of the list of the people to be killed when the time would come. My father was an eminent person who wielded considerable clout amongst the Pranami and the Muslim community too. In any Muslim officer’s party and they would ask my father to make all the arrangements right from preparing the food to organization of the party etc. For all this we would charge 5% -10% of the cost and do it for them.

On 26th August the Musalmans came, they had a list with them. They came to our mohalla and asked for my father. They forced open the
door and came inside. They were 3 to 4 people, one was from the military, 2 were local butchers and there was one more that I cannot place now. They told us to stand in a line. Then one of them said ‘let us first take the gold, if they die then from where will we get the gold’. My wife was wearing gold bangles. They tried to remove her bangles but the bangles were too tight and so they tried to chop off her hands, the marks of which she still has. I requested them not to cut her hands and told them that I will try removing them but don’t hurt her. Somehow I was lucky to get the bangles off her hands; the marks on her wrist are of the bangles being forcefully removed. After that they started killing. They first killed my father; they hit him with the sword, slit his throat. My younger brother ran inside, they dragged him out and hit him with the sword. He too fell. They killed the Hindu servant too. When they came to me I put my hand up to defend my head and something happened and I fainted, or I feigned such an action I do not know but I fell down straight (‘kudrat ki taraf se aise kripa hui aur maine aisa action kara ki main sidha gir gaya’). Presuming me to be dead they did nothing more to me, I just sustained an injury on the little finger of my hand. I do not know why but they did not do anything to my mother and spared her. They hit my wife on the head with their sword; she fell down and has a deep scar on the head now. My youngest brother was studying in Lahore and had been married just two months back; he was in the adjacent, connected house that was my sister’s. The Muslims killed my brother-in-law and they cut my brother in literally two pieces vertically with a saw. After they were through with their killing and looting they left in three hours or so. After they had gone my mother came to me and said ‘BC get up! Only we are left’. There was so much blood like a river of blood was flowing. They had also broken all the matkas urns in which we stored water so that we could not get water to drink. I kept putting bed sheets to soak the blood but there was so much blood splattered all over, on the walls, everywhere. We people ate good food, drank plenty of milk so there had to be blood in us, unlike the Muslims who could not even pick a sack of wheat or vegetables on their own. We were sturdy and strong. After an hour or so of the killing my mother said that everyone is dead, BC. My wife murmured, ‘I am alive (main jeeti hun)’. I saw her and felt that she was breathing but had doubts about her surviving very long (‘kucch to sans baki hai, pata nahin kab tak jiyegi’). My wife noticed that my brother too was breathing though very feebly. We gave him water. One of my younger brothers had run out into the neighborhood and he too was alive. After that, the next
My daughter was with my mother-in-law whose house was near our house. They were hiding on the terrace when the military fired. My daughter was on my mother-in-law’s lap. My mother-in-law’s head was blown off in the firing. The Pranamis who had taken refuge in the temple were also attacked and very badly butchered – chopped into two-two, three-three pieces. We could not even fight. Ninety percent of the population was Muslim, and the military that helped them was Muslim. We stood no chance. My brother was so handsome, married for only a month and a half; they killed him so brutally just like that. We could not even cremate his dead body. His name was Jugal. He was in Abhor at the time of partition and his wife told him not to go to Bahawalpur but he insisted that he had to go get his parents and his family from Bahawalpur and promised her he would be back soon, and told her not to worry. Jugal was very handsome, a good singer and whenever he came from Lahore he would organize mushaiara and mehfil with singing and shayari etc.

He was studying in Lahore. BC wept very bitterly for his brother. Then he went inside and got a framed photograph of his brother to show me. He composed himself and continued, I had a two-month-old son. His wife corrected him and said that the boy was seven-nine months. BC continued, my wife’s condition after the attack was terrible; she could not lift the child and could not look after him. We had a Musalman servant who had been brought up by us, he did not have any children. This servant said that he would take care of the child and bring him up, look after the child. You see, we never thought that we would never be able to go back. (He emphasized that point repeatedly that he did not know that they would never be able to go back.) Anyway I presumed that after 10-15 days things would cool down and be back to normal and we would return like earlier times so I left my son with my servant. You see one always returns to one’s village, one’s home. On coming to this side we realized that we could not go back. My son was left in Pakistan. From Bahawalpur we came to Karanpur mandi and sent word to our servants to come and also get the child. The servants came and gave us Rs 250 and our cycle. They told us that our son’s condition was not good he was unwell. After that they did not come any more.
Recently one of the neighbor’s friends had come from Pakistan; she was doing research on the same topic. She promised that she would go back to Pakistan (Karachi) and try locating my son. She advertised in the newspaper but could not locate him. She sent me a copy of the advertisement too. Recently I have heard from some of the quilt weavers who come every winter to Jaipur that the child has grown and has grandchildren too and is very rich.

BC he asked me to switch off the recorder. He wanted to talk to me about some personal matters. He went on to tell me about a special power (shakti) that he felt had descended on him. He continued, *I have been reading Kalyan, a religious publication about the Hindu beliefs, since 1954. From this book I learnt to meditate. At first I could sit for short periods in the lotus position of yoga (he showed me the posture) but now I can sit for four or five hours at a stretch in this position and meditate. In 1960 I read in the Kalyan and have eaten only one meal a day, and do not take tea or coffee or anything between, before and after that. I started the Jaap or repetition of the lord’s name, something that was different from my religious ways. The mantra that I started repeating was from our religious text but it is a very long prayer so I asked one of the religious heads of our community for a solution and they suggested that I concentrate on the names of our gods Radhaji and Shyamaji. This chanting of the lord’s name was also something that I learnt from the Kalyan, and then followed. Forty years ago one day while meditating I saw a light (jyoti) and had a vision of the Lord. From 1997 onwards there is a wheel of light like Vishnu’s sudershan chakra hovering over me all the time. When I first saw the chakra I was scared, then I had a vision of my mother and deduced that it was an indication of something special, but what that is I have not yet figured out. I visited many knowledgeable and learned persons from the Hindu community. One of the persons I met told me that I was special. There is so much power within me; it is not possible to have this siddhi in a single lifetime. It has to be related to my past karma too. BC then described the various other visions he had of Radhika Rani and Shyamaji or Raj-ji. He recalled that it was a winter day and he was sleeping with his head covered with a quilt and he saw Radhika. The one on whom he had been meditating, whose name he had been chanting came to him. Once he saw Radhika and her consort Rajji sitting on a swing. He also had had visions of various other gods like Krishna, and Prannath. He said, *But why do they come to me? What is going to happen to me? What are they trying to convey? These are the
questions to which I seek answers. At a later point during the interview I asked him if the Radhika and Raj-ji bore any semblance to the Hindu Radha and Krishna and he said that they were identical. He also explained that according to their religious beliefs, they do not worship god in any form, it is their text that is their god and they are not supposed to indulge in idol worship. He then described the sudershan chakra, saying that it followed him to protect him. He told me the story of Durvasa rishi, who erred and earned the wrath of Vishnu and the sudershpan chakra chased him and he was saved when he fell on the lord’s feet. The sudershan chakra is Vishnu’s weapon and it kills the wrongdoer and returns to Vishnu. BC said that now the chakra was with him always and like it protected Vishnu it was protecting him. He pointed out that it was his birthday when the sudershan chakra came to him. *It is absolutely round with a white centre, then it is black and then has all the colours of the sun’s rays (rainbow colours), it is very beautiful, resplendent and shining.* He pointed out to me where the chakra was positioned at that moment. It was in front of him, some 2 feet away at a height of 7-8 feet. He explained that only he could see it. Now he felt that it was normal for him to sit in meditation for 3-4 hours everyday in the morning and in the evenings too. According to the kalyan the evening Jaap is more powerful than the morning one. He then said that now that he had seen me, when he would sit to meditate he would be able to visualize or literally see me, and what I was doing. This ability or power he had by the lord’s grace. Then he described the other powers that he had. He stated that once he breathes into the water it develops healing properties. When a person drinks this water he is not only healed, but whenever BC desires or remembers that person, the person would automatically come to visit him. He then showed me the lines on his hands and a particular line he explained had been increasing ever since his *tap* or penance has increased. He felt that such peak experiences were a major achievement for him. What had happened in his life earlier was on a different sphere but this was altogether a different level of experience for him. This was the main focus of BC’s life now and in every session he would want to talk mainly about these experiences.

(BC resumed his life story, from 1947 onwards:)

*Besides my son who was left behind, I lost two other children after coming to this side. One daughter aged 51/2 years died of typhoid fever, and I’ve lost a child who was only 21/2 months old. Our daughter*
died on Dusherra. I was away in Ganganagar and did not know that she was so ill. It was fate that I finished my work earlier than anticipated and reached Jaipur. She was mumbling, “Everyone’s mother and father have come, I have to go to Panna to get the ‘mundan’ of bhaiyya done.” She saw me and said ‘Bauji you are late’, and died. His wife joined in and said that her daughter wanted to go to Panna. Then his wife cried quietly and kept wiping her tears.

BC again spoke about his brother whose death for him was the greatest loss of partition. He was very fond of his brother Jugal. Tall, lean like Bhagat Singh, he was 10 years younger than BC and BC treated him more like his child. Jugal was studying in Lahore College at the time of partition. He was a very good singer and also played the tabla well. His style of speaking was soft and melodious. When he would come from Lahore it was an enjoyable time. BC would pamper him with clothes and food. Jugal was fond of good things and enjoyed luxuries. Jugal was also an excellent rider of horses and a good polo player, just like their father. When Jugal would go to Lahore BC missed him and felt lonely without him. His wife was as beautiful as him and they looked good together. Jugal had come from Abhor a few days prior to 15th August to take all of them to Abhor. BC narrated that Jugal had boarded the train and Jugal’s wife was trying to convince him to stay with her and not go to Bahawalpur. Jugal told her he would be back, she was insisting that he get down from the train and the train started moving and they were separated. Jugal’s mother-in-law too was very fond of him. It was she who pressed for the marriage even though the times were so trying. Their marriage took place when they had shifted to Abhor a few months back.

On that fateful black day, said BC, My brother-in-law who lived next door called Jugal to his house saying, “Death is certain, but let us sing and enjoy ourselves till it comes” (maut to aiyee padi hai, kuch gaana-vaana ho jaye). Jugal was split in two by the Musalman. Recently, three years back when I had gone to Panna I met Jugal’s widow. She had remarried and had children. I did not recognize her but she recognized me and did ‘pranam’ and said “You have not recognized me?” How could I? It has been more than 50 years since I saw her. I gave her Rs 500.”

BC idealized his father. When he spoke of his father the admiration was obvious in his voice. His father he described as a knowledgeable,
with a saintly temperament. He said he resembled his father in looks and physical appearance. Though no comparisons between him and his father are possible, he felt his religious bent and thoughts are his father’s legacy. His father was a Jagirdar with 10 ‘murabba’ of land, which is approximately equal to 25 acres. This was his ancestral work. His father was well known in the state. He was a good ‘tabla’ player and a powerful orator. The Muslim officers handed over arrangements for their parties to his father. BC recalled various instances of his father’s large-hearted and pious nature. Once there was a famine. My father ordered his men to open the godown and let the people avail of the ‘anaaj’ or grains. We were always proud of our religiosity, not wealth. His father donated liberally to their temples. Every year he would go on a pilgrimage to Panna. He would always get something for the station-master of Bahawalpur. He refused to leave his community and sacrificed his life. He loved horses and also played polo. He would train horses on the plains of Sutlej that was some six miles from our house. Those times were terrific. We did not have to worry about our bread and butter. We just enjoyed life. Four years before partition my father told me to learn something in case bad times befell us. I decided to open a brick kiln’. My father advised me to follow three things-first to always pay the labourer his money before his sweat dries; second never to cast an evil eye on women; and third to pay the Pathans their money immediately (the Pathans from Kabul who would bring the wood and the Pathans from Kashmir who would cut the wood). I followed his father’s advice and in the first year itself broke even. In the second year I set up another ‘bhatti’ from the profits. The Pathans were very happy with us. The Pathans from Afghanistan would get dry fruits for us as a token of respect and the Pathans from Kashmir would get apples. My father would distribute it amongst the workers and servants too. Once or twice when they questioned him, he said they were his family too. The Pathans had warned my father about the possibility of violence and requested him to purchase guns from them. My father refused saying that he had young sons with nothing to do and hot blood and if they fire the police would get after them, so why invite trouble. Our house then was a kuchha-pucca house. After marriage each of us lived in a separate house, next to one another. Fearing violence, in 1947 all of us had gathered in my father’s house.

BC spoke fondly of his wife, Chandani. He described her as being an even-tempered and peaceful person. Prior to partition she took very good care of his parents. After partition she served and took care of his
mother till the time she lived for a year or so. She would cook and do everything that his mother liked. He felt his mother’s blessings were with her. He felt she inherited his mother’s quiet nature. He stated proudly, *She ventured out of the house only once – when they went to Panna. She did not go anywhere, did not attend any functions, not even the ones in the temple. If I insist she reasons that as my ‘ardhaangani’ half she is entitled to half of everything that is mine, even the fruits of my service and prayers, so she needn’t do anything except look after the house and children. Chandani is not egoistic and welcomes anyone who comes to the house and never once complains about the immensity of work or anything. After partition when we were in Rewari she would walk 2 km to the station to get sweet drinking water for us, as the water in the house was unclean. She did this even when she had an injured arm. My youngest brother stayed with us for many years because he had not learnt how to do any kind of work. We took good care of him so long as he was with us. Chandani would give everything to my brother and sisters: cook ‘rabri’ for them, give them milk, but she herself had only dal and roti. It is easy to say this but difficult to put into practice. Chandani is very pure and simple. She loves children. For many years after they came she did not have a son, she had two or three miscarriages and then three daughters and was very disturbed till they had a son. Both my parents appeared in Chandani’s dreams and told her not to worry, she would have a son. His wife added that BC took good care of her too.

BC described his mother as a simple religious woman. She was uneducated. She was short and of good health. She spoke very little.

BC felt close to his eldest son-in-law who was a lecturer in English in Sonipat. He described his eldest daughter as being very simple and innocent. A religious seer told him not to marry his daughter till they had a son. His son was born when he was 44 years of age. His eldest daughter took excellent care of his mother. He pointed out that because his eldest daughter had seen so much she was very kind and generous. She had no memories though of partition.

His other two daughters too he described as being simple. It was their upbringing and background that made his children good and simple. His brother predicted that his son would be troublesome, since he was a late-born (‘burhape ki aulad’). When his son turned 18 his brother called up BC and confessed that he was wrong, his son was without
any vices and simple. The only drawback was that his son wanted to join politics and become a leader. BC’s daughter-in-law was also a Pranami. His son had two daughters and a son. BC sent his son to the best school of Jaipur and his daughters went to the Arya Samaj School. He never gave his children any money to spend in their childhood. He taught them good values. He recalled the first time he saw and heard a radio. It was in a neighbor’s house. The childlike wonder was still there as he explained how fascinated he was when he heard the radio. This neighbor was the only one who also possessed a gun.

BC’s brother who was badly injured in the violence came to India and lived with his in-laws, and joined BC in business. His other brother who did not know to do any work at the time, later joined this business along with BC’s nephew, and they set up a factory for manufacturing bags. In 1960 all of them separated. His nephew kept the factory and his brother and he both got a retail shop each in the main market of Jaipur. His brother later became the ‘gaddipati’ or the head of their temple in Karnal. His brother would often call up BC and ask him to pray for him. His brother would tell BC that though he was the head priest BC was spiritually more advanced. BC then narrated how recently his prayers helped his son-in-law out of trouble, by removing certain obstacles.

In the 4th and 5th session Chandani seemed very disturbed. BC would repeat incidents from his life and he spoke about the servant with whom he left his son. The servant though a Musalman would eat in their house and had warned other members of his community from bothering him regarding his partaking food in their house since he considered BC’s home his home. The servant could not have any children because of some biological problems. Chandani joined in and said that she had been cheated. It was very difficult for her to forget her son. She was still breastfeeding him and the last time she saw him at the hospital when the servant brought him he saw her and wept, even though he could not speak – “the soul recognizes the soul (atma to atma ko pechchanti hai), she stated. Chandani was in the hospital for three days and on all three days the servant brought her son to visit her. On the third day BC sent Chandani, his mother and his daughter with Chandani’s father and brother to Abhor in India. He said he would come later with the infant. Chandani did not want to go without her son but because of her injury she knew she could not carry and hold her son so she had to trust BC – a point she repeated several times over
in the entire interview. BC always avoided speaking about his son and his memories were also not as clear as compared to the other incidents that he narrated. He then told his wife that he did not know that they would never be able to return, but Chandani just kept crying and mumbling. He then explained that he even packed the new utensils and left them in Bahawalpur and brought the old ones with him. Had he known he would not be able to go back wouldn’t he have brought the new utensils to India, rather than leave them in Pakistan? Even the keys of his house in Pakistan he threw away only six months after coming to India, when he was certain they could not return. He again expressed that not returning was something that never crossed his mind. He told the servants who had come to give him his money and his bicycle to tell the servant who was looking after their baby to come too but that man did not come. BC though did not ask the servant to bring his son along. He again justified that he did not send his son with his mother as she was old and he was unsure about his wife’s survival as she was fatally injured and moreover he did not know that they would never go back to their homes again. He then told me that his wife gets disturbed 5-7 times like this in a month and only he can handle her when she is in this state. Chandani through her tears stated that, Chhaati ka bacchha to bhula nahin jaat (you cannot forget your child who was still being breastfed). She seemed very disturbed and was still mourning the loss of her son. According to her, The Musalman asked me first if I was willing to go with them. I did not reply and they knew I would not go. They tried to remove the gold bangles from my hand but since they were tight they tried to chop off my hands because of which my hands are still deformed. But then BC was able to remove them. Then they hit me with the sword and I fell down. I was taken to the hospital the next day. The servant to whom we had entrusted the baby brought my baby to the hospital and the baby was crying a lot. I fed him and then they left. I was not told that the baby would not be coming with us. Then she wept and said that this was dhokha (betrayal), I could not lift my child but BC could and so could his mother who was unhurt. If I had known that BC would come without him I would never have left the hospital. BC told me that you move and we will follow. How can a father leave his child? I have been betrayed! You tell me if it is betrayal or not?” After coming to India Chandani had 3-4 miscarriages, 4 daughters and then a son. Till she had a son she was almost frantic and very disturbed though she performed all her duties. Even today she mourns for her first son. Chandani stopped going out after coming to India and confined
herself to the house. She had gone to Panna once after her son was born but that was the only time she ventured out of her house. She did not go to the temple either and joked that being BC’s other half she earned all the benefits of his prayers automatically.

After the violence and after he had sent his wife he asked the station master to book a place for them in the train. The station-master felt an obligation towards his father who had helped him earlier and he reserved the entire compartment for them as a gesture of his gratefulness. They were just 10 people in the bogey. At some point the train stopped and 5-6 men from the Military entered their bogey. BC thought it was the end for him but those people had come because there was space and not to kill them. The train had people packed like dogs. The train halted a few kilometers before the border. When they reached the station there was an announcement for them. They went to the control room and found that the station-master had called them on the wireless to confirm if they were safe. He told them never to forget whose children they were. By ensuring that they were safe, he was relieved of his obligation and duty to their father.

From Abhor they went to Surat, which has one of their main temples and stayed for a month and a half there. The Maharaj (their mode of addressing their religious head) served the people. There was a Parsi doctor who took great care of Chandani. As soon as she would arrive for the dressing and electro-therapy (cauterizing) to seal the wound he would leave the other patients and attend to her first. He would tell the other patients that she has suffered tremendously more than any of them. Chandani’s father told BC to go and look for work and leave Chandani with them but BC said he would leave Chandani’s side only after she can cook ‘rotis’ for herself i.e. till she is well enough to cook and feed herself. After a month they went to Delhi and then to Rewari. BC sold off some silverware to buy food and start a small business of selling shirts on the footpath. Luckily and by God’s grace he did not have to sell off his gold, he stated. Then he was told that there was a place like Bahawalpur, where there was smell of pure ghee (clarified butter) and where rivers of milk and buttermilk flowed, so they moved to that place – Jaipur. He said that as they were nearing Jaipur he could smell `asli’ ghee. Jaipur he felt was bigger and better than Rewari. The Marwaris helped them and treated them very well, so since 1947 they have been in Jaipur.
When they were allotted their house the area was a jungle. There were tribal castes ‘Meena’ living there in those jungles. The police tipped them off about a possible attack by some Meenas. BC excitedly narrated how at that time he kept a huge lathi (stick) with him and he was physically strong and muscular at that time. The entire Pranami community decided to counter the attack. Chandani too joined in and the thrill and adventure of the episode was evident. Chandani stated how she too was not scared and told her children not to worry. In the night when the Meenas attacked them the people beat them up badly and after that the Meenas left them alone out of fear. At this point BC used a few abuses, saying, *saala chutiya samjha hai, wahan bhi pitt kar aaye aur yahan bhi pittein* (those fucking fools think that we are going to be beaten there in Pakistan and here also). Even now if he is threatened he would take steps to protect himself, he asserted.

On one occasion when he was describing the August incident he and Chandani discussed who first discovered that his brother was alive. It was 4 a.m. when his brother stirred and then they realized he was not dead. Chandani then told me the Muslims asked her to go with them, but she was quiet and they knew she would not go with them. She spoke of a woman called Gulab Bai who had agreed to go with the Muslims and she returned after two days and nothing happened to her. BC questioned her again to reconfirm whether the Muslims had asked her to go with them. She ruminated that had she gone with them she would not incur any injury and then would not have to leave her son behind. BC contradicted saying that no one knows what the Muslims did and did not do. Chandani then stated that they did not even see the dead bodies of their near ones; they discovered who was dead when they reached the hospital the next day after the Military truck came to take away the dead bodies.

BC spoke excitedly about the Muslims. He felt that the Muslims could not be trusted. Prior to partition their relation with the Muslims was normal. He had a Muslim friend who was in the police. This friend had been warning them since a year that they should all leave and move to Abhor but no one took him seriously; all felt he was just too young to be taken seriously. And now after partition there is a difference, and it is too dangerous. As a community, they are not compassionate whereas a Hindu is compassionate and kind, an example of which he said was India returning the land it won in the Indo-Pak war – right up to Bahawalpur – back to them. Would Pakistan ever do such a thing, he
questioned? But BC felt that the Muslims were very strong about their religion, and their other good quality was that they did not take interest on the money they loaned to fellow Muslims. A Hindu BC described as being greedy. He further pointed out that the government too was biased and the Hindus had to implement family planning whereas the Muslims get away saying it is against their religion. He then abused the Muslims stating that they were unreliable and always backstabbed but a Hindu, a Gorkha, a Sikh was straightforward and honest. He narrated how the Muslims had sweet-talked them into coming back to Bahawalpur when they had moved to Karanpur (India) some time before the partition. They assured them of complete safety and protection and told them that they need not leave the land of their forefathers and ancestors and then had butchered them ruthlessly on that fatal day. Though the killers were not known the local Muslims could have come to their help and prevented the massacre but they did not. After the August incident the Muslims of their locality had come to inquire about their well-being but it was mere lip service. Their actual plan was to see that no one was alive but God had saved him. He emphasized that God’s grace had always been with him. This is important because he was one of the few adult males who had survived the attack. Then he stated that the Muslims had created havoc in the world and after the 9/11 attacks they were being cornered by the world, which they rightly deserve.

Some months after partition a troupe of a few Pranamis, Sindhis and Punjabis went to Pakistan to get their things. They asked him if he wanted to accompany that group but BC refused as he felt one cannot trust Muslims. What if he got trapped there? A Sindhi is considered shrewd, but a Punjabi is naïve, so the Sindhi would still be able to escape but a Punjabi may not make it. That is why he did not go to Pakistan. An incident that occurred 5-6 years back also required that he go to Pakistan, but he refused again. Near his house every winter there are women who come to weave quilts. One woman had a sister in Pakistan and this woman spoke of BC’s son and the servant. His son, she said, was a handsome man and very rich but was a Muslim. It created a stir in the community. BC got phone calls from people in Delhi who were willing to accompany him to Pakistan and help him get his son back. Even his wife wanted him to go, but he refused. He felt, what if he got trapped and could not come back? This weaver from Pakistan got scared by the number of inquiries, and changed her story so how could he rely on her and take such an important decision?
Further he felt that if God had willed it this way there had to be a reason and he was not going to contest that.

BC described himself as a person who has sinned not only in this life but also his previous life and was awaiting God’s grace and blessings. He was an ordinary person. He was very fond of ghee with sugar and his mother-in-law who lived 6 houses away in Bahawalpur would question him regarding his ability to digest so much ghee and sugar. But for the past 35 years he has not eaten for taste, but only to satisfy his hunger and survive. He then proudly stated that he had never taken any allopathic medicine and did not suffer from any diseases. Once or twice he did take Ayurvedic medicines, though even prior to 1947 he only took medicines from the Hakim if he was unwell. His physical fitness he attributed to God’s blessings. His eyesight had deteriorated during the past few months but he was unsure about using spectacles. BC went for a walk regularly, and even the RSS workers known for their agility would say, “make way for the frontier mail”; he did not walk, but rather sprinted. Everybody wanted to know the secret of his health. BC stated that he was a pure vegetarian and did not partake of even onion and garlic. He ate only one meal in day. One of their religious heads had come to Jaipur and BC had to take care of the Maharaja’s breakfast and morning walk. The head took medicines for blood pressure etc. BC humbly asked him how is it possible that being so enlightened he needed medicines to keep his body fit? He then told him how he never took any medicines. The Maharaja felt that BC had all the signs of some special power within him and asked him to stay in the temple and help him in his work but BC refused.

BC recalled that when he was around 11 or 12 years Gandhi, Nehru, Motilal Nehru and others were passing through Bahawalpur by train. The station was packed with people, but without caring for his life he ran between the legs of people to see Mahatma Gandhi. He attributed it to God’s grace that when he reached in front it was Mahatma Gandhi’s coach. He joined his hands and said “Pranam”. Mahatma Gandhi turned to Nehru and asked him to greet BC, saying, “Say pranam to this child, Nehru”. Then Gandhi patted him and said, “Shabash beta, mere jeete ji tune dharma ke jyoti jalayi hai, mai yahi chahta tha ki hamesha paramatma par vishvas karo.” (Well done my child I always wanted that someone should light the lamp of spirituality and you have done that; always have faith in God). Every year, when his father went to Panna he took him along. He was very happy and pleased with BC. The trip to Panna
would be 2-21/2 month long. His father would ask him to donate his old clothes to people on the footpath to teach him compassion and sympathy.

Prior to the news about his son from the weaver, BC stated that he had a vision of his son. He saw his son in a loin cloth, wearing a turban and his son’s wife too was with him in an ordinary salwar kameez. He also saw his grandchild. His son was a Musalman. He stated that this was not his imagination but a sacred power was helping him. He said that there were other such instances where he could intuitively know what was about to happen before it happened. He went on to explain that such suffering does not come to everybody. If God has given suffering there has to be a reason. In his case he felt that he was being prepared to be a shaman and cure people. BC felt that earlier when he used to think of those pre-partition times he felt unhappy and angry with God. He also blamed the leaders who did not warn them that there would be exchange of populations. Those were difficult times; we lost all our land, house and had to do all kinds of jobs. Now we have attained some things but nothing compared to what our status was in Pakistan. Though it was a Muslim state we were kings there with acres of land and wealth and we gave away freely. Whatever compensation we got was so little compared to what we left. Prayer and meditation helped him overcome the memories and the associated pain. For many years I would dream of the carnage, but only God’s grace has saved me, he concluded. I asked him if he ever tried to bring his son back. He said in a hushed tone that no one is perfect, nature is not perfect and no one is, and so neither was he. He lamented that his wife blamed him but it was her love for her child. Remembering that day he stated that when the servant brought the child for the last time the child was crying bitterly. The servant had dressed up the child with kohl etc. Chandani did not want to go but BC forced her to leave for India. How can she forget that child? She gave birth to him, he questioned. Then he emphasized that making such sacrifices was no play and only their religion helped them survive. When he lost his daughter he did not cry and was not perturbed, as it was God’s gift and God took it back, and one has to follow His will, he explained. Then both he and Chandani bemoaned the loss of pre-partition times. BC stated that he found solace only in God and immersing himself in God has been his wisest decision. His only wish was to construct a temple, which he finally constructed and donations too came easily. He also became a shamanic healer in the temple. Chandani however has been unable to stop her mourning and
has not come to terms as yet with her loss. Once when in a session she was crying he told her that she has a son and there is no need to cry to which she retorted sharply, asking how can one person substitute another? She also stated that if her older son would be with her she would be the proud mother of two sons and not just one.

**Narrative Two: Reshma**

This second story is a story of the guilt the person feels over a presumed betrayal that she thinks she has committed, whereas the truth could be quite contrary to her conviction. With this guilt Reshma (not her real name) has lived and everything in her life revolves around this perception, everything she does is restitution for that sin; it is as if she has no business to be alive and happy. She has the sharpest memory in her family and only she remembers the events of that fateful day so vividly. She spends that day every year in mourning since 1947; after all, she is the memorial. In this case the respondent was only 10 –12 years of age yet the events are vividly lucid, clear and she recalled them easily. I have attempted to present through her account her life story and how she has been able to resume a ‘normal’ life and not get disintegrated or have a psychological breakdown. In fact, she does not even harbor feelings of hate, bitterness, and revenge.

Reshma was hospitable and welcoming, even though I had landed up at her place without any prior appointment. Despite my very obvious interest in her life story, that even surprised her husband, and my repeated reassurances and even admiration about her excellent knowledge of the Hindu, Islamic texts and other religious scriptures, she kept deriding herself, was self-effacing and kept underplaying her talents and skills throughout the interview. She felt she was not knowledgeable and intelligent and was a mere housewife with little to contribute: *I do not know anything, you can interview my husband, he is very knowledgeable*, she said. She tried to convince me that she was really not worth anything and did not deserve my attention. A theme that reflected her mother’s reaction to the trauma of losing her husband and much-wanted only son in the partition violence through an initial rejection and negation of her daughter’s existence, and her refusal to live in a house, choosing to live in camps after partition, stating that ‘daughters do not make a home’.

The trauma that Reshma has been living with is not only loss of lives but also the guilt that she feels for having left her younger, only brother
in Pakistan, mistaking him for dead. The reality being elusive and impossible to know, her evaluation could be correct or incorrect, for all one knows, but this is the crime she feels she has committed and refuses to absolve herself of. This was something she confessed in the last session. The last session had a very heavy, sad and depressive feel to it. She had told no one about it until now. Soon after coming over to this side, she had fainting spells, dizziness, and even now when she thinks of those events she feels the same thing. As she narrated her story, her certainty over her brother being alive also increased. For so many years she had lived alone with her ghost, with gnawing doubts about her past decision and action, ambivalence towards her own survival; searching for signs of her brother’s existence in the newspapers, asking people, looking for something that would tell her whether he was alive or dead, hoping somehow to be reunited with him, reliving that episode umpteen times in her mind, looking for any information that would provide her with some respite from this ambiguity, anguish and guilt. Even when narrating it, she was actually replaying it aloud in her mind; I was in the periphery of her consciousness at that time. She tried to rationalize her decision of presuming him dead, but it was obvious that she did not believe in it. She repeatedly stated, as if repetition would validate it as true, and she would finally convince herself of her innocence, that she was only 11-12 years old at that time and was a child; she did not know how to distinguish between a dead person and an unconscious person. ‘She did not know’ was a theme recurring in many other areas of her life. Then she was afraid, afraid of being left with the dead, and the army had arrived immediately after and did not give them much time, there was chaos and a rush to take the living to hospital and leave the dead and wind up the ‘thing’. She felt she had definitely erred in her judgement. And she has unconsciously refrained from taking any decisions in her life, earlier it was her mother and Mausi who told her what to do and now it was her husband who decided for her. Even in matters of the temple that belonged to her mother, where her Mausi is buried, she has left it now to her husband to take decisions, yet after her mother’s death it is one of the areas of her interest and is the only place she visits socially. She said that her husband and family feel that she is always sad, unhappy. She stated that she failed to feel any happiness, excitement in life; even her children and grandchildren’s achievements did not affect her. She never had any dreams, plans or ambitions for them, they became what they wanted to, she did not play
any part in their choice of career, and she did not feel any enthusiasm either. She questioned herself, and me, How can I? This is not a story for me. I have lived it. Earlier I would get angry, question God, now I have become quiet. I cry alone only in front of him (God). You see justice can never be done to us. How can you get people back or replace people? Property you can compensate but what I have lost is so much. How can I forget these events? Can anyone ever forget these events? Communal conflict (majhabi bhed bhav) has ruined our lives and I am not the only one who has suffered due to it. I do not like going out too much. I go for my temple work and confine myself to my room. I do not like too much laughter and anything that is comical. My husband feels my thoughts are pessimistic and I do not know how to laugh. You tell me if this is the life you are condemned to lead, then what kind of happiness should I feel, what is there for me to look forward to, what can I hope for, what is left now? I have got into the habit of being unhappy.

When people recollect their personal past they establish a narrative order in their lives, whatever the actual course of their lives has been. Thus, whereas our lives may not be coherent, our stories about our lives usually are. Autobiographical remembering preserves a sense of our being a coherent person over time. Despite being so sure of our own past, we often err in recollecting it, and often it may be manifestly false. Here in Reshma’s case, she has no way of verifying whether her brother was alive at that time yet she has declared herself guilty she lives her life in tune with her verdict. She has not given herself the benefit of doubt, and with this survivor guilt she lives in this ‘alive’ past and ‘dead’ present…. Perhaps it is a necessary defense so that she maintains her coherence. Denial of her brother’s death is possibly a safer course for her. Sometimes we have to live with our ghosts to maintain our sanity, even if that means choosing a condemned life rather than acknowledge and accept that someone whom we want alive is dead, and we are alive and the order cannot be changed. To adapt to these psychological conflicts and pressures, the memories too have been subtly transformed over time and molded into their present appearance with the help of psychological, cognitive, emotional defenses and other means, and the gaps have been filled in the narrative. Now she confidently states that she had relived the episode many times in her mind, and over the years she has become more certain and convinced that her brother was not dead but only unconscious. She had made a terrible mistake, taken an erroneous decision.
Reshma is of medium built, and wheatish complexioned. She was always dressed in a sari and wore a thin gold chain and a tulsi beads thread. She had a soft and pleasant voice, which belied her slightly hardened and serious expressions. She had black hair, and she proudly told me that she did not use any dye for coloring her hair. She walked with the help of an orthopedic stick since she was suffering from arthritic pain since the past year or so.

I met Reshma on three occasions. Each session was for approximately 3-4 hours. The total interview took about 10-12 hours. Also I have had long conversations over the telephone with her. On one occasion Reshma’s eldest grandson Abhay too sat through the interview listening to his grandmother. Reshma explained that though everyone in the house knew about her loss she had never discussed her life in such detail with anyone. She insisted on confidentiality.

Reshma’s house was in a middle class resettlement colony. As one entered the house on the left side were four toilets and bathrooms reminding one of very old houses. Then was the verandah and entrance to the living room and house. It was a modest house. I interviewed her in the living cum drawing room. The room had an old sofa, a center table and a divan and settee. There was an old black and white TV on which there were three new pearl pet bottles.

Reshma did not know her exact date of birth but said she was approximately 64 years of age. Married at the age of 16, she has two sons and one daughter. All her children are married. She has 6 grandchildren. It has been 40-45 years since her marriage and she felt that she was satisfied. Her native language is Punjabi; the interview was in Hindi, which she spoke with a Punjabi accent. They were six sisters and one brother. She was fifth amongst them, had a sister and brother younger to her.

Insisting again on confidentiality, she said the major affect in her life has been the violence she experienced in 1947. She was 10-12 years old and even though I wanted her to gradually talk about partition violence and wished that she rather started with less painful memories, I could not stop her. She said that those years are so alive she remembers everything even now, like it is happening in front of her. She did not weep bitterly during the interview; her eyes would occasionally brim with tears which she would wipe matter of factly. In the last session she seemed very sad. But the affect on me was immense because when
I was transcribing the audiotapes I was unable to stop my tears; her suffering had seeped through my defenses.

She began, *It was 26th August 1947. At 12 noon, we had all taken refuge in our temple, all of us Pranami’s were there, men, women and children. We had all brought a few of our belongings and some of the elders would go and get food from their house. There were rumors that a train from Hindustan had come which had only dead people (every one was butchered) and every Hindu was anticipating trouble. Just two days ago, all of us had decided that this temple would be the safest place.*

*Of course, even the temple had been vandalized recently with Muslims hanging meat dripping with blood outside the doors and other such incidents. It is forbidden in our religion to possess weapons so all of us were unarmed. We did not even keep lathis (batons). The temple was in the midst of the mohalla (locality) where the Pranamis lived, which was near the Station. It was a predominately Hindu mohalla with two Musalmans living in rented premises in it. The old houses were built in such a way that most of the terraces were connected and one could go from one to another. My elder chachi, my mausi (mother’s sister) and my chachi’s sister, another friend and her younger chacha (father’s younger brother) had gone to their house some ½ km away to get food for the people. Here in the temple were people with families, and children. My father was on the other end of the mohalla; he had gone for some work to visit someone who had broken an arm, some 1-½ km away. I cannot forget the scene; a mob of Musalmans shouting broke the doors of the temple and charged in. They had guns, lathis, axes, barcchis (daggers), khurpis (small spades) and they attacked us. The Katha (religious narration) had just got over. I was near the door. I just crouched on the floor with my hands over my head, a sort of umbilical position and I remember being hit by a lathi and fainting, 2-3 dead bodies fell over me. They set fire to the temple and indiscriminately killed anyone, even women and small children. There was chaos and everyone tried to flee but there was no place. We could not even put up a fight because we had nothing and they just kept killing. After three hours it was all over and they were gone. The police had given them three hours to go and kill all the Hindus. The casualties and dead were numerous. My father was on the other end and as soon as he heard about the attack he ran on the terrace towards us. He was shot on the way. I could not even see his dead body. My younger chacha*
was killed by a barcchi, which cut through him. My Nani (maternal grandmother) tried to protect my youngest mausi who was blind and threw quilts and blankets over her. My Nani was hit by a lathi and she fell.

My mother was carrying my four-year-old brother in her arma. She was hit and my brother fell and was crushed under the dead bodies. Two of my sisters were married and they were not in the temple. Of the others who were inside the temple, one sister elder to me was hit on the head and the forehead by a barcchi and the other sister was also hit by a khurpi. Both my phoopa (father’s sister’s husband) were killed, my phoopa’s son was killed, my dada, (paternal grandfather), dadi (paternal grandmother), and Nana (maternal grandfather) were killed. My chacha’s daughter was killed; my bua’s (father’s sister) only son was killed. My other bua came to save the child and begged them to let him go as he was the only child, of course they killed the child, but they also cut my bua with a barcchi. She survived but suffered for six months before she died. They had cut her through the head to the neck, and probably she had a broken neck. We did manage to get her to India; she would scream in pain and was better dead. In one day our entire community was finished. All the male adults and children were killed. The only surviving male was my elder chacha who was away in Karachi for work. 12 members of my immediate family were killed.

Anyhow, after the massacre the Musalmans left us. We lay that entire day. Next day around 12 noon I regained consciousness. There was fire and smoke everywhere. I removed my brother from under the dead bodies. It was a gory scene—blood, dead bodies and it was difficult to know who was dead and who was alive. I pulled my brother out. He asked for water, I ran to fetch it for him, I was only 10-12 years old and risking my life I remember going through the fire. He drank a sip and then collapsed. Immediately after I gave my brother water the Pakistani military came and separated the dead from the injured, and told us that they would take us to the hospital. I left my brother believing him dead and went with the police. My mother, my Nani, my elder and younger sisters and my mausi were alive. Except for my mausi all of them were hurt, she was saved because my Nani kept throwing quilts and mattresses over her. My mausi is a sadhavi (a nun) and that protected her. The hurt and injured were taken to the hospital and the dead were left there and taken away separately. We did not even perform their last rites. My father’s dead body I did not even see. He was only
34-35 years. On 28th August I, and my mausi left with other uninjured members of the community by train for Karanpur. Then we took another train to Surat. We camped at Surat for about six months. Surat has one of our community’s biggest temples.

She did not cry much while narrating this, and continued talking brushing aside the few tears, though the sadness was apparent. She continued, *It was so shocking, I was not even thinking, I think I was too young to even think. But the way I remember the entire episode I had to be at least 10-12 years old. Isn’t it?* she questioned. *We were soaked in blood, dazed, taken to the military hospital, and kept in the female ward. We had no clothes except the ones we were wearing and no food. This is how my life started and has been, and there is nothing more to it.*

I asked Abhay her grandson if they had heard stories about the partition and Pakistan. He said that sometimes she would tell them some stories but not details. Reshma on her part agreed that she had never discussed the details with her family though everyone knew that she had seen and witnessed a lot of trauma. Sometimes when the children would pester her for stories she would tell about those times when things were better and good.

Born in a large family of seven sisters and one brother, Reshma’s birth order was fifth. She lost her youngest sister, who was her brother’s twin, at birth. These twins were the youngest of the seven siblings. Her father was in the government service working for the Nizam since their town Bahawalpur was under the Nizam’s rule. He was educated to what would now be XII standard. He was, as far as she could remember, fair and handsome, of average height. She could not remember very much since she was small when she lost him and she had no photograph to remember him by, yet she recalled that every dress and color looked good on him. He usually wore a white salwar and kurta with a cotton jacket over the kurta. He was very patient and always kept his cool. He had two younger brothers and four sisters. Being the eldest of the children, her father always fulfilled his duties.

She described her mother as short and of wheatish complexion. Her mother knew how to read, but was not educated. Reshma described her as a brave woman who did a lot of social service and had a big heart. She was calm and loving. She was a very good cook and always remembered what each son-in-law liked and made it for them. She
was looking after the temple, which was in the neighborhood, after coming to India. They had been allotted two houses, one in their Nana’s (maternal grandfather) name and one in their father’s name. Since Reshma’s Mama (mother’s brother) was also killed both the houses went to Reshma’s mother. One of the houses they converted to a temple, which was also looked after by Reshma’s mother. She was very hospitable. Even if ten people arrived she would make sure they had food and did not hesitate to cook for them. After their father’s death, for three years her mother was in mourning. She refused to stay in any house and put up in camps. Her mother said that since she lost her son, she did not need a house. Daughters do not make a family. Her mother felt she had no one and did not want to live. Reshma’s admiration and emotional dependence on her mother were obvious. Her mother was the fulcrum of her life and took care of her and her family too. This was possible because her mother stayed just two houses away from Reshma’s house. Her loss was difficult for Reshma to bear. Reshma felt closest to her mother and after her mother’s death she did not feel that kind of closeness with anyone in her life.

Reshma’s Nani died three years after the partition. That was the time when her Mausi admonished her mother and told her to look after her children since no one else would care for them. After that her mother took care of them, got them married, ran the temple, and looked after their families with dedication and an iron will. They would mourn the loss and absence of their brother but she was never weak. She told them that they were not orphans, they were her family and responsibility. She turned into both a mother and father, and looked after not only them, but her grandchildren too. Till the end she did not take help from anyone and was self-reliant. She was Reshma’s source of inspiration and she felt she owed her life to her mother. Reshma felt that with such a person at home who bore so much suffering and yet rose above it she did not have to look elsewhere for support and inspiration. Her mother single-handedly took care of all four of them who had survived. Her second sister was engaged but her fiancé was killed in 1947. Her mother got her sister married again and they settled in Gujarat. Her third sister Guddu (not her real name) was slightly challenged. Her mother got Guddu married in Delhi. Guddu’s in-laws used to beat her up. She had two sons and one daughter. One son was speech-impaired and the other was normal. Guddu would call them from Delhi for help. Her mother got Guddu’s children with her, looked after them and educated them up to post-graduation. Then her mother fixed Reshma’s wedding and
till her death took care of Reshma and her family. Reshma admitted that her mother was especially fond of her. When she was going to die Reshma was by her side. Her mausi had expired in January 1965 so every year they have a langar (collective meal) in the temple and organize a prayer meeting and for prasad (offering) they make malpua (a sweet). Her mother had organized a prayer meeting and cooked food for everyone. She came inside to get the prasad and she felt faint and giddy. She said she wanted to sleep for sometime. All her sisters went home but Reshma stayed with her mother. At around 12:30 a.m. she said a prayer and became unconscious. Reshma rang up her husband. Her son who is a doctor was there and got an ambulance but her mother had already expired due to brain hemorrhage. Ever since her mother’s death Reshma had difficulty sleeping, as a matter of fact for the past 20 years everyday she has had to take sleeping pills to sleep. During the day, the household work and the temple work kept her busy, but the nights were difficult for her to pass without the sleeping pills. Her mother’s death had rendered Reshma’s life meaningless and had precipitated her sense of being utterly alone and helpless.

Another person who has had tremendous influence on Reshma was her mausi. Blinded in childhood due to small pox, her mausi was a spiritually enlightened person. She used to sit in the room and meditate for hours and had decided not to marry. She was a ‘sidh-atma’ – a divine soul, revered by the entire community. Reshma had stayed with her mausi most of the time. Her mother had initially refused to shift into a home so Reshma’s mausi looked after her. Earlier Reshma too was very spiritual but once she married and entered matrimony, she felt her capacity for prayers has decreased.

She described her childhood prior to partition as wonderful. Going to school, doing her homework, playing with her sisters and friends was all she did. Reshma went to an Arya Samaji school. Her friend too went to the same school. Though most Pranami families used to restrict themselves to roaming in their mohalla because Bahawalpur City had a predominantly Muslim population, Reshma went out to the city with her family a lot. Her most memorable journey was the pilgrimage the entire extended family had taken to their temple in Panna in Madhya Pradesh on the fulfillment of their mannat (wish) for a boy in the family. She described how her only brother was born after many prayers. He brought happiness in the family with him and his going took away their happiness.
Her grandson said that she has brought up her children well and took good care of them. They have no complaints against her. She admitted though a little reluctantly that she was a good cook and even her grandchildren liked her cooking. On that occasion, we talked about her favorite foods, she seemed relaxed and had loosened a little, but it was for a short time, immediately she was melancholic once more. She said that she had the best memory amongst her family. None of her sisters could recall the events as she could. She was also good in stitching, making stuffed toys and needle work that she had learnt during her stay at the widow ashram with her mother in Amer (Jaipur). She did not give importance to gold and wealth but was very particular about behavior towards others. ‘If you cannot do good it is fine but do no harm’ was her principle. Another thing that she found intolerable was not offering a glass of water to anyone who came to her house be it the vegetable vendor or a guest. She said, One who cannot give water – what can he give then?. After the massacre on regaining consciousness they had wanted water and the attackers had broken all the matka which they stored water, so she later made it a point to offer at least water to whoever came to her house. She described herself as a religious person who had faith in her Guru and the holy text and God: I have taken the pledges in our text, which was due to my mausi’s influence. Our pledges are (1)To be grateful (2) To be humble (3) To be thankful for what you have (4) To do seva. Reshma attributed her ability to take in life’s ups and downs to her spiritual inclination and her religion.

She was married when she was 16 years and that also cut short her studies, even though she wanted to study further. Their respective parents fixed their marriage. Her husband is of the same community. Her husband’s best quality was his honesty and inability to lie. She described him as being very helpful but his main drawback was his uncontrollable temper, and when he was angry every one else in the family kept quiet. Their elder son became a chemist, the younger son a medical doctor. Reshma then fondly described how until some time ago her husband used to look younger than her because he is fair and because of his black hair. Now because of putting on weight and his limp he had started showing his age. He did not have any vices – drinking, smoking etc – and likes reading. With more than 40 years of marriage Reshma felt that initial differences of opinions recede and slowly one reaches an understanding and learns to compromise. She has never had to ask him for money. He always kept it under her pillow, without her asking. He has taken the responsibility of giving her
medicines daily and if they are over, he gets them. If he gave her medicines, she had them and if he forgot, she did not ask for them. She did not like demanding anything from anyone. Her elder son she felt took more care of her. The younger did not say anything yet she just felt that way. Her daughter was a graduate in Arts; she described her as a calm and patient person.

Until a year ago Reshma was managing the house, including the cooking, but now she could not do it anymore because of arthritis. She did tell her children that they could live separately if they wanted to but they refused, so they stay together. She said, With daughters-in-law you have to compromise because they do not share your background so they are different. Every Sunday after her marriage her husband, her children and she would go to buy the household things, then they would see a movie and come back. This she stopped after her son got married.

On our third meeting she repeated the temple episode. Then she added, in a more somber and sad tone that her main trauma was seeing her brother. She did not see her father dying but she gave her brother water with her own hands. Immediately the police/military arrived and they were taking the injured to the hospital. She said what troubles her even today is the nagging doubt that what if her brother had been alive and she presumed him dead. The police were telling them to be quick and she could not stay alone with the dead bodies, even if she wanted to wait for her brother to regain consciousness if he was alive. What if she had made a mistake, and he had just been unconscious, not dead? Reshma felt that she had erred at that time and her brother had been alive. This was her trauma. For six months after she came here she was in a shock. If there had been news that the child was found I would have found peace, she said. I had fever and was very sick. I kept replaying the scene over and over in my mind, how I picked him up, how I ran through the fire and got him water, how he drank and I became convinced that he was alive. The police coming, I was so young, how could I know how does one die? She ruminated, Then I was afraid too, afraid of being left with the dead bodies alone, afraid of being left alone and what if my brother had died, what would I do alone because one did not know when help would come and being alone was terrifying too, so I went with the injured and left my brother. Even today I keep wishing that I get some information that he is alive in Pakistan. For many initial years, I looked in the newspaper for information about him. Even today I cannot forget that day, that scene and the longing for my brother is as strong as ever.
This incident only I know and remember. I have not told it to anyone before you. Earlier (soon after partition) I used to dream of the incident and for the initial 6-7 months after coming from Pakistan my mind was restless and uneasy. The first thing that would come to my mind is my brother’s face; this is my deepest pain and hurt. I did not think of my father because I did not see him die but I left my brother. This pain is unbearable. One grows up believing that parents will leave you but your brother is there and here I have no one. Her trauma, she explained, was less than her mother’s who she felt suffered the most. Reshma emphasized that when they left Pakistan they did not even expect to survive, they thought that eventually they too will be killed, but they survived and that was god’s grace.

From Surat, after about a month her mausi, her nani, and her sisters joined her. Then they all decided to come to Jaipur. Her mother however being in a state of shock decided to go to Delhi, to a camp. Then her mother came to the widow camp in Amer (Jaipur). It was a completely protected area where no men were allowed. She and her sisters stayed with their mother. Here they had to cook their own food and if they wanted to eat in the camp’s mess they had to contribute a small amount. They were taught stitching, making stuffed toys and other such skills like mirror work and embroidery. One day she fell very ill, had very high temperature and in the middle of the night the doctor was called. She was given an injection. After that her chachaji (uncle) came and took them to his house. Of course staying in the camp was horrible but nothing could be worse for her than what she witnessed, everything paled in front of that afternoon of 26 August.

Reshma and her family did not have to work too hard for a source of income. They were allotted two houses, and her mausi, and nani and elder sister got some money from the government. She said that this was not as money given to refugees, but a pension or something like that. A month prior to partition, hearing rumours, Reshma’s family had come to Mukhsar (Punjab) to their Bua’s place and left three trunks of clothes, and their jewellery. But the Muslims called them back to Bahawalpur, promising that no harm would befall them, so they went back with most of their belongings. The three trunks took care of their major expenses later, such as weddings.

I asked her about how she felt about Muslims. She said that she did not feel anything negative towards them. She felt that if a Hindu lost, so did a Muslim. All are alike. It was only that one incident in 1947 that
was violent, but she added that they never thought that they would have to leave home that way. She felt that every community suffered, the Hindus in 1947, the Sikhs in 1984 and the Muslims in 1947, so how could one blame anyone? Recently there were riots; their vegetable seller, a Muslim, was in their colony, a Hindu colony. She saw fear on his face too because he was alone. She reassured him, gave him tea and allowed him to go only when things cooled. She said, *Not communities but people are good or bad, irrespective of religion.*

I asked her if she felt that the gods had failed to protect her. She asserted that she is a very religious person, when she got angry and negative thoughts about god and humanity crept in, she got rid of them by praying. She had been initiated into the religion by her mausi very early, so whenever she felt disturbed she would pray. Moreover she reasoned that it must be for their own good, it was past life karma, some have to give, and some have to take. Whenever she has had a problem she felt God always provided solutions and help. Even regarding her inability to walk, she reasoned it was God’s wish that she concentrate or her reading and cut down on her socializing. God troubles only his followers. It was this faith that sustained Reshma through all these years and gave her some peace of mind.

Every year in August, the day of the massacre and in January, the day her mother and mausi expired, she feels depressed and low. On 26th August, she does not eat and does not even come out of her room and everyone in her family understands her need to mourn. *Those who have not experienced and suffered, they will never know.* After I had written her life story I asked Reshma if she would like to see it. She told me, *I have lived it; I do not need to read it. What is there for me to read which I have not experienced?*

This is the story of a person who has lived 54 years of life with her memories and negotiated through her grief, guilt and suffering to choose life over death. She did not let her trauma overwhelm and incapacitate her. For all this she did not have any professional help: she did it on her own. That is admirable. She spoke to me about those memories because I went to interview her about them. The only thing that my going did was to give her a space to voice her trauma, guilt and pain, part of which she had never spoken about to anyone else in her life. Sometimes just having somebody listen is therapeutic. Later, after the interview, she told me that she liked talking to me, and I should keep visiting her.
Both BC and his wife are still on the lookout for their son, and Reshma is still searching for her brother. So are many others in the community on the lookout for their brother, sister or relative, because after the violence, which lasted for four hours, they were left unattended. And the next day, that is twenty-four hours later, the army came with two trucks, one for the dead and the other for the injured. It was a rushed affair where they were ordered to move into one bus as the bus would depart soon and they had to leave their dead ones just like that. The majority of the people did not get to do the last rites of their dead relatives or even see their dear and near ones and confirm whether they were dead or unconscious. There was fear and the desperation to get away. But this left the people who remained alive with the feeling that they may have made a mistake or wrong judgment in presuming that their people were dead, when actually they may have only been unconscious. This feeling was predominant especially amongst the people who were children at that time. Just two days later the women and children of the community left for India not knowing that they would never be able to return to their ancestral home; not knowing the fate of those they have left behind; not knowing whether their dead relatives have had a funeral or not; not knowing if those unconscious have survived. And not knowing what fate awaits them. There were just too many unfinished tales...
Chapter 2

TheoreticaBasis

The individual past is not a relic or a fixed entity; it is a part and parcel of the living present, continuously affected by its concerns. The past exists only when we re-create it by training our thinking on it and the past as individual and collective history cannot be recovered – it has to be reconstructed. Occasionally these data can be crosschecked against the memories of other persons.

Any psychological experience always implies a connection; a relationship with another, life is a network of relations. The same is true in this interpersonal interaction with the people who have been affected by the genocides and uprooting. Studying their lives so many years after the event has been a difficult learning experience. To say the least, I have been very much affected, and have not been able to be a blank wall as I was taught to be while training in psychology. With this as a given I have attempted to understand their suffering, trauma and somewhere have again witnessed vicariously, after 55 odd years, the partition, through their memories and recall of their experience of those times. What has specifically stood out has been the fact that the memories of partition have not yet become a ‘past’ that can be safely buried and forgotten because now it does not threaten to engulf, rather the people’s life story is built around partition, and the people are mired in their past. What had me intrigued was the fact that for an event that was so old, even after so many years, the memories of the event have been exceptionally clear, and some of the respondents could even recall very minute and mundane details. The other outstanding feature was their will to survive. After the unimaginable trauma, the physical and moral blows which exceeded human boundaries, after coming face to face with the evil that each has within, they had all the ingredients for a ‘good nervous breakdown’. But that did not happen. Instead of being damaged and immobilized so that they could no longer function coherently, they showed an extraordinary resilience and reassembled their lives to reassert and live a ‘visibly normal’ life, even if it meant living with ghosts and overwhelming pasts, survival guilt and post traumatic stress disorder. They hung on and did not land up in mental
hospitals. But during the interview each and every person wept, either bitterly, or tried to hide the odd tears that welled up, taking them by surprise.

The people that have been interviewed are all in their old age and this is the stage when the focus in any person’s life shifts from doing to thinking, from planning to reminiscing, from preoccupation with everyday events and long term plans of surviving and getting on with life to reviewing and rethinking about one’s past life, ruminating about the things done and not done. For people who have witnessed extraordinary pain and trauma, this stage often intensifies the mourning for past and present losses, and often they end up thinking more about those events than they did in their younger days.

Studying partition of British India after 56 years and interviewing people who have witnessed it, it was a sobering realization that for most people of that generation independence constituted the footnote. 1947 was etched in their memory as the year of the bloody and violent partition of the country along communal lines. The communal blood bath, forced migration and uprooting was their association with 1947. It is a past that is a living present for many people even today – a past that never really was a past and is still vividly recalled even after more than half a century. In fact the survivors have become a memorial for those who have died. And the story of partition that emerges is a story of losses, loss of lives of family, friends, relatives, loss of a home and homeland where they had lived for hundreds of years and the loss of lived culture, shared spaces and loss of religious tolerance and experimentation. It is a permanently unfinished tale, resurfacing in communal interactions so often – the 1984 riots, the 2002 Gujarat riots etc all have their roots in the 1946-1948 riots that shook the entire sub-continent. Even after existing as three independent states India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, partition still plays a crucial role in the relations between the three nations. Strangely however we hesitate to acknowledge this reality that is in our subconscious, make it a part of our consciousness and deal with it. We fear that the trauma may overwhelm us, may get out of control, and set up defenses. But the fact remains that without confronting that part of our selves, our psyche healing, cannot take place and we can never hope to be normal.

Further, deeper layers of the self-definitions of the communities – Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs – cannot be understood without confronting that forgotten violence and the psychological defenses set up against
remembering it. The very fact that it took some 50 odd years to go back and look at the events of the past, beyond the defenses of suppression, repression and denial, speaks volumes about the impact of partition on the individual and collective selves of the nations. According to psychologist Ashis Nandy, ‘This journey of exploration through madness might turn out to be a step towards an alternative, enriched form of sanity. Even chronicling the sufferings of the survivor to ensure that cold statistics do not hide the reality of the suffering can be therapeutic. It opens up the culture of politics to unconditional empathy and the courage to admit that suffering must have priority over the celebration of successes of entities such as nation-states and nationalism in South Asia.’

The need to delve into a perceived remote past and the need to undertake this study of violence was important for me because I feel that people erroneously assume that once the riot ends and the compensation are given the trauma is over and the story is finished, but that is far from the truth. Traumatic events are indelibly imprinted; they reside in the minds and bodies of the witnesses and are passed on to their children and grandchildren in the form of reminiscences, memories and testimonies. It is one’s moral duty to ensure that the suffering of the victims is not lost and forgotten. Without mending wounds, our bodies and psyches bear the untold lessons and scars of history. To start a new life the unfinished toxic trails have to be redeemed. Trauma is defined by the experience of the survivor. Two people could undergo the same noxious event and one person might be traumatized while the other person remained relatively unscathed. It is not possible to make blanket generalizations such that “X is traumatic for all who go through it” or “event Y was not traumatic”. Traumatic events express their affect in various forms and invariably in all aspects of the person’s life, including his relationships with others, with society, and sometimes even end up making persons who have witnessed severe trauma and violence themselves more violent, and even making their children and grandchildren immune and tolerant of higher levels of violence. Often in the younger generations all that remains is the rage, despair and hatred for the other community without any obvious ground, and feelings that are twisted, tangled and out of reach from the source. There can be no peace until the entanglement has been unwound to the source; when events remain unresolved they haunt future generations like a ghost. And it is time we confronted the ghosts of 1947 to regain our sanity.
Traumatic events affect children in a much more profound way than they do adults. The roots of good and evil lie in the earliest days of life. Studies on trauma reveal that the trauma and the cruelty and violence suffered during childhood remains stored in the form of unconscious memories. Most people who have witnessed the partition were children in 1947 and their memories and recollection of partition are actually a child’s reconstruction, recalled and verbalized as an adult and after some 53-54 years of the event. If children are not to break down completely under the pain and fear, they must repress the knowledge of the trauma suffered initially. But the unconscious memories of the child who has been traumatized often drive him as an adult to reproduce those repressed scenes over and over again in the attempt to liberate himself from the fears. Former victims create situations in which they can assume the active role. In this way the emotion of fear can be avoided momentarily, but not in the long term, because the repressed emotions of the past don’t change as long as they remain unnoticed and un-expressed. They can only be transformed into hatred directed towards oneself, scapegoats such as one’s enemies, other communities and sometimes even one’s children. This is why I feel that studying the affects of partition violence is very necessary for not only the healing of individuals but also for the whole society and particularly the two communities, Hindus and Muslims. To move forward one first needs to render partition as a past and this is possible only when it is given the space to be acknowledged and expressed. Denial and silence make the trauma more unbearable. The core issue in dealing with trauma is talking about it and also letting others talk about it. And by the act of listening and bearing witness to their testimony, their trauma and their lives, and documenting these, one validates and accepts their suffering as real, perhaps as a necessary step towards healing and resolution. Many of the respondents interviewed have reinforced this and have stated that talking about the event sometimes for the first time in so many years after its occurrence has helped them.

Psychologically partition caused havoc on the collective unconscious and on the individual level as well. The immensity of the trauma that the violence unleashed can probably never be captured and researched totally, but it is a fact that many of the respondents are still suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder with no respite from the pain, the memories. Collectively too partition is still a pertinent part of our present. Every aspect of a person’s life was altered. Studying partition and the long-term affects the violence of 1946-1948 has had on the life
of the person facilitates in understanding and knowing the long term affects of 1984 riots or the Gujarat riots. It helps us in finding resolutions and remedies and rectifying errors so that the past is not repeated and past mistakes can be avoided. This is the significance of this research.

The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations are too terrible to utter aloud – atrocities however refuse to be buried. Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are pre-requisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims. The answer to ‘why study Partition’ is best captured by Urvashi Butalia (1998) “while partition may be dangerous to remember, it is essential to do so – not only so that we can come to terms with it, but also because unlocking memory and remembering is an essential part of beginning the process of resolving, perhaps even of forgetting.”

Studying an event so many years after its occurrence is difficult but it also provides one with the rare opportunity to understand and see how the trauma has played out in the entire life of the person and in his relations with the world. The attempt is to study the long-term effects of partition violence and uprooting on the self-definition, identity and personality of the individuals and consequently the community from a psycho-socio-cultural perspective. I hope to capture the entire gamut of the person’s life. A study of the individuals would divulge not only the effect the violence has had on their entire life but also, because of their own centering on their religion, the role religion has played in their life, their coping and dealing with the violence. The endeavor is not only to capture and reconstruct the story of the person, but through it, the story of the community.

Most people alive now who witnessed partition were children and their memories and recollection are actually a child’s reconstruction, recalled and verbalized as an adult. The child’s inner and outer world, his interactions and memories have been reconstructed. Psychological defenses involved in coping and dealing with trauma and how the trauma has affected and unfolded during the entire life cycle of the person is what becomes significant for future interventions.

The Pranami’s claim to fame lay in the fact that Gandhi’s mother belonged to this community. Gandhi imbibed the concepts of tolerance and non-violence from his mother. In his autobiography Gandhi mentions that as a child his mother would take him to a temple that had
a Koran on one side and a Purana on the other and the priest would read from both the texts. And in my interaction with them the influence of Pranami religion on Gandhi seemed to be evident. Even though it is a small community its religion has wider implications because it teaches tolerance, non-violence and may provide some answers to the perennial problems of religious intolerance and hatred that exist today. Studying how the individuals and the community as a whole has dealt with the violence using their religion as their source of strength may have lessons that go beyond the community and have applicability in larger society. Maintaining faith in their religion despite being penalized for belonging to that religion hints at a religion that is potent and deserves respect.

The urgency of this study comes from the fact that probably three-fourth of the generation that directly witnessed the partition is already dead, life expectancy in India being less than 65 years. Also along with individual survivors, after 1947 many such communities are also dying because of alterations, deliberately introduced so that they conform and fit into the modern stereotypical ideas of Hinduism and Islam. Most have already opted for a single religion rather than riding in two boats simultaneously. Soon direct testimonies of these individuals and communities may not even be available. These rare communities provide an insight into the era of cultural interaction between the two religions Hinduism and Islam, and contrary to modern notions signify and exemplify that the culture of those times was plural and syncretic rather than monolithic.

The emphasis of the study is also on the lived culture, shared spaces and religious interaction between the two communities Hindus and Muslims and the effect partition has had on these shared spaces and cultural exchanges between the people. Studying this aspect of the two cultures presents a different picture from the prevailing one of being two antagonistic, clashing religions, cultures and communities and perhaps these shared spaces are the wells from where tolerance emerges and will have broader implications.
Chapter 3
Psychodynamics

Erik Erikson says that it takes a well-established identity to tolerate radical changes, for the well-established identity has arranged itself around basic cultural values. But for most, identity depends on the support that the person receives from the collective sense of identity characterizing the social groups significant to him i.e. his class, nation, and culture. Culture and self constitute an adaptive fit. The creation of a communal identity is indispensable to individual identity. Where historical and technological developments, uprooting, etc. severely encroach upon deeply rooted or strongly emerging identities on a large scale, the person feels endangered individually and collectively, leading to a disruption in the hierarchy of developmental crisis and the built-in correctives to it in personality. A person loses those roots that must be planted firmly in meaningful life cycles. Their whole experience of identity and of the world is based upon expectations of harm and abuse. The traumatic event is over, but the person’s reaction to it is not. The intrusion of the past into the present is one of the main problems confronting the trauma survivor. Often referred to as re-experiencing, this is the key to many of the psychological symptoms and psychiatric disorders that result from traumatic experiences. This intrusion may present as distressing intrusive memories, flashbacks, nightmares, or overwhelming emotional states.

The group identity originates at two levels: social and psychological. Every group occupies a social niche; it exists within a network of inter-group relations. Another important factor is the way in which it is conceptualized by its members i.e. its acknowledged identity. All groups are targets for ascribed identities – images of themselves pinned upon them by others. Ascribed and acknowledged identities are not always compatible; self-conception may not match with social reflection. When this happens, there is ambiguity as to the identity of the group that threatens the efficient functioning of the group. Remaining out of phase is uncomfortable and the group works to restore equilibrium or alignment. Then any experience, thought, feeling or action that challenges the individual’s personal or social identity, or the group’s psychological and social identity, is a threat because in a way it
challenges the existence of the group. It may query the content of the personal or social identity and it may query the evaluation of the personal or social entity. The content dimension entails what image is built of the group or person and the traits attributed to it. There would be a mismatch between acknowledged and ascribed identities on various value dimensions and psychological characteristics of the group.

Cohen and Taylor (1972) claim that people seek to be consistent, they seek to act consistently, even when removed from their normal social setting they try to maintain their identity in accordance with the prescripts of their ‘historical self’ or ‘true self’. Anything that prevents such consistency across time, or anything that simply claims that it is not there, represents a real threat to identity. Gergen (1971) states that people seek to maintain their self-esteem, they seek to feel positive about themselves. Anything that challenges self-esteem is a threat. It can operate on three levels – attacking the individual, attacking the individual’s group membership and attacking the individual’s group.

The form that threats take can be material/physical or symbolic or both and may originate from the individual himself or the group itself, from others or from the material world. A challenge to the content and appraisal of identity will result in objective changes in social power. The feedback loop between power and identity is inevitable.

According to Erikson (1965) identity-formation seems to involve the acquisition of a consistent style of organization of experience, entailing a restructuring of childhood ‘identifications’ and incorporation of some of the roles offered by society. The person may engage in tentative identifications. There may be a state of ‘identity-confusion’ during which the person is unable to establish a clear basis of consistency. If the community’s characterization of the person can be brought into accord with the emerging self-definition the task of identity formation is complete; if not, the person may face psychological difficulties. In terms of groups then, if the ascribed characterization of the group by others is very divergent from the self-definition of the group by its members, then the group faces psychological difficulties and identity confusion.

Chronic early trauma – starting when the individual’s personality is forming – shapes a child’s (and later adult’s) perceptions and beliefs about everything. Severe trauma can have a major impact on the course of life. Childhood trauma can cause the disruption of basic
developmental tasks. The developmental tasks being learned at the time the trauma happens can help determine what the impact will be. For example, survivors of childhood trauma can have mild to severe deficits in abilities such as:

- self-soothing
- seeing the world as a safe place
- trusting others
- organized thinking for decision-making
- avoiding exploitation

For people to lead fulfilling, productive lives, they must first experience the fullness of themselves. They need to know who they are, how they function, and how they relate to others. People also need to believe in themselves. Our emotional and intellectual lives are so complex that we would be devastated if we couldn’t discuss our experiences with one another. When we share our experiences and feelings at a level beyond superficiality, we realize that we experience all of the emotions, but each of us experiences them in our own unique way. By sharing in a safe environment, we see basic commonalities and individual differences among human beings. This understanding contributes to the development of self-respect, and upon this foundation, we then grow to understand and respect others. Through this process we develop the concern for humanity that is vital to our becoming responsible members of the human family.

The process of verbal interaction is a key avenue to maintaining and enhancing mental health and well-being. Words are the only tool we have for systematically turning our attention and awareness to the feelings within us, and for describing and reflecting upon our thoughts and behaviors. When we inwardly sense an idea we cannot articulate, we struggle to find meaning for ourselves. The effective use of words constitutes the first step towards developing the ability to grasp previously unspoken feelings, and understand the connection between feelings and behavior. Feelings, after all, lead people to marry, seek revenge, start wars, create great works of art, and commit their lives to the service of others. They are vital and compelling.

For people to manage their feelings, they must identify them. To comprehend the feelings, they must practice describing them in words. When a particular feeling is verbally expressed several times, the mind begins to automatically recall ideas and concepts it associates
with the feeling and starts providing ways to deal with it (eg “I’m feeling angry, and I need to get away from this situation to calm down.”) The ability to put words to feelings, to understand those words, to sort through an internal repertoire of responses and to choose appropriate, responsible behavior in reaction to a feeling indicates a high level of emotional maturity which is the only way to avoid violence and which every person needs to learn.

Many of us do not realize that merely listening to young people talk can be immensely facilitating to their personal development. We do not need to diagnose, probe, or problem solve to help people focus attention on their own needs and arrive at their own conclusions. Having people listen to them, gives young people confidence in their ability to positively affect their own lives. Listening is certainly the helping method with the greatest long-term payoff.

When people are dealing with problems, or when their emotional state clearly indicates that something is bothering them, active listening is irreplaceable as a means of assistance. However, we (as helpers) must be willing to set aside our own needs momentarily. Clearing our minds temporarily and neutralizing our biases allows us to concentrate fully on what is being said. In contrast, if we feel compelled to show we have the answer, or need to let the speaker know s/he did the wrong thing and is somehow deficient or inept, we will not be listening. Active listening puts us in the other person’s shoes while s/he does the walking. It communicates two messages: understanding and acceptance. Many of us do not realize that merely listening to people talk can be immensely facilitating to their personal development.

We think of childhood as a time for play and having fun. However, children also have struggles, particularly those who have survived disasters. The trauma resulting from a disaster can cripple a child for life. Dr. Magne Raundalen, a child psychologist who specializes in war-related trauma, describes psychological trauma as “...a sudden, unexpected event that overwhelms the person and renders him/her helpless. It is an attack on the senses. When you are in danger, your senses widen, they receive more impressions of what you see, hear, smell or touch, and you are helpless to block them out. It is like looking at the sun with completely dilated pupils – the impressions are burnt into the mind. If these impressions are not dealt with, the trauma can be so tormenting that up to 25 percent of people have lifelong trouble.”
He goes on to say that most adults, parents and teachers underestimate the sufferings of the child who has experienced major trauma. These adults may even actively discourage children from talking about their experiences because they may not know how to handle them. Children have been identified, however, as being among the most susceptible elements of the population to suffer stress and trauma in a disaster. In summarizing findings of different disasters, it shows that in three quarters of the children, symptoms were still evident two years after the traumatizing event. Time alone will not heal the trauma. The Buffalo Creek children who suffered trauma after devastating floods, showed no improvement with the passage of time. The children in the Alaskan village who experienced the tidal wave in the 1964 earthquake have suffered greatly from that trauma and have passed along that suffering to the next generation.

While few studies describe follow-up or treatment after a traumatic event, the work that does exist discusses the importance of talking about trauma. Also, literature describing how to cope with anticipated disasters frequently mentions the importance of people talking about their feelings. The need in healing and reconciliation is to develop ways to help witnesses, victims and perpetrators talk about their experiences and feelings. Few people are able to talk directly about their experiences or their feelings and we can possibly never underestimate the value of using words to describe feelings.

It’s true that frequently people do not even know the words to describe their emotions. Children specially do not talk about their feelings, not because they don’t have them, but because they don’t have the vocabulary necessary to distinguish feelings, recognize them and/or accept them. Feelings and emotions are neither good nor bad; they just are and everyone has them. Using words to describe emotions takes the power out of some feelings (i.e. anger) and enhances others (i.e. joy). Feelings are a source of information about a person’s interpretation of his/her inside and outside world. It is particularly difficult for young children to find the right words to describe feelings, but when they are able to do so, they can decide what behaviors to use. They can ask for a hug, dance around the room, choose time to be alone, or continue to remain angry. If the child or the adult, however, can’t recognize and name the feeling his/her options for action are limited. One of the most fundamental needs in a child’s development is the ability to connect emotionally with the adults around him/her. It is important for adults
to accept a child’s feelings without judgment, impatience, ridicule or teasing. Because young children think concretely, teasing or ridiculing feelings will be believed for what is said, not what the adult means. All this is especially relevant to the present study because some of the people interviewed were children when they witnessed the event and their memories are actually a child’s memories being verbalized as an adult.

I have attempted to exteriorize the lives of those people who have never got a chance to express and verbalize their lives and times and how they have had to cope with trying circumstances and trauma. Their lives have found no mention in the grand narrative of histories of nations; they are the mute, silenced parts that we would rather wish away. This study is an attempt to exorcize those ghosts by letting them out; to heal the gangrenous wound by letting the pus out. Verbalizing or talking about pain is the remedy. Talking is a big step towards healing. Giving people a voice; helping people find their voice and articulate their experience especially since they were children when it occurred is the most important step towards healing and reconciliation. It is therapeutic because only then one can leave the past behind when it is out of oneself. The whole science of psychotherapy is based on the premise of the power of voice in healing – it is the talking cure.

With the help of detailed life histories I have attempted to bring out the manner in which the victims have reconstructed their life stories, centering on the memories of partition, and the way their life-styles dovetail with their constructed pasts, and how they negotiate through their feelings of guilt and pain.

An autobiographical narrative and reconstruction is our internalized and evolving life story – a way of telling the self to the self and others, through a story or set of stories complete with settings, scenes, plots, characters, and themes. A narrative about oneself is a necessary construction in order to give our lives a sense of unity, coherence, and purpose. These autobiographical reconstructions and narratives concern actions in the past, express cultural ideals, and help to guide and organize actions in the present and future. They involve current appraisals of oneself and one’s actions and change and grow in detail and nuance but remain consistent in theme. This consistency conveys the essence of one’s identity.
To understand the person would require that one recognize the other as a specialist or expert on some aspect of human experience. The next step is representing the other’s evaluations of and involvements with the world. The third step is trying to make sense of context-specific experiences of the person. Last is the process of representing the other with the process of portraying one’s own self as part of the process of representing the other.

The shape of the oral narrative is not linear. It does not go from a beginning, to middle, to an end. It often digresses off into something the story teller appears to have thought of, then it comes back to the main thrust of the narrative, sometimes tells you about another related story inside it. It is always moving back and forth, between then and now, here and there, with some past memories very sharp and accurate and the recent ones diffused and also sometimes the other way round. The organization of the narrative, as in this study, into a beginning, middle, and an end reflects my understanding of the person’s life vicariously and also reflects my need to rewrite the story in terms of my encounter with the person. But even though the organization of the narratives is mine, it is their stories that are being told.
Chapter 4

Revisiting Religious Histories

…that great and true amphibian whose nature is disposed to live, not only like any other creatures in elements, but in divided and distinguished worlds.

– Sir Thomas Browne, Religio Medici

The question arises as to why the Pranamis were called back when they had already left and moved to India some months before. What need was there to see that they were killed and their place of worship desecrated? The challenge is to go back and take another look at the two religions/cultures, Islam and Hinduism and the interactions, exchanges, intercourse and dialogue between them at the community level that existed then and reconstruct it through individual and collective memories of people who have witnessed that period.

Why did it happen? Why and how did ordinary people contribute to the mass violence? The answers are still in the process of research. The point that the ‘alien’ concepts of nation-state, nationality were superimposed or over-written on the diverse cultural histories of the people has been made in the works of Ashis Nandy, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Gyanendra Pandey, and Rajendera Prasad. But what is still the grey area is why should two different peoples have so much problem separating? If it was for property, then violence alone was sufficient. Why the surfeit of violence?

Standard history books tell us that religion has been the basis of the partition of undivided India. The conclusion that one often draws from the political studies, literature and official records is that Hinduism and Islam are two mutually antagonistic, monolithic, fixed, identities with irreconcilable differences and world views and so are the two communities. It seems that partition was almost inevitable and necessary since it was not possible for these two nations to exist in one state because of their obvious dissimilarities and often-conflicting histories. There is another side of the story too.
According to a survey done by the Anthropological Survey of India in 1994 more than 400 communities in India have more than one religion. Roughly 15 percent of Indian communities inhabit a terrain of double or multiple or intermediate religious identities. Similar data are available in other South Asian and South-East Asian countries too. This does not include the many cultural influences and overlapping practices within the broad umbrella of Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity and Sikhism. Somewhere something is amiss. These bridge communities that fall in-between the two religions Hinduism and Islam seem to defy and question the logic of internal uniformity, fixed boundaries and rigidity of different religions and cultures and suggest interaction and exchange. These communities force us to doubt the fundamental or radical incompatibilities among various religious communities of the region. Taking another look at the two religions/cultures, Islam and Hinduism and the interactions, exchanges, intercourse and dialogue between them at the community level that existed then and reconstructing it through individual and collective memories that people who have witnessed that period have, one realizes that such communities are a result of the interaction and dialogue between cultures, sects, and religions. They can be viewed as the connecting links or buffers between two religions and communities. The problem with plurality, hybridism, and synthesis is that in moments of transit when one has to define oneself along parameters of difference and identity, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, innovation becomes contestation and controversial, and when communal situation worsens, one is then relegated from a part of the diasporas to occupying a no man’s unwanted land and are seen as liminal communities. The common view about multireligious communities in both Hindus and Muslims is that they are weird. Both communities find their presence uncomfortable. They are considered Hindus by some and Muslims by some but invariably are considered neither good Hindus nor good Muslims not only by the people, but also by academicians and intellectuals. Somehow these communities are always under the pressure to fall in line and adhere to stereotypical versions of Hinduism or Islam. Often they are easy scapegoats and soft targets for aggression.

And such are the dynamics of scapegoating, that a community faced with its own imperfections and failings shifts the blame onto some of its members or other communities who are less powerful and these people are then identified with evil or wrongdoing and exiled or punished so that the remaining members can feel exonerated and the
communal mores can be justified and reinforced. In blaming the sick, the poor or anyone else who has met with misfortune or injustice, scapegoaters feel freer, stronger, and safer from the afflictions of life, relieved of the burden of their own fears, mistakes and misgivings. The scapegoated on the other hand, feel inferior, heavy and vulnerable, for they are burdened with the unanswered questions, the shame and shadow of the collective. While we all partake of both sides of this dynamic at various points and places in our lives, those primarily identified with the scapegoat role acknowledge and suffer the wounds we all share and come to manifest the symptoms: ruptures of psyche and body. The scapegoaters sometimes overdo their identification with collective responsibilities and compensate for the shame by feeling superior, as though ‘chosen’ to redeem others and carry the sense that their affliction is serving some greater purpose beyond themselves. Perhaps that is why to many the thought that their stories may be left untold, their sufferings forgotten and so wasted by people too busy, blinded or righteous to hear is horrifying.

Though most studies on partition have not looked at the effect partition has had on the history, identity and personality of these multireligious communities, but invariably, any study that seeks to understand partition violence will have to look at these odd, intermediate, challenging, multireligious communities and cultures that do not conform to the official, census-type religious identities because the violence of partition arose not of distance but out of proximity. These communities are the missing links in the chain of events because they provide the answers to why partition violence occurred; they are the living proofs that the proximity between the two communities had become uncomfortable. These communities are the reminders of our other self that we do not want to accept, that part of us that we want to do away with, namely our ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’ self. They stand as stark reminders of our not so pure lineage; after all as Psychologists say our enemies reside within us and are necessary parts of our self. If partition was so traumatic for the two communities, Muslims and Hindus, what would it be for the intermediate communities? Studying these multireligious communities provides useful insights and answers into the psychology of a genocide that involved communities close to rather than distant from each other.

To understand the relations between the communities, one needs to look at the relationship matrix between them devoid of any
preconceived assumptions and notions. The formation of religious identities in South Asia has been a long, intricate process of exchange and sharing of the psychological and social spaces and worlds of the different communities, religions, and cultures for hundreds of years. Even for the proponents of the two-nation theory like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, C.Rahmat Ali, Swami Shraddhananda and B.R. Ambedkar, this self-consciousness in the people of being two separate, conflicting, cultures began from 1930 (some would put this to 1857) after at least some 900 years of existing together. This exchange and intermingling of cultural, psychological, social worlds was reflected in all aspects – the mode of dressing, food, music, art, dance, literature, language, rituals, beliefs and practices – the list is a long one. Even from an orthodox perspective, assuming Hinduism and Islam are two monolithic religions there were always exchanges and interactions. The patronage and attempt to bridge the two cultures by the Moghul rulers like Akbar and Dara Shikoh is well known but even Aurangzeb is said to have made grants to various temples like to the Pushkar temple in Ajmer. Hagiographical studies show how saints like Kabir, Dadu, and Nanak attempted to bridge the two communities and in the process redefined Hinduism and Islam itself. During the Bhakti Movement religious experimentation and evolution reached its peak. But the main reason why this exchange was possible was inherent in the structure of the society itself, which was centered around ancestral place, and land, jati (caste) and panth (sect), and the lived culture, with its rituals, customs, practices was more important to the people than the broad religious category.

This was further attenuated by the fact that the majority of Indian Muslims were from the masses of Hindus. They carried their customs, habits, rituals and practices to Islam. The changing of religion did not necessarily mean changing of customs and rituals. In this composite culture there was scope for diversity, not only similarity. Cultures are osmotic, semi-permeable, and not rigid and fixed so there has to be exchange especially after living for a thousand years together. Cultures and people are affected by each other; interaction is not because of choice but the survival instinct for both the culture and the people. Cultures adapt, adjust, accommodate, and evolve making them gray, not black or white. The result was a unique version of Islam that incorporated many Hindu practices, and a unique Hinduism that bore strong influences of Islam. With a slight change in perspective one can reframe it and also say that it was no longer Hinduism and Islam that
bore each others influences but a new religious identity, a new personality, a new self was born and that was the South Asian cultural identity. Plurality, not homogeneity, was the benchmark, the essence, of the culture of South Asia. Plurality seemed to be the cultural identity of South Asia. I would stretch it a little farther and state that a pure Hindu and a pure Muslim or pure Hinduism and pure Islam are two hypothetical and mythical extremes on a continuum. Most people and religions fall somewhere in between these two ends as far as the South Asians are concerned. The same would hold true in other places too where two different religions and peoples have existed together for some generations. This exchange and interaction also resulted in the birth of new cultures, religions, which were not only a synthesis of the two worldviews but had their own unique and defining characteristics and were complete unto themselves. Using the pegs Hinduism and Islam for them is inappropriate because it is like describing someone in terms of only comparisons.

You may catch the words but the melody slips by. Ismailism, Sufism, Sikhism, Nathpanthis, Kabirpanthis and Prannathis are some religions that resulted from the union of the two cultures. And these new offspring can be defined and captured and understood when we change our gauge and look for fresh parameters. I have used the term multireligious for want of a better word and not because I think it best describes them.

Partition with its emphasis on homogeneity changed all that. The logic of the nation-state demanded homogeneity. It required clear-cut borders, the delineation of unambiguous regions and well defined selves and identities: black or white, yes or no, nothing in between. Homogeneity by any standards – socially, culturally, psychologically and even geographically – seemed impossible. The people were too well-grafted to be divided easily. In the highly charged environment in 1947, it was distance that was emphasized and accentuated, the undercurrent, the unspoken and veiled threat was the proximity between the people that was fearful, and it was this mingling that partition sought to rectify and sort out. Partition then was as much a division within the person as outside. This identity crisis was the process of forging out separate identities of mind and land and caused deep ruptures within the self. It required separation and forming of a new identity from overlapping, intermingled, blurred personal, social and psychological selves and boundaries. The formation of new identities required giving up known, intermingled and intricately related psychological and social worlds and selves and incorporating ‘alien’, imposed selves/identities.
Partition was the watershed in the history of the country and the communities Hindus and Muslims and the religions Hinduism and Islam. Psychologically, socially, and even geographically, the Hindus and Muslims were so intermingled, so well grafted that no division would be easy. It required separation and forming of a new identity from the existing overlapping, intermingled and intricately related personal, social and psychological worlds. It required giving up those known realities and selves and incorporating ‘alien’ imposed selves, identities and boundaries. People had to disown and redefine themselves and make changes in almost all spheres of their life, dress, art, religious practices, cultural practices and even language. Take the example of Urdu, which was the language of Punjab prior to partition. Post partition it became the language of Pakistan. For many people their native language had become part of an alien nation and they had to now disown that part of their self and learn an alien language. And the multireligious communities did not fit anywhere into the new consciousness of either Hindu or Muslim.

The violence arose not out of distance but out of proximity. In fact the violence itself helped shape and crystallize nation-like groupings in South Asia. People had to redefine themselves, forge their identity by making changes in almost all spheres of their life, including dress, art, religious practices, cultural practices and even language. These aspects of one’s life are also one’s psycho-social possessions. They constitute one’s identity, are the self’s markers. And if I am what I have and if what I have is lost – who then am I? Partition was this search for one’s identity, the parameters and things that defined oneself and this is always a painful, fearful and threatening process. For the multi-religious communities, this identity crisis caused deeper problems because of the already existing ambiguity and fuzziness in their collective self-definition. The problem with plurality, hybridism, and synthesis is that in moments of transit when one has to define oneself along parameters of difference and identity, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion, innovation becomes contestation and controversial, one is then relegated from a part of the diasporas to occupying a no man’s unwanted land. This uncertainty generates immense insecurity and fear in members of the community and those outside it. Ambiguity is always perceived as threatening because it does not lend itself to classification, categorization, predictability and control. It is not ‘either’ and ‘or’ but ‘neither’ and ‘nor’, and the unknown is mostly fearful to deal with. The multireligious communities did not fit into the new consciousness
of ‘either Hindu or Muslim’; they faced threat not only to their individual identities but also their group identities. Their self-definitions and identities were threatened to such an extent that they had to disown a major part of their selves to survive; they had to lose their unique selfhood and opt for a more common cultural stereotype – a Muslim or a Hindu identity. Partition partitioned their individual and collective self, because for them their inner self was also a battleground for the play of homogeny, singularity and purity, and this internalization, internal sorting, division was more complex and conflicting than the external division. While the external conflict was resolved by dividing the country into two, internal resolution seemed too evasive and difficult and extremely painful.

The Pranami or Parnami community was also called Nijanandi, Prannathis, or Dhamis. This study tells the story of some of their trials and tribulations, their agony and traumas. It is a story of the journey they are traversing to forge and map and sustain their identity both collective and individual against a tirade of attempts by secularists and communalists to ‘fit’ them into either Hinduism or Islam. It is a story of their inner and outer partition and how partition has been reenacted in their inner individual and collective self and how they have redefined themselves. The question that needs to be answered is what and how must it feel to be a member of the marginalized, the displaced, the diasporic, those whose very presence is both overlooked in terms of social and political identity and at the same time over-determined, made stereotypical and symptomatic and forced to conform and fit into predetermined and orthodox categories.

I was initially interviewing Punjabis who had resettled in Jaipur after the partition of India. One person I interviewed told me that I should also interview the Pranami community as they had also migrated from Punjab in Pakistan. He told me they are Punjabi Jain who did not eat non-vegetarian food and even avoided eating onion and garlic. He also pointed out that they were able to get their gold from Pakistan.

What was remarkable about the Pranami’s was their in-depth knowledge about the Hindu scriptures (Purana) and the Koran. All the people I interviewed could quote easily from the Purana as well as the Koran and they would speak in detail about the unity of all religions. They would draw equivalences and comparisons between the two religions. They did not reveal that their beliefs were actually different from the Hindu beliefs. They were not comfortable talking about their ‘Pranami’
religion and evaded the issue and even seemed anxious and afraid when I asked them directly about their Guru though it was a question that I had asked almost all the people whom I had interviewed who had witnessed partition. But the focus and central theme of their interviews were the teachings of the Koran and the Purana and they spoke very passionately about it, and mentioned that their Guru was a great seer yet they never revealed any other information about their Guru. And nothing else in their demeanor revealed that they were not Punjabi Hindus. It was only later that I got to know that they had not read the Koran or the Purana, their knowledge of Islam and the Purana was derived and taken from their religious text, they were quoting the verses from their text. Initially I thought that it is the elders of the community who were so zealous about religion and orthodox but it came as a surprise to discover as the study progressed that the younger generation was equally knowledgeable and well versed about their scripture and as ritualistic and passionate about it as the elders. In their interviews what stands out is that they are still a community whose life is centered on their religion and their communal identity and their community. They claimed they worshiped Krishna till he attained 11 years 52 days of age (till he was in Vrindavan) and their temples too are ‘Sri Krishna Pranami’ temples. They did not disclose anything more about their difference from the Hindus.

One of the teachers I was interviewing was discussing riots and in the same context we started talking about 1984 riots, Godhra train killings and subsequent riots and the various reactions to it and then he stated that in their religion too their Guru had been inspired by the Koran and had taken many aspects from the Koran. He went on to tell me how in their text they have some chapters discussing the power of Allah and have drawn many things from the Koran, which, he rationalized, was due to the political compulsions of those times. He was also critical about the Koranic aspects in the religion and felt they were just adjuncts that should be removed. That was how I got to know that they had a different text and did not believe in any of the Hindu scriptures. I had done interviews earlier but none of the persons even hinted that their religion is not a Hindu religion. I asked them if I could get to read their text, but they were very guarded and secretive about their text. They gave me other books to read and it was after I had spent considerable time with them, in their temple too, and had attended their religious meetings that they gave me a copy of their religious text. It was only after they were comfortable in my presence that they admitted that
they were different from the Hindus too. During the interviews with the members of their community many stated that the riots in Gujarat were inevitable, and if I wanted to know what India was before partition, I should visit Gujarat. What they were talking about was the Hindu-Muslim interactions. In Gujarat there is a tremendous amount of religious conversion going on between certain sects of both communities to make them fall concretely in just one community, as the two communities Hindus and Muslims have become uncomfortably close in their rituals and practices. With too many overlapping practices and interactions, creating a distance has become a necessity. This is interesting because psychologically it tells us important aspects of communal identity formation. It also lends support to the theory that partition was a fight for identity and the violence arose out of the closeness of the two communities. It was the need to separate, and not distance between the two communities, that was the reason for the violence.
Chapter 5

Pranamis – Genesis and Evolution

The Pranami is so named because of their style of addressing which is “pranam ji” so a person who greets you with this salutation is a Pranami. The Pranami religion and Nijanandi sampradaya (sect) was founded in the early seventeenth century (1620s) by Devchandra. It was an offshoot of the Bhakti Movement characterized by exchanges between various religious communities. But it is his disciple Mehraj Thakur later called Mahamati Prannath who is worshipped as the supreme God/ Being and considered the central force. Prannath proclaimed himself to be the Kalki and Nishkalank Buddha Avatar and the Imam Mehndi. His teachings written in Hindi, Sindhi, Gujrati, in the form of 18,840 sholakas and ‘chaupai’ or verses, are compiled into 14 texts, which constitute their sacred text the ‘Kuljam Swaroop’ considered the Atharva Veda too by the followers. Prannath was the spiritual as well as political guru of Raja Chhathrasal of Bundelkand. Prior to Prannath leaving his mortal body, his disciples asked him in what form will they be able to see him, Prannath told them that he would remain forever with them, spiritually, in the form of this sacred text. Every Parnami household has a copy of the ‘Swaroop Sahab’ that they worship. Swaroop literally translates into ‘form’ – it is Prannath’s form. The 14 texts are the 14 parts of him. Panna is to the Pranami what Haridwar is to the Hindu and Mecca is to the Muslim. The ashes of their dead are buried there; ‘Mundan’ or first tonsuring of the hair is done there. The other place of importance is Prannath’s birthplace Jamnagar and the place from where he started his teachings – Surat. They have approximately 400 temples spread over Gujarat, Nepal, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, North East and Haryana.

A Pranami is an ideal, altruistic and philanthropic. The Pranami religion is a way out of the perennial problems of ‘Hinduism (and its branches Sikhism, Jainism etc) versus Islam’.

Prannath was born in 1618, the same year and day as Aurangzeb. His name was Mehraj Thakur and he was a Lohana Rajput by caste. When he was barely 12 years he was so impressed by Devchandra, a preacher, that he became his disciple. Devechandra Mehta was born in 1581 at
Umekot, in Sindh. His Guru Haridas initiated Devchandra into the Radhavallabhi Sampraday where the mode of worshipping Krishna was based on Radha’s manner of worshipping Krishna. One day while meditating he received a new mantra ‘the Tartam mantra’ which was to be the basis of the new sect that Devchandra established – the Nijanand samprayday. ‘Nijanand’ means one whose source of happiness is within him. This ‘Tartam mantra’, which means ‘that which takes you beyond’, is the initiation mantra of the Pranami community. The religious head whispers this mantra in the ears of the initiate and only then one belongs to the Nijanand Sampraday and is a member of the sect.

Prannath’s travels and his life are documented in the second sacred book of the people the ‘Bitak Sahab’. The uniqueness of the ‘Bitak’ is that there is no other parallel work of its kind where a contemporary writes the history of a person simultaneously in his lifetime. The Bitak also captures the political, social and religious history of India at that time, especially Aurangzeb’s rules and his policies. Prannath’s life is itself a series of persecutions and sacrifices. Reading through the ‘Bitak’ the life and travels of Prannath and the Kuljam Swaroop, the outstanding feature is the extensive traveling that Prannath did to propagate the religion. He traveled even by sea to Muscat, Iraq, Arabia, and Persia, and then within the country from Gujarat, Diu, Sindh Rajasthan, Delhi, and Haridwar and finally settled in Panna in Madhya Pradesh. According to ancient tradition traveling by sea meant excommunication from the community. What stands out is the impact the socio-political environment of various places and the various religions he encountered has had on him. His writings reflect the influence of Jainism, Sindhi culture, Islam and Sufism. And his synthesizing all religions into one composite, complete religion, using mainly the language of the local people then – Hindvi, or Sadhukkadi mirrors the Bhakti movement. Prannath spent many years in Arabia and Persia. He was well versed in Gujarati, Sindhi, Arabic, Persian, Urdu and Hindi. In 1646, he was sent to Basra in Iraq by Devchandra to bring back Kheta Bhai, a brother of one of Devchandra’s disciples. Prannath stayed in Basra for 5 years and met the Caliph and not only preached his message but also studied Islamic culture, religion and philosophy. In 1657, when he was working as the Diwan, the Raja of Jamnagar jailed him on false charges of swindling money. In the jail he wrote his first composition on the walls of the cell. He spent 3 years in jail. In 1665, sea pirates kidnapped his wife for ransom. His search for her took him from Diu to Porbandar,
Thaddha in Sindh and finally Muscat in 1668. In 1671 after traveling to Arabia and Middle East he finally returned after rescuing his wife from the pirates and preaching his religion too. After that at various times he wrote the other compositions as and when he encountered the various religions prevalent in those times. When he encountered Jainism he wrote about it, when Kabirpanthis he wrote about the inner meaning of Kabir’s works, and when he heard the ‘baang’ or ‘aazan’ i.e. the morning prayer of the Muslims, recited by the Mullah or priest in the Masjid in Merta in Rajasthan he realized that now the ‘josh’ or force or power of Allah too has become a part of him. He then felt he was complete with the five powers for which the symbol of the hand stands. Henceforth he called himself Mahamati. His text is also called Prannath’s ‘Baangmay’. It is after this that from Rajasthan, Prannath went to Delhi and for 16 months tried to gain an audience with Aurangzeb. He sent twelve momins or disciples (one was a Muslim disciple and the rest were Hindus) to Aurangzeb later. Aurangzeb did not consent. The twelve momins went on a Satyagraha outside the gates of the dargah that Aurangzeb visited and started reciting the Tartam mantra and the verses from the Kuljam Swaroop. Aurangzeb jailed them and then Prannath got them freed, considered a brave feat. There are many stories about Aurangzeb and his children in the Pranami literature. It is said that Aurangzeb could never sleep properly after Prannath left Delhi because of the guilt that he had refused to meet the Imam Mehndi. It is rumored that Aurangzeb’s younger daughters were followers of Prannath.

Besides his travels to spread or propagate the religion called ‘Jagini’ by his followers, the other aspect has been his constant aim to interact with Aurangzeb and his attempt at trying to convince and also teach Aurangzeb the true meaning of Islam, which only he as the Imam Mehndi could reveal. Later he instigated Raja Chhattrasal to fight against Aurangzeb’s excesses. Aurangzeb was a focal point in Prannath’s life. In his attempt to prove himself to be the Imam Mehndi, his religion earlier seemed closer to Islam. Laldas who compiled the ‘Bitak’ earlier taught the teachings of the Koran to the followers. This is the reason the people give for the liberal use of Urdu, Arabic and Pharsi in the text. Prior to partition offering prayers was called ‘aazan’ not ‘puja’, Prannath’s temple in Panna was ‘majar-e-sharif’, ‘Kuljam Swaroop’ was ‘Kuljam-e-Sharif’ etc. Prannath even addressed his followers as ‘Momin’. This is one aspect about Prannath that many in the community were ambivalent, embarrassed and uncomfortable.
talking about. When specifically questioned about it, their reaction was akin to being caught on the wrong foot, their responses varied from being defensive and justifying, or stating that those aspects are there for decorative purposes and stating through his writings how Prannath actually disliked the Muslims. They also argued that Prannath was one of the few people to stand up to and oppose Aurangzeb’s excesses. He used all means to change Aurangzeb’s ways, and ultimately resorted to asking Raja Chhatrasal to directly fight him. He gifted Chhatrasal a sword and Chhatrasal could never be defeated by Aurangzeb. His meeting with Chhatrasal in Bundelkhand was also dramatic. Chhatrasal had lost his kingdom and was a wanderer waiting to get back his land. He had no wealth either. Prannath told him to go take his horse and ride on the fields in Panna. Wherever the horse’s hoofs made marks to dig that land, he would find wealth. Chhatrasal dug and found diamonds. Prannath was aware that Panna had diamond mines. A contradictory belief stated by the people is that Aurangzeb was actually a very pious soul and it was his ministers who were evil and prevented Aurangzeb from meeting Prannath. There are many stories in their texts to prove Aurangzeb’s purity.

Prannath wanted to bridge two religions, two cultures; he criticized both Hinduism and Islam. But saying that his composition is a synthesis of the Puran and Koran would be too simplistic. Prannath’s genius is exceptional and his reading and understanding of the various texts phenomenal. His writings attempt to reveal the esoteric and inner, symbolic meaning of the Purana and the Koran. He explained that as the complete embodiment of the divine being he has the ‘Josh’ or spirit of all the previous avatars of God, Krishna, Mohammad and Jesus and he has come to complete and fill the lapses of the other previous times when the spirit of the divine ascended on earth. His mission was to awaken the souls through knowledge; Qayamat meaning the death of ignorance and resurrection through knowledge, and establishing peace and harmony because the essence of all religions was one. He had come to unravel the true and the inner meaning of both religions; he was the key that would unlock the doors that separated the two religions. Consequently in his text, the first half explains the true meaning of the Hindu scriptures and, the latter half the true meaning of the Koran. Besides this, his text actually begins by answering or explaining what the Bhagwat Purana leaves unanswered or does not categorically describe – ‘who do Shiva and Vishnu pray to?’ In the latter half of the ‘Swaroop’, he seeks to unravel the 11,000 ‘hadiths’ that the Koran
states would be revealed by the Imam Mehndi, the reincarnation of Allah.

Prannath’s relation with his followers too was unique. Since he was Rajji the Supreme lord and his followers Rooh or Aangana of his consort, they worshipped him like a lover and husband. It is stated that he did ‘Raas’ with his followers in Panna, similar in all aspects to Krishna’s ‘Raas Lila’. Prannath was 70 years old when on the insistence of his followers he performed one of the few miracles in his life. Like Krishna, he took many forms so that each follower had Prannath as his partner and when he did the ‘Raas’ he was not 70 years but a young man. Today this is celebrated every year on Holi, the people do ‘garba, raas, etc.’ in the temple in Panna. Even today the Pranami worship the Kuljam Swarup like a lover. The Swaroop is their husband and lord and they serve it like they serve their husband, beginning with waking him up, to bathing, dressing the Swaroop etc. to putting him to sleep at night. They have a ritualistic and systematic way of doing their daily Sewa of the Swaroop. In fact some of the learned people in their community lament that the Pranami were so involved in serving the book that they have never opened and read it and so are ignorant about the finer nuances. Also one could never have any discussion or disagreement regarding what is written like the Hindus discuss the Gita etc – it was blasphemy.

Prannath was against the caste system and any kind of discrimination. He was against idol worship, ritualism and superstition. He encouraged his followers, who came from different castes and sects and religions, to marry within themselves, eat together even from the same plate, so as to avoid any kind of discrimination among his followers. He however had more Hindu following than Muslim followers. He preached non-violence and prohibited eating of meat, onions, garlic and use of alcohol and smoking. He emphasized the importance of a householder’s life not renunciation. He insisted that his followers weave the charkha and spin cloth. This charkha is displayed in their museum in Panna. He traveled a lot and his means was walking. He traveled by foot most of the time and insisted that his followers too walk. He was against violence and believed in ahimsa or non-violence and advocated religious tolerance; yet he did instigate Chhattrasal to fight against Aurangzeb and his unjust ways. But his followers very rarely have kept any weapons with them.
As the Guru of Raja Chhattrasal he attempted to establish a place where his ideals, beliefs and philosophy could be translated into reality. He wanted to put an end to the perpetual fighting between the various religions and bring peace and harmony. He stated that he was here to propagate one world religion and join all the people together by revealing the true inner meaning of the various religions which he said was the same; only difference was in the forms it was presented. He was the key that would unlock the real meaning of the various scriptures and when the similarities would be evident there would be no reason to fight. And he attracted both Hindu and Muslim followers initially. The religion spread to Punjab, Nepal and Gujarat. This is Prannath’s philosophy and religion in a nutshell. He tried to implement practically an ideal theoretical concept and worked hard and through syntheses between the two religions Hinduism and Islam developed a new religion that took the best cultural practices, rituals from the various religions and explained and integrated the teachings of the various religions. But an ideal does not necessarily translate into a ‘perfect’ lived culture. The discomfort others felt towards them was evident right after Prannath’s death itself. The Pranamis were never able to be at peace with themselves and their perplexity heightened by the amalgamation of Hindu and Islamic practices that further confounded their religion and led to a lack of confidence in themselves as a community. The cracks, fissures insecurities have been their legacy, inheritance and reinforced at various junctures through history.

After Aurangzeb’s demise, his ally Jai Singh II, the Maharaja of Jaipur initiated a new policy to reassert Vedic traditions and reconcile the various Hindu sects. He wrote letters to Dadupanthis, Laldasis, and Prannathis. In 1729, in a reply to Jai Singh’s request Chhattrasal along with other rulers promised that they would observe the principles enunciated in the Vedas and give up what was contradictory. In 1794 Murtaza Hussain wrote that in the Prannath Mandir there is a Puran on one side and a Koran on the other. John Thomas in 1894 stated that when the Pranami make a new disciple they make him participate in a communal meal with both Hindus and Muslims, nothing else exists which can distinguish them from Muslims in practice and religion. Traditionally, they keep their faith a secret.

Things were never easy for them. They were also viewed as weird and not belonging to anyone. This prejudice and bias too has had its impact on them. Both Hindus and Muslims disliked them, this is something
that all multireligious communities face – ridicule. Even modern notions and definitions of such communities imply that they are intermediate, hyphenated communities and are neither proper and good Hindus nor Muslims. They are variously addressed as syncretic, liminal and overtly and covertly they have been coerced, pressurized into choosing a fixed, stereotypical identity and entity for themselves. They have had no respite and have not been spared even by academicians. After all how can mixed blood be better than pure? Time and again they were asked to prove where they stood and ‘who they really were’. They had to fight various court cases from 1935, 1942 onwards to prove their identity and more importantly answer the question “who are you?” In Nepal in 1942, when homogeneity and similarity defined as nationalism became the focal point, the Pranami were asked to leave the country since they were not Hindus, and Nepal had opted to become a Hindu kingdom. They had to explain why they buried their dead if they were Hindus and why on their temple there is a symbol of the hand which is a Shia symbol of the holy five ‘panch tan pak’ – Mohammed, Ali, Fatima, Hasan and Hussain – the symbol of the hand for the Pranami stands for the five supreme powers which Prannath symbolized. They also had to state which God they worshiped. To prove their identity as being Hindu, which in one way they were because they were drawn from the local Hindu population, the head priest of the Nepal Prannath temple made a change in the ‘Tartam Mantra’ and instead of ‘Nijnam Shri Sahibji’, he wrote ‘Nijnam Shri Krishnaji.’ He also removed the part, which sought to reveal the Koran from the text. The Pranami now burn their dead, only those who live near the Panna temple are given Samadhi. The changes in their text were easy to make because till 1965, the Pranami did not publish their text, only hand written text were available to the people of the sect. Having proved that they were Hindu-Vaishnav, worshippers of Krishna, their struggle only began.

The real assault and shattering influence on them and their collective identity was in 1947. Ironically, the two religions Islam and Hinduism by 1947 were viewed as diametrically opposite and were perceived as two antagonistic religions that could never be bridged and they could not even exist as a single nation. In those times of physical, psychological, emotional segregation and mitotic division the Pranamis’ dilemma was aggravated due to their already diffused boundaries or plurality, no matter how one looks at it. They were the target of organized, planned violence leading to immense personal loss and individual and collective trauma. The effect of the genocide that the
Pranami from Bahawalpur experienced was the determining factor in the collective identity of the entire community from then on. In Bahawalpur all of them stayed in the same neighborhood like they did in the present times.

The Pranamis from Mintgumri in Multan did not face this, but they knew about the Bahawalpur massacre. What they faced was the ‘normal’ violence of partition. They came in large Kafilas from Mintgumri. But this experience of Bahawalpur is the defining moment of the entire community. The fear partition and the specific genocide in Bahawalpur unleashed have diffused into the entire community personally and individually. 1947 became an important event in their collective and individual identity. It was the culmination of their identity crisis and fear psychosis, for that genocide precipitated their sense of disorientation, disturbance and estrangement, which they had been suffering ever since the inception of the religion. Like a bridge that can connect and separate, their synthesis, plurality or in-between identity, became problematic and traumatic for them at this moment of historical transformation, when alien notions of nation-state, singular identity and nationalism were thrust upon them. It has unfolded in subtle and dramatic ways in their individual and collective selves. Though the Punjabi Pranami constitutes only 10% of the total Pranami population quantitatively, qualitatively they constitute 99% of Pranami. The changes that have taken place in the entire Pranami Community have been directly due to the experience of the Punjabi Pranamis. According to their priests whom I interviewed the Punjabi Pranamis are the ones who are more orthodox and religion-abiding and also the ones concerned about the dos and don’ts of the community. They are also the ones who have revived the religion, which before 1947 had almost disintegrated into oblivion, giving it a fresh start.

With this as their past, their inheritance, the present is but a reflection of their history. The ramifications of partition can be felt in every aspect of their life. Partition resulted in a partition of their religion and their inner selves into a Hindu and a Muslim self. Their crisis is the inner partition that they are still in the process of resolving, their inner rift is what they cannot handle, even though they are trying to disown their Muslim self. Their religion has also been partitioned and divided. They have disowned the Islamic aspects of their religion and at least superficially are donning a pure Hindu veil. They are enacting out partition in their inner selves.
Post partition, like earlier times they still live together in the same neighborhood geographically, and psychologically are still huddled together. Most of the Pranamis still stay in the same houses that were allotted to them in 1947. Even affluence has not made them move to another locality or a bigger house in another area. They are mostly from the middle class with business being their main occupation. Their houses are not very modern. Most of their houses have the toilets still outside the main house like earlier times, and reflect their traditional setup structurally as well as psychologically. Their standard of living is simple and modest with few changes in their lifestyle, many among them deliberately tried to maintain a lifestyle that was familiar to their pre-partition days and abstained from indulging themselves or their children even when they could afford to.

Moving to Jaipur was more or less a community decision. They were told that Jaipur like Punjab was a land of milk, ghee, curd, and buttermilk and that seemed very promising to them. In the neighborhood there are four Pranami temples. Prior to partition their temples were called Prannath Mandir but after partition they have renamed their temple as Sri Krishna Pranami temple. In fact, even their name Pranami is one they adopted after independence; Pranami is taken after their mode of greeting each other – Pranam. They now address themselves as Sundersath instead of Momin. They are still viewed as weird by their non-Pranami neighbors because of their custom of marrying within the same community, though I was later told by them, they marry in a different gotra. There are other things that are considered weird not only by Hindus and Muslims but also by Sikhs.

They are organized around religion and are closed and secretive and guarded about their religious beliefs. A description of their practicing culture would more adequately capture the essence and the enactment of their fear and the secretive and enigmatic style that it has led to, so that they are not discovered to be different. When one enters their temple one sees bright, ornately decorated forms or idols of Krishna and Radha but on closer inspection one realizes that there are no idols, it is made to look that way and just a Mukat or crown with a flute symbolizing Krishna and another crown symbolizing Radha are there. The crowns are actually placed on the Kuljam Swaroop and Bitak that are wrapped or draped in a beautiful, bright colored cloth in shades of green, orange or peach are called the ‘vasta’ or clothes of the lord with elaborate gold and sequins work done on it. There are garlands placed on the
two texts and then the crowns are placed on them. Everyday the dress of the texts is changed and the ‘Shingar’ or ornamental dressing of the texts is an important ritual. This is an aspect one cannot know until they tell you because the texts are made to look like idols and one cannot discern that underneath the crowns are the texts that are actually installed and worshipped. The camouflage is that perfect. Though the temples do not have any bells, there is a gong in the temple, which is sounded during their ‘Arti’. Their Arti is similar to the Hindu Arti in style. Most men and women I interviewed did not eat any thing before the morning bhog or offering to Prannath or Rajji. There are six offerings: morning fruit, breakfast, lunch, tea, dinner and post-dinner some fruit and milk. The Prasad consists of the food they cook for themselves – roti, dal and vegetables alongwith some sweets. Even in their homes they did not have any idols but worshipped the Kuljam Swaroop and the Bitak. Many of the educated people bemoaned that for many years their community only worshipped their text but never read it. Even when their first publication was printed in 1965 it met with a lot of opposition, the elders of the community found it insulting the Lord. Like in the Gurudwara and in the Sikh tradition outside the inner chamber, there are two to four copies of the ‘Kuljam Swaroop’, which the people read silently. They are kept on a ‘takhat’ or platform, placed on a small bookstand. The texts are covered with bright colored, heavily decorated cloth. And when they recite their texts it sounds more like an aazan but this is also now in the process of being changed.

Their marriage is similar to the Hindu tradition of taking ‘Phera’ but the Pranami instead of fire, take ‘Phera’ around the Kuljam Swaroop and instead of 7 phera take 4 phera. After partition, those parts of their text, which deal with Koran, are not read aloud. They no longer recite their text aloud and their mantra is also recited silently. It is not displayed or written anywhere on the walls of their temple like earlier times. On the walls of the temple are pictures of Krishna and Radha. On the walls above the inner chamber the Garbh Griha are pictures of Devchandra with the Tartam Mantra and Prannath with the Kuljam Swaroop. A person is initiated into the sect when the priest whispers the ‘Tartam Mantra’ in his ears. The initiate then gives the priest a box of sweets and some money. He/she from then on is a Pranami. He has to forsake partaking non-vegetarian food, drinking alcohol and smoking and lead a simple life, donating some part of his earning to the temple too. Henceforth, he has to follow the principles of the Pranami faith and also its rituals.
Whatever their sacred text may be, whatever way they may be practicing and following their religion today observing the Pranamis leaves one in no doubt about their Hindu roots. One cannot doubt their aligning with Hinduism totally and they have even successfully incorporated many of the mainstream Hindu beliefs like wearing the sacred thread, their priests don a tilak (Prannath too donned a tilak) and wear saffron clothes. There were voices of dissent and consent too among the older members regarding the changes being made in the religion. Some were nostalgic about pre-partition days and felt they were losing their identity by aligning with Hindu rituals; others felt that enough was not being done to do away with the Islamic aspects of the religion. Not very many outsiders or non-Pranami visited the temple. When a non-Pranami visited their temple he was easily spotted and watched very carefully especially if it was on more than one occasion and their priests and heads were aware of his visits.

One is acutely aware that for the Pranami, the negotiation of defining themselves is still an ongoing process. They are still looking for space to provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood, individual and collective, singular and communal, and still searching for innovative domains for cultural negotiation, collaboration, contestation and representation. And it is their ‘right’ to choose their alignment.

In the late 1980s, what began as a disagreement between one of the Pranami stalwarts and reformer Jagdish Chandra and the ‘Gaddipati’ or head priest of the temple took on a new movement. Jagdish Chandra rebelled and formed a new group, which wanted to stick by the original text and teachings. He felt they were losing their identity and getting too assimilated with the Hindus, adopting their rituals and indulging in idol worship etc. He named the temple he built as Prannath Temple and Nijanand Ashram. He started publishing the literature and more confidently started reading aloud the Tartam Mantra and the Kuljam Swaroop in his temple, even the parts discussing Koran he started reading aloud in the temple. He also removed the Nijnam Sri Krishna from the Tartam Mantra and rewrote it as ‘Nijnaam Shri Sahibji’. He was reverting back to their original religion. In this temple, like pre-partition times, there are again two crowns on their sacred text but no flute. This was despite the fact that Jagdish Chandra was responsible for fighting the case for the community in 1983 in Rewa in Madhya Pradesh when again the Pranami were accused of being a Muslim Community actually and deluding the people. They were asked to hand
over the temple premises, which they were accused of occupying illegally. Jagdish Chandra proved that they were worshippers of Krishna and their sacred text begins with the Tartam Mantra, which in turn begins with ‘Nijnaam Sri Krishna’. He won the case. It was this breakaway group that openly spoke about their religion, was more confident discussing the Islamic aspects of their religion and also gave copies of the Bitak and ‘Kuljam Swaroop’ to outsiders till recently.

The Pranamis are a small community centered on religion and on their community, almost afraid of living as individuals in a psychological sense. Even though it sounds repetitive a description of the inner world would have to begin with religion because that is their theme, their collective fixation filtering down to the individual. They are more communal than individual psychologically. Their collective identity overshadows their individual identities. The image that comes when one sees them is that of coral reefs, their individual existence is subservient to their collective self. With such strong memories of collective past and history, collectively shared trauma and pain, a collective identity or self would give them more sense of psychological security than an individual one. They are traditional, orthodox, closed, rigid and secretive. Some of the more liberal members pointed out in hushed tones that the Pranamis blindly believe that Prannath was God reincarnated; even hinting that one can consider him a saint like Kabir etc, is sacrilege, blasphemy and may even lead to excommunication from the community. They are equally contemptuous and condescending towards both the Hindus and the Muslims and their rituals and practices and emphasized the supremacy and completeness and the holistic nature of their religion and their guru. Being a community where marriages were within the community, all the people seemed to know each other. Being so secretive about their religious beliefs it was with difficulty that I gained access into the community’s inner core i.e., their religion. But once I started going to their temple regularly I was accepted as one of them, a part of their family, and I noticed a very visible change in the attitude of the people. They were more helpful, hospitable, trusting, eager and willing to talk. In fact they were not only enthusiastic but even contacted me and volunteered to be interviewed. They revealed their beliefs and opened up more easily. They invited me to all their functions and their hospitality at times was overwhelming and embarrassing. As stated earlier, most of the people were uncomfortable about the Koranic aspects in their religion. It was their Achilles’ heel. Even after I had established a rapport
and trust with the people, I discovered those parts where Prannath talks highly of Islam only when I started reading the text, and then on questioning them they discussed the merits of Islam. This cautiousness and reticence seemed to be their second nature and it was not restricted to their practices and beliefs only. Jagini or awakening and spreading their religion and conversion are an important aspect of their religion. For this purpose when they plan to convert people from other communities into Pranami, they instructed the older members to tell the new initiate that talks will be held on the Bhagawat Purana but never mentioned the name of their text.

Not only collectively, even individually religion is the consistent theme in their life, the axis or the fulcrum along which the other activities revolve. On questioning them if they ever felt that their God failed to protect them in his temple and did they ever feel let down they stated that only the chosen are given pain. Prannath faced many trials and he tests his people to prepare them for his abode. Since Prannath is their lover and Lord I did wonder how it would play out in their lives. Both men and women are equally religious and involved in the activities of the temple and the community. The temple is the arena for the play of power, politics etc. It is a frequently expressed desire to be able to build a temple in their lifetime. Both men and women visited the temple regularly, sometimes even twice a day, even the younger generation. They have a book where all the ways of living and going about the daily activities like worshipping, marriages, eating, and other household duties are listed. In fact, they would relate every aspect to their religion and community and did almost everything according to what was written in their texts, for everything the peg was religion. In their homes too, they serve the ‘Kuljam Swaroop’ in a fashion similar to the temple. Only after they have put the text to sleep do they rest. Prannath emphasized a householder’s life so very few of their priests are renunciates.

The Pranamis are mainly into business and are considered shrewd businessmen by the Punjabis. The Punjabis feel they are shrewd because Jaipur had a largely Jain Marwari business community that was vegetarian, and willing to work with the Pranami because they too were vegetarians. Like most refugees they had to work very hard for a living but they were able to get their gold and some valuables from Pakistan and so were never absolutely penniless. Interacting with them, at times I felt like they were caught and frozen in time, they seemed to
be in a different world, somewhere from the past.... another time, another place. The source of their problem is when they have to negotiate with society as ‘the other’ along communal lines, then they are insecure, scared and threatened, and react accordingly.

The Pranamis claim to eminence as stated earlier lies in the fact that Mahatma Gandhi’s mother was a Pranami and an orthodox one. According to Raj Bala Sidana (1968), Mahatma Gandhi in his autobiography has mentioned that in his childhood he used to go with his mother Putlibai, who was a Pranami to a temple in Porbundar where there was a Koran on one side and a Purana on the other side and they read out from the Purana as well as the Koran and explained the meaning of both. There are other factors too that seem to hint that Prannath’s influence on Gandhi cannot be passed off as mere coincidence. Prannath traveled by sea when people were excommunicated if they did so. Gandhi too faced opposition when he wanted to go abroad. Prannath walked a lot and his Jagini is famous. Gandhi’s love for walking is also well known. Prannath said that the essence of the two religions Hinduism and Islam was the same. They were different modes of expressions for different peoples of the same God so that each could understand God and his teachings. Both were against caste system, preached non-violence, religious tolerance and advocated vegetarianism, non-consumption of alcohol etc. Both laid emphasis on the charkha and spinning of cloth. Prannath states that when the souls were separated from the lord in ‘viraha’ (separation) they sit and spin clothes for their lord and themselves. Prannath emphasized on making one’s own clothes. Once when Prannath had sent his 12 disciples to seek audience with Aurangzeb and they were refused, the 12 momins sat on a satyagraha outside the dargah that Aurangzeb visited daily. Gandhi advocated the satyagraha as the best means of protest. While traveling Prannath once encountered a beggar with no clothes, he immediately removed his kurta and gave it to the beggar and continued his journey in a dhoti only. All these incidents create a sense of deja vu, reminding one of Gandhi in more than one way. Incidentally, the Congress I symbol of the hand was adopted by Indira Gandhi after she visited the Panna temple with HKL Bhagat, who was a Pranami. She won the elections soon after that.
Chapter 6

Researched on Researcher

In December 2002 Dominique Sila Khan, a French anthropologist and sociologist published a small book on the Pranami Community. The book is titled “The Pranami Faith – Beyond ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’”, and is for private circulation only. The priest in the Surat Pranami temple found a copy somewhere and being very careful and overcautious about their religion, he bought and read it. He then sent it to the Jaipur mandir for further action. In the book Dominique attempts to prove that the Pranamis are actually a sect of Nizari Ismaili, Shia Muslims who had to disseminate to survive. She has based her conclusion on a Gujarati text published in 1935 where the names of the Ismaili saints are listed and Prannathis and Meraj Panthis and Devechandra and Prannath are listed as Ismaili Nizari saints. She tries to prove through both their texts how Prannath’s belief in Hinduism was just a camouflage, to mask his real identity of being a Nizari Ismaili belonging to the Imam Shahi tradition. She states that in Panna, on one wall is inscribed the Kalma and on the other the Tartam Mantra. Prannath’s tomb/samadhi is still called his dargah and on it is inscribed in Arabo-Persian ‘dargah-e-muquaddas imam mehdi uz-zaman (holy mausoleum of Imam Mehndi of the time), Haq haq haq baroz umma akhri 23 Muharram 1106 sal yak hazar yak sad shash. In her book she narrates verses or chaupais from the text and incidents to prove Prannath’s Muslim identity. She has concentrated on the Islamic practices that have been incorporated in their religion and proving that they are Islamic is not a difficult task if you ignore half of their practices. It is an unending debate as to which aspect of their religion is true and which is the camouflage going by her line of logic. But in the Pranami community her article has re-precipitated some of the same fears and fissures, collectively and individually, that they had been unsuccessfully trying to control after the 1947 genocide. Somehow her article has reinforced, re-scratched old fears and traumas and broken their already fragile defenses.

If we were to substitute the community and its inner struggle for India then we realize that internally they are experiencing the same dilemmas of identity that India experienced in 1947 which led to a violent identity
crisis and subsequent external separation of the communities Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. The Pranamis are witnessing the same upheaval again but this time it is only internal.

I have been interviewing the community for the past year and a half; and one of their head priests from Panna contacted me and explained for 40 minutes on a long distance call how they were actually a Hindu community and how they have been wrongly portrayed. Behind that call was the fear and helplessness that since I too have knowledge of the religion and have been given a copy of their holy texts, I may also draw a similar conclusion. They were looking for reassurance that as the other researcher studying their community, I did not misunderstand Prannath’s teachings and would at least present and justify their multireligious aspect, if not their Hindu identity. Members from both the Sri Krishna Pranami group and the Prannath group have tried to explain how inaccurate Dominique’s analysis is. They explained and tried to justify that their religion was a synthesis of both, Prannath attempted to unite the Hindus and Muslims so he spoke about both, fitting them into one group was damaging and unfair. They were not Muslims. In fact, Prannath states categorically that in all religions, Hindu religion is supreme. They have become defensive and give long explanations to prove their Hindu identity, even though I have not asked them about it. Somehow they have clamped up and become very distrustful, closed and guarded. Their sense of trust and their willingness to give has been put to test again. Members of both the groups have also concurred on the point that henceforth books and literature will only be given carefully and on strict scrutiny to new members and very rarely to outsiders. Those who were against publishing the Koranic aspects have a stronger voice now. They feel the Koranic aspects are no longer needed and have caused enough damage to their community and religion. They are advocating for the removal of all the Islamic aspects of their culture or at least banning publishing it and giving it to any non-Pranami. Another aspect that was visible was their fear of being persecuted in this case by the Muslim community once again, a fear that had percolated to the entire community and was persistent even now. It seemed like the fear of the Muslim had seeped into their very fabric and guided many aspects of their life even now. They repeatedly stated how the Muslims were so rigid that they would kill anyone who spoke anything that was not written in the Koran and did not listen and were not amenable to reason and logic. Even for a task as simple as writing to the publisher of the controversial book their
dissenting views and objections on what they considered misrepresentations or inaccuracies they were hesitant and afraid. They voiced fears about how taking any kind of action against a Muslim may be dangerous because a Muslim can kill and retaliate even without any provocation and if they took some action, they may invite unnecessary trouble and violence. This fear I guess would also be prevalent as regards the Hindu also. They are more appeasing towards the Hindus. In the same vein they also mention bravely how they have won the various court cases and have successfully proved in the court that they are Hindus and the current situation too can be handled adroitly.

Another person, a retired IAS officer who had migrated in 1947 explained that if they were Muslims, they would not have to leave Pakistan and come here as paupers. On a sadder note he told me that they had already faced a lot of violence, discrimination and had resolved their traumas, fears and controversies through certain changes, adaptations. What purpose would opening it all up again serve? He reasoned that they are not denying their multireligious or plural nature but what they deny is that they are Nizari Ismaili. “It is too difficult and painful to fight another case to prove our identity. We are cornered again.” They are also trying to buy all the copies that are available of the book in the market, a panic reaction, undoubtedly. The people who supplied the literature to Dominique were also justifying themselves and rationalizing that they were not at fault. They helped her as part of their Jagini or awakening (conversion). They also explained that she did not state that she was doing research on their community but said that she was a tourist from France. Their pain and fear was dual, they would have to be accountable to the community too. Most were defensive, scared because it took them by surprise, they did not expect that someone would break their defenses so easily even after 55 years and also they would again have to state ‘who’ they were. There is a lot of churning and turmoil going on in their community now and the resultant would probably be their aligning with mainstream Hinduism. They have pasted an article on their temple notice board in all the temples stating how they have been inaccurately projected and they should be careful and watch out and take action against such maligning publications, whose aim is to divide the Hindus and create a rift between them and the Hindus. Their fear and reaction to the article seemed to me to be a little out of proportion to the incident, an over-reaction and I must admit that it did surprise me.
Trauma and subsequent and concomitant fear has this tendency to generate helplessness and insecurity and reactions that are repetitive and defensive. The resultant reaction has been the process of ‘Hinduization’ and shedding of the multireligious identity that characterizes such communities. This will be a tremendous loss, the final blow of partition to their identity, to our identity; the last nail in their (and our) multireligious-identity coffin.

Partition has been a story of losses – loss of faith, loss of culture, loss of motherland, loss of life. And overshadowed by these intense losses is this one loss characteristic of multireligious communities – loss of the freedom of multiple religious allegiances or, put simply, the freedom to worship and interact with God in a plural, idiosyncratic and different way. From 1947 onwards we are gradually moving towards singular, exclusive Gods and their modes of worship. In this uniformity lies the story of the slow and inconspicuous death of religious and cultural interaction and exchange. This straitjacketing is the end of the buffer states or multireligious identities that provided richness to the South Asian cultural identity. Partition has frozen the shifting, fluid cultural and psychological boundaries and shared spaces among the various religions. The intricate structures of interpenetrating, multilayered lifestyles, cultures, self-definitions have given way to uniform, concrete, inflexible, identifiable definitions of the self, the religion, and the culture. It is this lag effect of partition that, though understated in its damage, is a fatal blow ideographically and nomothetically. These shared spaces provided the buffering, the sanity to tolerate differences because their existence was based on similarity not differences. The Pranamis have been able to forgive and deal with violence because of their religion and the connection between the two religions that it emphasizes. In our enthusiasm for new discoveries, we are forcing them into a corner where their options are to choose any one religion like the Meo, and die a slow psychological death. The Meo are again a multireligious group in Rajasthan who in their habits are closer to Muslims but trace their ancestry to Radha and Krishna which is revealed through their oral history. They are diametrical opposites of the Pranami, who in their habits are closer to Hindus but their scriptures incorporate Islamic beliefs.

In the case of the Pranami it is not only the modern notion of nation-state that played havoc in their lives, but even after 55 years their crisis of identity is not yet resolved. Ironically, what even partition could not
accomplish fully, a secular, scientific research would probably help accomplish or at least hasten the process of – turning the Pranami into a Hindu community totally, thereby also ‘resolving’ its identity crisis. As a researcher one has to, at some point, consider the moral implications of one’s research. Empathy and sensitivity are important at least when one is dealing with living cultures and collective memories and pasts, which are still being lived out. Sometimes our ecstasy of discovering and exposing ‘our’ perception of someone else’s reality can lead to agony, anguish and trauma for those whose reality we claim to study and represent, neutrally and without any bias. As a researcher one needs to look at the ethics of the so called ‘neutral’ research. It is the researchers’ responsibility to handle such sensitive and traumatic memories with understanding and give it the respect it deserves, after all accountability is important in all researches.

The release of the book on the Pranamis by Dominique and the effect on them raises one question: Do the researched have a voice? Is it possible to lend a voice to the respondent, the subject, the native, the subaltern, so that his view, opinions and feelings about research based on him (or her) is also documented?

The truth I have come to believe is that science and social science is a biased science. The latter half of this century has seen erosions in the perceived legitimacy of science as an impartial means of finding truth. Many research topics are the subject of highly politicized dispute; indeed, the objectivity of the entire social sciences i.e. psychology, sociology, anthropology etc has been called into question (MacCoun, 1998). The core controversies, problems, conflicts and dilemmas seem to center around one major issue in the social sciences – the study of other cultures and peoples. A large number of social scientists right from the time when IQ testing started have been highlighting the fact that many errors and biases seem to creep in when one studies the ‘other’ culture and ‘other’ people especially if the other is not equitable on social, political, psychological dimensions. It is alleged that the researches are biased toward a Western individualist worldview (e.g., Sampson, 1989). The basic question that arises is whether or not one can study another without any bias.

Further many scholars suspect that researches done by outsiders on another culture can sometimes lead to not only methodological biases but also ethical ones – specifically, bias in the formulation, interpretation
and use of empirical research findings (see Malhotra, Sanu, Tilak, Alonso & Starr; 1987; Maier, 1991; Porter, 1995; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1991 etal). According to Malhotra, “Western readers often fail to contextualize the narrative as the perspective of an “outsider” that may be skewed in the following ways: (1) the native informant’s vested interests and intentions distort, just like any measurement perturbs the system being measured. (2) The scholar’s understanding, both literally and cognitively, is distorted by the scholar’s private framework. (3) The scholar has a propensity towards conclusions that support the particular political, religious or other institutional frameworks s/he is operating in. (4) The generalizations made lead to stereotypes, given the enormous diversity of the Indian experience.

Anthropology, sociology and psychology are all subject of adhering to the implicit presumption that the West is the reservoir of knowledge and wisdom, which is unilaterally handed down to the traditional cultures (which sometimes also means backward cultures). One of the ongoing contentious issues amongst intellectuals is that often the subjects about whom generalizations are made are not informed or consulted about the findings of the research. The norms of research are sometimes blatantly violated when studying non-Western cultures. What results then is a work that does not adhere to any scientific or even academic norms yet remains unchallenged. These Experimenter biases are taken very seriously in the scientific community and science has been very harsh with people who break these norms. But somehow, according to scholars questioning the research of many Western scholars, sociological and anthropological researches conducted on non-Western people are exempted from following even these ethical norms. The irony is that whatever Western researchers write is taken as truth and the onus is on the unsuspecting subject, the native, the respondent coming from non-Western society to disprove the assumptions attributed to him. It is a catch-22 situation for the subjects of such research. And since he or she, often because of inequitable means, does nothing to refute the assumptions about him or her and his or her culture it is presumed to be the truth. To add to it, the passive recipients of knowledge – the non-Western academicians on their part, more often than not do not scrutinize, evaluate and assess the researches done by the Western scholars. According to Malhotra, “The burden of proof in such a system is shifted upon the shoulders of the side with less credibility, i.e., with less symbolic power. This makes all the difference, because most assertions in this field are unprovable as either true or
false; it boils down to who has the burden of proof, and who controls the default (or incumbent) view by sheer force of consensus of the peers. Holding the default consensus is like being entrenched at the great heights of Kargil. The opponent would have to pay a heavy price to try to dislodge. The discourse received from these ‘native informants’ is not being positioned as their work (theory or narrative) that is orally transmitted to the scholar (who is actually a sort of communication medium or ghost-writer in many instances). Rather, it is published as the original work of the scholar. This is part of the Eurocentric mindset that discovery is what the white people do. That is why Columbus is said to have ‘discovered’ America in 1492, implying that the Native Americans who had lived there for several thousand years had not yet discovered it….

Indian culture is particularly positioned at the wrong end of the lens, namely, as the “object” of inquiry, and not as being capable of providing any of the theories to be used in the study. The result of all this is the canonization of certain theories in the liberal arts, which very few have the capability and courage to debunk. It thus often takes an outsider, such as Alan Sokal, to truly point out that the emperor has no clothes.” (Malhotra, 2004).

The works of Wendy Doniger, Paul Courtright, Sarah Caldwell, Jeffrey Kripal etc are stated as examples of experimenter bias with many ethical and methodological flaws inherent in the research, yet their version is taken to be the truth about Indic culture. It is left to the people who live in that reality to prove that they have a different version of reality. It is akin to writing a thesis on a dish by studying the ingredients of the dish not tasting it, and then presuming you know the taste of the dish too. Nobody has independently gone to those “natives” and told them of the way they have been depicted, quoted and understood; asked them what they think of the way they have been depicted, quoted or understood. Where do they disagree with the work done on them; what has been edited out of their narratives? What has been misunderstood or misinterpreted or over-emphasized, either out of ignorance or bias of the researcher or investigator?

The ethical and professional dimensions of socially sensitive research need to be considered as an imperative and necessary aspect of any research. Socially sensitive research refers to studies in which there are potential social consequences or implications, either directly or
indirectly for the participants in the research or for the class of individuals represented by the research due to the inequality in terms of power, status or privileges of the investigator and the subject. In Dominique’s work there has been blatant violation of ethics, and she has missed out the humane side of research too.

Attempting to categorize Prannath as either Hindu or Muslim is misleading, like trying to describe water as either vapour or ice, not water. In fact, any literature or person is not devoid of the context and the prevalent political, social environment. Prannath belonged to the generation after Kabir, Dadu, Nanak etc., and the Bhakti reformers. That was the time of religious experimentation, innovation. Out of context, one cannot understand Devchandra and Prannath and the religion of ‘Din-e-Islaam’ or ‘Nijanand’ that they founded, however ill-fitted or well grafted it may seem to be, depending on one’s perspective.

Even if for the sake of argument one agrees that Prannath embraced Islam from Merta in Rajasthan but Prannath himself compiled his writing in Panna, which was the place where he finally settled down and took samadhi much after Merta. He did not eliminate the first half of the Kuljam Swaroop which deals with Raas, and Lila of Krishna and Gopi, Paramdham and other Hindu aspects, somehow he considered them an important part of his beliefs. Raas and Lila are so important that is the way the Pranamis relate to Prannath, he is their beloved and they are his lovers. Prannath himself stated this, he is their ‘nath’ or ‘lord’, and they (his followers) are his consort (Shyama). That is also the reason why he is called ‘Prannath’, the lord of one’s soul. He stated that the way to serve the lord or him is like one serves one’s lord or lover or husband. The Pranami people do not partake ‘prasad’ or offering from any other temple. They reason – ‘you eat only your husband’s leftovers, not his friend’s’. Further, if one considers it an Islamic religion then one has to take into consideration the influence of Hinduism on Islam. Prannath’s being a Nizari Ismaili missionary is not important any longer because the trajectory of the religion in the last 300 years has led it to lean more towards Hinduism. No socio-cultural environment exists or has an identity independently of the way human beings give meanings to their experiences, even though every person’s subjectivity and mental life are outcomes from his or her socio-cultural environment. As a matter of fact the religion attracted mainly Hindu followers. Prannath reminds one of Kabir, but whereas Kabir
derided and rejected the scriptures Prannath built the religion on their basis. It is not easy to fit both in the straitjacket of either ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’. They belong and do not belong to either. They are a definition unto themselves.

The lived culture of Pranamis today is nearer to Hindu beliefs and practices especially the Vaishnav practices today. Besides Hinduism, Islam, Ismailism, Sufism, Jainism, Sindhi and Gujrati culture all have their place in the text. Attempting to retrieve red and blue from the color purple would be impossible without destroying the color purple. The identity of the community is that they are ‘Pranami’, ‘Nijanandi’, Prannathi, Dhami. Multi religious/plural is a category complete in itself. It does not need the crutches of Hinduism or Islam. Attempting to give meaning to single pieces of a puzzle would be inaccurate and problematic. It has to be seen as a whole.
Prannath’s Text and Teachings

*Sarguna ki seva karo, nirguna ka kar dhyan
Sarguna nirguna ke pare, tahan hamara gyan*

– Kabirdas

*Khasam ek saban ka, nahin doosara koi.
Ae vichar to kare, jo aap sanche hoi*

– Prannath

Prannath called the ultimate indestructible masculine god of the Puranas and the Allah who lived beyond the four heavens as Rajji. Rajji’s feminine escort he called Shyamaji. It is not easy to understand Pranami scriptures as they are complex and require an a priori knowledge of the Vedas, Puranas, Koran and T absorbing factor is the language – Hindvi, Sindhi, Gujrati, Arabic etc. The other outstanding feature in Prannath’s writings is how he and others of that era drew from each other’s traditions and scriptures. In Prannath’s works the influence of the Bhakti and Sant traditions is unmistakable. As one reads the Kuljam Swaroop one can see him incorporating, adapting and assimilating the various religions and finally developing his unique worldview and synthesis.

In his early compositions Prannath displays an intimate familiarity with the practices and beliefs involved in the worship of Krishna especially as it existed in the Braj-Mathura traditions. The influence of the Bhakti movement is apparent from the emphasis on ‘viraha’ (separation) and the references to Bhagawat Purana and Vedas. In his text Kirantan his familiarity with the Jain beliefs and their penitential practices stands out.

A second phase discernible is Prannath’s engagement with the Sufi tradition. Sufi concepts of ‘ishq, ashiq, and mashuq’ (love, the lover and the beloved) gain entry in the text Sanandh. Of course Sufi and Bhakti movements exchanged many beliefs and were more similar than different. Both movements rejected the rigid, orthodox, religious systems of exclusivist Islam and orthodox Brahminism anchored in caste hierarchies. Both shared the theme of separation from the beloved.
Both emphasized the devotional and mystical practice of striving for the annihilation of one’s ego in order to merge with the beloved. At the age of 63 Prannath finally wrote Marfar Sagar and Kayamat Nama, which reflect Prannath’s understanding of Ismaili beliefs and writings. In a very heavily Persianized and Arabicized vocabulary he carries out an exegesis of the Koran.

Prannath reminds one of Kabirdas since both attempted to bring together beliefs from the Islamic and Vaishnava traditions. Both spoke out against orthodox practices, criticized the orthodox members – the Mullah and Pundits. Both used the local language of the masses-Sadhukaddi and Hindvi. But there is one vital difference – Kabir tended to be contemptuous towards the usefulness of the scriptures; Prannath based his teachings on the scriptures.

A brief outline of the 14 texts would give a clearer perspective on his beliefs. All his texts talk about the similarity that exists between the two religions and he explains how both are stating the same things using different words.

1) Shri Raas is the first composition written in Jamnagar in jail in 1657. It is in Gujarati. In this Prannath reveals the Brij Lila and Raas Lila of Krishna in Vrindavan.

2) Prakash is again written in Gujarati and Hindustani and is his second composition. In this he deals with the theme of viraha and the anguish of the souls separated from the lord.

3) Shatritu was written in Jamnagar and is in Gujarati and discusses the same theme of separation and union with the beloved God.

4) Kalash he started writing in 1658 and completed in 1671. In this book he opposes unnecessary rituals and customs. He talks of Jagini i.e. the awakening of the souls. It is written in Gujarati.

5) Sanadh was composed in 1658 and is written in Hindvi. Here he focuses on the similarities between the various religious teachings.

6) Kirantan is written in Hindvi in the period 1658-1683. It is Prannath’s symphony containing songs and bhajans. Here he defines a true Hindu.

7) Khulasa was written in Panna in 1683-1690. It is written in Hindvi and in it Prannath clarifies the concepts of the Koran and explains its unity with the Purana.
8) **Khilavat** was composed in the period 1683-1690. It was written in Panna. It means silent unity, in Arabic. Here Prannath reveals the union of the beloved (soul) with the lover (God).

9) **Parikrama** was written in 1684 in Panna. Its language is Hindvi. In this the joys and beauty of Paramdham the Lord’s abode is discussed.

10) **Sagar** was composed in Panna in 1687, and in this the description of the mythological seas of the lord are discussed.

11) **Sindhi Vani** is written in Sindhi, which was Prannath’s mother tongue. In this he discusses his role and reason for coming to this world.

12) **Shingar** was composed in 1685 and is again in Hindvi the local language. Here the celestial form of the lord and his qualities and beauty are discussed.

13) **Marfat Sagar** was written in 1691 in Arabic, Persian and Hindvi. Marfat means complete knowledge. In this Prannath analyses the Koran and reveals its esoteric and symbolic meaning along with the literal meaning.

14) **Kayamatnama** has two parts ‘chhota’ and ‘bara’ Kayamatnama. It was written in the period 1688-1689 in Chitrakoot near Panna. The language is Arabic, Persian and Urdu. These two texts talk of the judgment day and what it means symbolically. He describes his role and that of his Guru Devchandra in the general scheme of the divine world and the reason for his incarnation.

Some of the Chaupai from the Kuljam Swaroop, the revered text of the Pranamis, given below, illustrate the flavour of Prannath’s poetry and thinking. They are not even a bird’s eye view from a plethora of 19,000 compositions. He discusses all religions, Veda, Purana, Islam, Jainism, Kabir, and Buddha. One has to look at it in totality, as a whole, to truly understand what he wanted to say.

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Triloki me re uttam khand bharat ka, tamme uttam Hindu dharma takke chattrapatiyon ke sar, aaye rahie et saram
(In all the three worlds, the best is Bharat, in all the religions, the superior is Hindu religion, where great souls have come to. The country now is again asking for sacrifice to protect the religion/dharma then why are the people quiet. This he spoke when he wanted the people to protest against Aurangzeb’s excesses.).
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Shastra sabe jo granth, take karte thae anarth
Bina Imam na koi samarth jo pat khol kare arath
(All the scriptures are meaningless, till the Imam comes and reveals their true meaning).

Jer bhaye sab pandit, fateh bhai Islam
Kafar muh syah hoyke le gaye apne tham
(All the pundits were defeated, it was the victory of Islam, and the unbelievers were full of shame and went back to their place.)

Ab me sath Islam ka sabe karo ek thor
Ucchav rasoi karke seva kara ati zor
(Now I will gather all the disciples of Islam and organizing a feast will do great and meritorious service)

Pahle din Islam me gangji bhai dhare kadam
Seva kari Shri Devchandrji ki kadmon sonpi ataan
[First of all Gangji Bhai, a disciple of Prannath in Merta when Prannath realized the esoteric meaning of Kalma and Islam, made his step towards Islam serving Devchandra, he entrusted his soul at his feet).

Yaad karo Islam ko, chalo rah Islam par
(Remember the eternal abode, and tread the path of Islam)

On the unity between the two religions, he writes
Naam saron juda dhare, lae sabon judi rasam
Sab mein umat or duniya, soi khuda, soi brahma
(There is only the difference of name and rituals, in fact Khuda and Brahma are the same)

Jo kuch kaha kateb ne, so kahiya veda
Dou bande ek saheb ke, par ladath bina paye bhed
Boil sabon juda pair. Naam Jude dhare saban,
Chelan juda kar lima. That he same na pair kin
(The Koran and the Vedas emphasize the same thing. Both Hindus and Muslims are the disciples of the same Master, but the differences of language, names and customs have created problems.)
Saheb aaye en jay, kea karee teen
Sake Jade met eke, yaw duniya, yaw din
(The master has come to fulfill three jobs, to remove all conflicts,
to unite mankind and proclaim the essential unity of all faiths).

Prannath is equally unsparing to both Hindus and Muslims
concerning their rituals etc.

Kare jump garb par, koi na kasha faraday
Kar sunhat ghost khilavahin kahein home hot sahab.
Khana khilave aap mein dekhlave masit mehrab
Lekar kalma padavahi kahe hamme hot sabab
Koi jalim, jeev janam ka, khuraki ghost saraab.
Tinko leven deen mein, kahen humme hot sabab
(They oppress the poor. None redresses the wrong done to them.
They inflict circumcision and forcibly make them eat meat. They
compel them to visit the mosque and recite the kalma and deem it
to be meritorious. They allow a born-tyrant addicted to meat and
wine to embrace Islam and consider it to be a pious deed).

Jo dukh deve kinko, so nahin musalman
Nabi ae musalman ka, naam dharya meherban
(One who oppresses others is not a Musalman. The prophet named
Musalman as the one who is kind and compassionate.)

Ab kaho kake chuye, aang log chhot
Aadham tum vipre ange, chandal ang udhyot
(Now tell me who is an untouchable, the Brahmin with a callous
heart or a Chandal with an enlightened soul)

Par savab to tinko hobahin, chhota bade sab ek
Eken nazaron dekhin sabka khabind piyu
(The true piety is to love all, the great and small alike because the
God of all is one, the protector is one)

Ved aaya devan pe, asuran pe Koran
Mool mayne ultaye ke, kai jaher kiye toofan
(The Veda and the Koran came in different forms because the audience
was different. Vedas came to people who were civilized i.e. the Deva,
whereas to the uncivilized nomadic tribes Asura came the Koran,
hence the difference. And this difference has created a storm).
Asur lagaye re Hindu par zajiya, bako mile nahin khan pan
Jo garib na de sake Zajiya, thathe markarein musalman
(Only the demon can inflict the Zajiya tax on the Hindus. It is not religion, it is not Islam)

His coming, his role, his reason for incarnation he explains as
Tum dhundo apne khilke mahein. Tin mein saheb aaya nahin
Jinko tum kahte Kafir jaat, so sabki karsi sifat
Rab na rakhe kisi ka guman, oh to garibon par meherban
(The one you look for, the Imam, will not be born amongst you. The ones you call Kafir that is the veil he will don. The God does not tolerate pride, arrogance; he is kind to the poor and helpless)

Padiyo nahi Pharsi, na kachu harab arab,
Suniyo na kaan Koran ko, par kholat mayine saab
(I have not read Persian, nor Arabic or Hebrew, nor heard the Koran, yet I reveal the inner meaning of all)

Ya Koran ya Poran, ye kagad do praman.
(The Koran and the Purana are the proof. The meaning of both and the key of both are with Prannath who is the one who will unravel the secrets and meaning of both)

The Kuljam Swaroop is a researcher’s delight. Literally the first half is Puranic and the latter Koranic. For every ‘Chaupai’ in which Prannath talks of the Koran, there is another where he talks of the Purana. For an outsider like me who is no expert on the Purana or the Koran, reading and listening to their text has given me not only the essence of the two texts, but like a key that unlocks or a ‘Kunji’ that gives a concise answer, the ‘Kuljam Swaroop’ does just that. A Pranami who listens to it right from childhood reflects this deep understanding of the two religions even though he has not read either, but has read only the ‘Kuljam Swaroop’, and this is a defining trait of the entire community, even the younger generations. With ease and finesse they would draw equivalences and parallels between the two religions, all of it written by Prannath.

The verses quoted above are some of his compositions related to social and political events. He has written poems on ‘virah’, ‘raas’, ‘paramdham’ and many other topics that are beyond the scope of this paper, but nevertheless reveal the genius of Prannath.
Chapter 8

Overview

How does one recapsulate interactions between peoples or between two communities that have lived and interacted with each other for more than 900 years? Reading and rereading the history books is futile because the official versions are somehow always doctored. History lies in the memories and recollections of the people. These reconstructions are somehow more alive and authentic. While history taught that Hinduism and Islam were two opposing religions and the creation of Pakistan was inevitable, people’s stories are different. It is plurality, cultural exchanges and overlapping practices and shared spaces – that was our spirit. People belonged to a place, and had a culture, which religion did not interfere with. For instance Punjabis were similar whether they were Hindus or Muslims. This peaked during the Bhakti movement leading to various religious experiments that led to further intermingling.

Partition brought an alien concept of nation state that required clear definitions of one’s self in terms of religious, cultural, psychological boundaries. Identity formation is always very painful and violent whether it is internal or external. The violence arose not because we were two different communities but because we could not be too different. The violence actually cut us in half. In this process the multireligious communities faced a backlash from both communities, completing the separation.

Pranamis are multireligious. During partition they were targets of organized killings by the Muslims due to which they withdrew into a shell and became secretive about certain aspects of their religion. As a community they are more community-oriented than individual. Their religion helped them cope with the trauma and loss that the violence brought about in their lives. Their lifestyle almost reminds one of the era most of us have forgotten – with their old kind of houses, and lifestyles that bring back nostalgic memories. Their comprehensive knowledge about the symbolic understandings of Hinduism and Islam was exceptional. With the help of the two life histories I have attempted to bring out the inner dynamics of what trauma does. BC became a
shaman and turned to God to deal with his fear and guilt of leaving his son back. Reshma too became more religious after the episode. BC gave up all luxuries in his life, as did Reshma. BC’s wife was still under stress. They and many others like them have converted themselves into memorials of the living dead. Yet they are not bitter about the Muslims, their life is not consumed in hate. Forgiving is an important part of any religion but for the Pranamis pain is given to those who are special and chosen. Tough times are the lord’s testing times and one is lucky to undergo pain. The incident increased their faith in God rather than diminishing it. I have been attending their various religious functions, meeting their religious heads and interacting with the community members. To say that they are bound by their religion is an understatement. Their world is their community and their religion and life revolves around it. In Panna, in Karnal, in Ratanpuri in Uttar Pradesh thousands of devotees gather. Yet even within those closed premises they do not recite the Islamic verses loudly, or discuss the Islamic aspects of their religion. They are cautious: only the Hindu aspects are recited loudly and discussed loudly.

The route to healing is in helping them voice their life and pain. Another part is accepting the community for what it stands for. Rather than point and highlight the peculiarities or dissimilarity and similarity viz a viz Hinduism or Islam, or define them against the backdrop of the two religions, we let them define themselves.

Personally interacting and interviewing the people has been a great learning experience for me. No amount of textbook learning and training can prepare you for what you experience in the field. When I was interviewing many of the people I was empathic yes, but I was in control of my emotions. But when I have been transcribing the interviews it has been tough. The flow of tears took even me by surprise. The horror of their lives and the pain seems to hit hardest when one is alone, safely ensconced within the warm walls of one’s home. I have also witnessed their fear, anger and agitation at Dominique’s book and their resolution to file a case and then backtrack considering that she is a Muslim and justify to themselves collectively that it is better not to provoke and confront Muslims, they’ve had one experience and don’t want another. It is better for them to change. Yet I could not help marveling at their resilience because they have lived and coped with their troubles and none from the community had a permanent breakdown after partition. Many had discussed partition for the first time after 1947 and so they
also at times were taken aback at their reactions to it after so many years. They were also surprised at their memory, how vivid it still was regarding that time. Many formed a bond as I was the only other witness to their experience and even after the interview they wanted me to keep in touch with them. For some of the respondents, talking about the event was very traumatic and their family members specifically asked me to not trouble them more as it takes those people days to bring the person back to normal.

I have also had to negotiate and answer various uncomfortable questions to myself; work through my guilt. But what assured me about the validity of my work was when at the end of the interview after both the respondent and I have worked through the difficult phases; the persons have felt relieved and towards the end often have even thanked me for listening and giving them time. Listening is therapeutic is one of the important things that has been reinforced for me while doing this research. One can never totally capture the interpersonal dynamics in words – the only thing I can say with certainty is that I have learnt valuable lessons in tolerance, resilience, forgiveness and courage from these people.

I would like to sum up this study of the community by narrating an incident that everyone in the community talks about and that captures, and in a way answers, the predicament of multireligious communities. One of the Pranami women recounted how in 1942 they were fighting a case to prove they were Hindus and not Muslims. The priest in Nepal had removed the latter Koranic half of the ‘Kuljam Swaroop’, to prove that they were Hindus. After that incident the priest suffered a stroke of paralysis where half his body was paralyzed. He believed and told the members of the community that since he had cut Rajji into two parts, Rajji had rendered half his body useless. He was rightfully suffering for the sin, the transgression he committed. That was his punishment and restitution. He remained paralyzed until his death.
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