



Editor's Note



Because he was harmless, the guards let him stand right where he was while they got on with their work. He was quiet all night, but just before sunrise, he screamed. Officials came running from all sides. After fifteen years on his feet, he was lying face down on the ground. India was on one side, behind a barbed wire fence. Pakistan was on the other side, behind another fence. Toba Tek Singh lay in the middle, on a piece of land that had no name.

-Sa'adat Hassan Manto, Toba Tek Singh (Trans. by Richard McGill Murphy)

With this quote, at The Dialogue Box, we welcome our readers to go through an anthology curated, created and researched by various authors from multiple institutions. The quotation also marks the unending nature and discourse of Partition. Much like our previously published issues, the debate of Partition is perceived as important for contemporary discussion. What we seek in our issue for September is an unfortunate continuity that marked not just India but several constituencies around the world.

One has to ponder upon the idea of a displaced population due to arbitrary nation-formation processes. With such sudden displacements, the human psyche goes through layers of trauma that one cannot formulate or comprehend. Hence, disciplines like Trauma Studies, Memory Studies and Literary Studies help us to articulate a sort of metalanguage to discuss the testimonies of millions of people.

Furthermore, a looming question over the theme of the issue might also be temporally motivated. The valid criticism of, “Why do research on Partition, now?” For this, we have an apt description. Regarding the issues of Partition, one has to be chronologically sensitive. This sensitivity, or rather this forcibly generated sensibility, occurs only to remind us about the pastness of the present. The workings of trauma that travel through the majoritarian power blocs to the individual and marginalised survivors of the Partition. These streams of trauma do not just transcend time but also generations—giving rise to the famous concept of “postmemory”.

It explains the modification of ideologies concerning nation-building, national animosity and cultural beliefs of people who are still, to some extent, affected by the event. One cannot begin to discuss these issues without acknowledging the social and power relations that feed upon the event of separation.

These tacit power relations are reflected in literary texts related to the Partition. Thus, it is not a coincidence that our latest issue takes a more literary and cultural stance in understanding the plight of the people. The literary pieces become these screams of traumatic wounds that cry out for their relief. A form of relief that is not possible. Cathy Caruth's idea of trauma, thus, finalises and seals the (un)becoming of the traumatic subject. They are locked in a state where the traumatic event, because of its “belatedness” is stuck on a repeat. Like a horrifying scratched record playing in your mind involuntarily.

Much like any other injuries to the psyche, Partition was also only registered after some time. Under the banners of national freedom and Independence, it was supposed to be forgotten. But when has repression ever stopped the memory that the brain tries to repress? In this light, our latest issue has brought to you an emancipatory look at trauma. A step towards understanding the meanings that lay hidden within the masses who lived through it. A liberatory effort to listen to unheard testimonies.

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