

Intergenerational Memories of (1947) Partition: A Collective Remembering

A brief background about the Partition of British India in 1947:

The Partition of 1947 resulted to mass-migration of South Asians to the United Kingdom. A historic event that changed the life of millions of people belonging to the Indian sub-continent. This also had permanent ramification in the lives of the displaced communities. Partition memories continue to influence and impact the political relations between the two nation states of India and Pakistan and the social life of the diasporic communities from South Asia that are living in the UK.

"Intergenerational Memories of (1947) Partition: A Collective Remembering" took place on the 8th of March at the Oculus building, University of Warwick. The co-creation project was funded by IATL and WICID (PAIS). The event brought together South Asians who had experienced the partition of British India in 1947, along with active participation from Warwick students, creating a unique co-creative project. The aim was to explore intergenerational memories in a time when colonial history is being reckoned with in the UK.

This event held great importance as it informed and opened dialogues within the diaspora community settled in Coventry, Birmingham, and Leicester. These dialogues and understandings became crucial and urgent, particularly in the post-pandemic era, to navigate the complexities of a tumultuous past.

The event was followed by an exhibition. The exhibition focused on the connection between memorialized and silenced aspects of the partition, examining how memories are preserved and recreated through cultural vehicles such as photographs, objects, and memorabilia. Through visual and material culture, the event explored the negotiations of the past in the contemporary moment, considering processes of narration, forgetting, and re-remembering.

Eight outcomes emerged from the event:

1. Increased intergenerational understanding: Meaningful conversations bridged gaps between different generations, fostering empathy and unity among community members.
2. Preservation of cultural heritage: The project contributed to the preservation and documentation of the diverse cultural heritage of South Asians who migrated to the United Kingdom, safeguarding stories and artifacts for future generations.
3. Strengthened community bonds: The event served as a platform for collaboration, creating stronger connections and a more tightly knit community.
4. Empowered marginalized voices: Participants had the opportunity to reclaim their narratives and challenge dominant historical perspectives, promoting inclusivity and diverse viewpoints.
5. Promotion of interfaith dialogue: Interactions among Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu participants facilitated understanding and harmony among different religious groups.

6. Enhanced cultural appreciation: The sharing of family histories, objects, and oral narratives fostered a deeper appreciation for the rich cultural heritage of the South Asian community.
7. Generation of educational resources: The event resulted in the creation of responses that will benefit research on decolonising Partition and in understanding minority South Asian diaspora communities living in Midland's vis-e-vis cultural vehicles such as photographs, objects. The online link to the documentary can be shared to educate future generations about the partition and migration.
8. Facilitation of identity negotiation: Participants engaged in self-reflection, negotiating, and exploring their identities in the context of their family's history. In conclusion, "Intergenerational Memories of (1947) Partition: A Collective Remembering" was a significant event that fostered intergenerational understanding, empowered marginalized voices, and preserved cultural heritage.

In addition to the outcomes mentioned above, the event highlighted the power of co-creation and knowledge exchange among community members, different ethnic groups, students, and educational institutions. It served as a platform for meaningful interactions and collaboration, fostering a vibrant environment for shared learning and understanding. The co-creative aspect of the event allowed participants to actively contribute their perspectives, experiences, and expertise. Community members belonging to diverse ethnic backgrounds, including Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu groups, brought forth their unique narratives, objects, and photographs. Their active involvement in shaping the event ensured that it truly represented the collective memories of the partition and its impact on their lives.

Furthermore, the participation of Warwick students added a fresh perspective and youthful energy to the project. Their engagement and dialogue with the South Asian community members created an enriching environment for mutual learning. Students had the opportunity to gain first-hand insights into the experiences and memories of the partition, deepening their understanding of this significant historical event. The event served as a bridge between academic institutions and the community, fostering a reciprocal exchange of knowledge and understanding.

Educational institutions, such as the University of Warwick, played a vital role in facilitating the event and providing the necessary resources and support. Their involvement not only underscored the commitment to promoting diversity and inclusivity but also showcased the potential of universities as spaces for meaningful community engagement. The event provided a platform for students and educational institutions to actively participate in local community initiatives, fostering a sense of social responsibility and civic engagement among the younger generation.

The knowledge exchange that took place during the event was not limited to the sharing of personal stories and memories. It also encompassed broader discussions about the historical context, socio-political implications, and cultural significance of the partition. Through panel discussions, workshops, and presentations, participants were able to explore various aspects of the partition, enabling a deeper understanding and appreciation of this complex historical event.

The event's success and positive feedback from participants, including both community members and students, highlighted the importance of fostering ongoing collaborations and co-creative projects. Many participants expressed their desire for future events that would continue to provide platforms for dialogue, knowledge exchange, and community-building. They recognized the transformative potential of such initiatives in promoting intergenerational understanding, preserving cultural heritage, and challenging dominant narratives.

The active participation and positive feedback from Warwick students demonstrated the success of the co-creative project. Their desire for future events of this nature emphasized the importance of continued dialogue and understanding.

Overall, the event served as a testament to the power of co-creation and knowledge exchange between community members, different ethnic groups, students, and educational institutions. It showcased the immense value of engaging diverse voices and perspectives in preserving collective memories and fostering a more inclusive and empathetic society. By actively involving the community and educational institutions in collaborative endeavours, we can create spaces that facilitate meaningful dialogue, bridge intergenerational gaps, and promote a deeper understanding of our shared history.

Dr Aditi Kumar
Visiting Fellow
WICID (PAIS)