

Raminder Kaur's script for Silent Sisters has been informed by historical research on India's partition, and interviews and workshops with more than 50 British Asians mainly based in Sussex. A few anonymised excerpts of peoples' experiences are included below as not all of the stories could of course be included in the script under development. We would like to extend a special thanks to everyone who shared their time and contributed to the research process.

'My great grandparents were freedom fighters. My great grandmother was a freedom fighter. They were all involved in the freedom struggle. They lived in Delhi. They were from a Nawabi background. So they had a lot of money, wealth, power and all of that. Partition happened and they were completely surrounded by a mob, and they were going to break down their door and kill all of them. Both were very secular. They did not believe that partition could happen. They refused to move. They were thinking: our neighbours would never let this happen; we are safe in our locality. So they refused to move. Until the mob came...My great grandfather had his hunting rifle ready. And he had six daughters. There was no poison at home. If the mob breaks through in then he was ready to shoot and kill his daughters because he didn't want them to be raped and then killed. It was only because my great grandmother's brother in law who had connections with politicians. They were airlifted out...in the nick of time. She had to leave everything behind. They were just air lifted. She had literally nothing. They moved to Calcutta which was where they started. I'm sitting here today because of the decision my great grandmother had made at that time. She had a few gold bangles. She sold all of them. And instead of keeping them for her daughter's dowry or for food or for shelter, she put her daughters into schools. And those daughters went on to become successful women in their own respective

fields, and then their daughters, well one of them is me. It was a very testing time. I think people's true character was tested at that time. It was horrible and vicious and there was so much blood everywhere but you had to be very fast and grow out of it.'

(female, 20s, Brighton)

'I was 8 at the time [of partition]. I did not understand everything but there are some things I remember and some that were explained to me afterwards out of which I put things together to make sense of what happened. I'm from Lyallpur, which is near Lahore. If we go high up onto the roof, we could see the fires in Lahore. We were scared, that it would come our way. I was at my in-laws house, and then I came back to home. We went to my maasi's [mother's sister] house as she had a big house with big walls. We all had big houses with lots of land. In their house, they had so much in dowry that a whole room was full of gold. We tried to hide it in the house. We all thought we'd come back. No one had any idea [about what would happen around partition]. It happened so suddenly. My dad was an educationalist. He knew some people in the military and they managed to get some trucks across for the young girls and women. I went on the truck, and they took me to safety, a refugee camp. We used to stand in lines for food and water. I don't remember whether I changed my clothes or not. But I had nothing with me. I heard that my nana and nani [maternal grandparents] ran from the hordes. And my nani fell as her foot got stuck in the uneven land. She fell and they took her. My nana survived. He kept running...People ran and hid in the dark if they were left alone. Some went in the drains (naalia). This was how desperate it was'. (female 70s, Crawley)

'My father is a Sufi, and my great great grandfather was a Sufi saint. He grew up during the Raj [British colonial era] and they put partition right through his village...But he never talked about it...When I approached my father about it, he found it very difficult. But he did manage to bring out a full poster size photograph of the palace he grew up in. And I managed to take a photograph of it...It's not there anymore. So my great grandfather's grave is looked after by Sikhs, and that's on the Indian side now. It's on YouTube. I can see his shrine on YouTube...But when he died recently, then some of the uncles began to speak a little more...I learnt that he escorted Jinnah to that meeting with Radcliffe when they drew the line. At that time he would have been 19, 20. I'm imagining that he very much grew up with the idea of having an Islamic saint. But also he was a Sufi, so completely open-minded and a socialist. He had friends from all nationalities. He didn't discriminate...When the British left, he had first hand witnessed the violence. They were telling me that his servants got their heads chopped off with a machete... A lot of his family went to Lahore. The British manipulated, caused political unrest in a country that was operating quite well with all the religions that were going on before. He was very much involved with the political activities. I need to dig deep, now that I'm in touch with his side of the family. I can ask them...He hardly went back. We went as a family when I think was 4 years old. For 8 months. But I don't remember much. He had two separate lives. I begged him at the end: can we write your memories and can we record it? But he found it too painful because he witnessed these atrocities first hand.' (female, 40s, Brighton)

'Both my parents' family are from a place in Pakistan. The stories come from my paternal grandfather and maternal grandmother. They tell a similar story in that they

were both moneyed, wealthy landowners such that my grandmother was 'too posh' to go to school even. They had a nice life. Seemingly out of nowhere bloodshed and violence erupted all around them. Everyone knows the story – trains coming with everyone killed, people being murdered and raped in the streets....The rape fear was so strong. Everyone was petrified about what to do with the women. What was going to happen to them if they got caught. And yet it was quite normal when you were told it was always preferable to be killed by a family member rather than be subjected to gang rape which now seems absurd. I can't remember how my mum's side left. But my dad's side managed to get a plane. So just leaving everything. Packing up a few pots and pans. Anything you can carry. My mum had measles at the time. So her family all went ahead. And my mum and her parents stayed behind as a unit as she wasn't well enough to travel. I'm not sure how they managed to get across. And there's this story of arriving in Delhi and life being very difficult. Initially not in a refugee camp. Then in a refugee camp for some time. Then that was followed by many decades of grinding poverty, reading by lamplight. Both families became were very very poor and education was the only way out. To be fair, both families did extremely well and then prospered. Emotionally their responses were very different. My paternal grandfather was just scarred. Looking back I suspect he had PTSD [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder]. Whenever he talked about it, his eyes would fill up, he was just in deep trauma. Even when he talks about it decades later. He has become a very very mistrustful paranoid individual. I think it ruined his capacity to love, so it completely ruined his family life which is sad. Whereas on my mother's side - my grandmother is just this incredible woman...She remained psychologically robust...and somehow she was able to make some peace with it so it wasn't such a traumatising event. ...My dad and uncles still have some paranoiac

tendency. You can see how this emotional trauma has impacted on their children, and perhaps their children's children' (female, Brighton, 40s).

'I remember the rains and the floods [when we were leaving what is now Pakistan]. There was so much rain around that time. We were wet through and through. We were walking. Some of us had a gadda (bullock cart) which carried some mattresses, food. But we had to throw things away as it was getting too heavy. One time we were sitting on the edge of a road surrounded by water. We could not move....I saw a documentary recently about nomads in Kenya and they have to go through a valley to get to the other side. And there are crocodiles waiting in the river on the way. That's how it was like. We were surrounded by water and mobs would lie around like crocodiles waiting to attack us. We were most vulnerable at night. But the boys used to get whatever they had – swords, stones – to make sure we stayed safe. It was a very bad time. A very bad time. I would not wish for anyone to go through anything like we did'. (male, 70s, Crawley)