

SSHRC STORYTELLERS CHALLENGE 2024

Top 20 Finalists

CONCOURS J'AI UNE HISTOIRE À RACONTER 2024 DU CRSH

20 finalistes



Phase 1: SSHRC Storytellers Submission

Sunjay Mathuria

Title:

The Researcher: Locating the Personal Geographies in Post-Partition Displacements and Returns





This image and accompanying text describe the researcher's unexpected encounter with an ancestor's home in Lahore, a place they had to flee over 75 years ago as a result of the Partition of British India. This auto-ethnographic method highlights the importance of researcher positionality and the interconnections of self/home, place, and generational memory.

In 1947, someone closes the door for the last time, touches it. Locks it, leaves the key with a neighbour, a friend, a family member, promises to return. Someone promises “when” but never utters “if”. Someone looks at their home for the last time, walks down the laneway, turns their back on their street, heads east. Lahore is temporarily a warzone. It is on fire. Violence quells the fortified streets, a haze of smoke hangs in the air, and trains continue to carry mutilated bodies into the city. The shells of buildings collapse on this land sacred to all Punjabis. After the chaos, a new family moves in and two stories become intertwined.

In 2023, I try looking for the door, fail, and come back again. An elderly man finishes his prayer and says he was just thinking about me, hoping I'd return. We walk around through the crammed streets for hours, looking for clues. He won't leave until he has delivered me to the place of my ancestors.

I look at the door. I am the first to return. The door marks the beginning of a rupture - it is a multi-generational story, for those who fled and those who arrived. The door is burdened with a generational trauma that has cascaded across geographies. We have looked for this door in other places but became distrustful of allure of permanence and rootedness. I open the door for someone, I am not sure for whom.

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