

Broken Seeds Still Grow

Nava Dance Theatre and Rupy C. Tut

Program

I. When I Return

Dancers: Nadhi, Shruti, Priyanka

Artwork: “Mountain”, “Home”, “Forest”, “Cloud”

“When I return to the banks of the Dhansiri, to this Bengal,
Not as a man, perhaps, but as a Myna bird or white hawk,
Perhaps as a dawn crow in this land of autumn’s new harvest,
I’ll float upon the breasts of fog one day in the shade of a jackfruit tree.”

By Jibanananda Das (1899-1954)

Excerpt from “When I Return” (Bengali)

Translation by Clinton B. Seely

For many Partition witnesses who left as children, once the border was drawn, their childhood also became a place they could never go back to. One witness said, that ever since he left his ancestral home, he felt like a potted plant, never being able to take root no matter where he moved. In contrast, here we are in a time and a place where moving comes a little too easily to us. What does it mean to go back? To a time and place where life was simple? Where we could feel the specks of earth rubbed into our fingertips. What does it mean to call someplace home?

II. Poisoned Water

Dancers: Nadhi, Shruti, Lalli, Janani, Aishwarya

Artwork: “Burning Landscape”(video)

“Someone filled the five rivers with poison,
And this same water now irrigates our soil.”

By Amrita Preetam (1919-2005)

Excerpt from “Ajj Aakhan Waris Shah Nu” (Punjabi)

Translation by Rupy C. Tut

Partition witnesses often spoke about pre-Partition time being fairly secular and peaceful. However, something in the air seemed to change. Many of the witnesses from the 1947 Partition Archive who are living now were children or adolescents during the months leading up to Partition, and at the time there was a general lack of exact certainty on how people’s viewpoints began shifting. Once viewpoints started shifting, attitudes started changing.

III. Dance of Destruction

Dancers: Shruti, Lalli, Janani, Aishwarya

Artwork: “Fire”, “Blood”

“I still cannot understand what happened to me....We were swept away by this wild wave of hatred....I cannot even remember how many men I actually killed. It was a phase, a state of mind over which we had no control.”

Witness Account from “The Other Side of Silence” by Urvashi Butalia

The level of violence reiterated in the witness accounts was a shock to the system. We often found ourselves wondering how this wasn’t a major part of our education either in the US or in India. Once it started, it seemed to spread like fire. The riots, mob

mentality, targeted violence motivated by religious fanaticism were just some of the reasons people started leaving home long before partition boundaries were announced.

IV. Where Do We Draw The Line?

Dancer: Nadhi

Artwork: “Here Comes the Savior”

“He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate of millions...”

By W.H. Auden (1907-1973), Excerpt from “Partition” (English)

Partition borders were drawn to both appease and undermine the political sway of various minority groups. However these actions in large part created 15 million refugees and resulted in the death of over a million people and has affected people for generations. Why do we feel like an outsider should come and fix everything? Sometimes it’s hard to see what does more harm than good.

V. Burden

Dancers: Nadhi, Shruti, Lalli, Shelley, Aishwarya

Artwork: “Burden”

This piece is inspired by the common themes Nadhi and Rupy discovered while listening to and reading a number of witness accounts of Partition, both from the 1947 Partition Archive and from the books they referenced. Many talked about the struggle of leaving home, and of carrying that burden alone, so that their children and grandchildren could move on and start new lives as quickly as possible. Many witness accounts included describing months spent in refugee camps, starving, losing family to violence, hunger, disease, a forcible dismantling of the world they knew. Many never spoke of this burden and remained largely silent.

VI. Loss

Narration: Rupy C. Tut

Artwork: “A Boat to Nowhere”

“For a long time we have endured hardships and sorrow,
Now, I am ashamed to call this homeland my home.”

By Unknown Poet

Translated from Urdu to English by Rupy C. Tut

Partition stories shared by Rupy’s Grandfather often ended with him speaking a couplet in Urdu that reflected the disappointment felt by people who were uprooted, suffered loss, and faced tragedy during that time. These people had no country to call their own as they left their former homes and were seen as refugees and outsiders in their new home. We may never fully understand what that struggle was like for him, his family, and countless others. But we can honor their stories and memories by reflecting on them now.

VII. Reminisce

Dancers: Nadhi, Lalli, Sanjana, Priyanka, Janani, Aishwarya, Shelley

Artwork: “Calligraphy Series, slides 1-10”

Dialogue: Rupy C. Tut

Featuring narrated excerpts from witness accounts collected by citizen historians of the 1947 Partition Archive (Based in Berkeley & New Delhi) and excerpts from “The Other Side of Silence”, by Urvashi Butalia.

Going through the witness accounts, we could feel the witnesses remembering not only what happened, but how they felt when their worlds started unravelling; kidnapping, murder, violence against women and more. Many thought they might go back, that this would only be temporary, but soon realized that they would never see their homes again. How do we remember these stories 75 years later? How can we learn from them now?

*****INTERMISSION*****

VIII. When Things Don't Change

Dancers: Nadhi and Shruti

Artwork: "Demon"

Narrator: Rupy C. Tut

...This is my country. Go back to your country. This is my home, not your home. What are *they* doing here? This neighborhood is not what it used to be. Where are you *actually* from?...

We tend to think things might be different now 75 years later, and half a world away. But it turns out maybe we all have demons inside of us. A part of our process for this project has been discovering the history of South Asians in America. People might be more familiar with recent hate crimes against South Asians, but we found our relationship with hate and violence is long standing, with records of violence towards South Asian immigrants found as early as 1907.

IX. Resilience

Dancers: Janani, Lalli, Aishwarya

Artwork: Traditional Indian painting process

After decades of work by a number of minority activists associated with the civil rights movement and beyond, South Asian immigrants and other minority groups gained more rights and freedoms in this country, allowing us to stand up against injustices and working towards the common goal of making this new country our home. But the work is tedious, necessary, and doesn't stop here.

X. Her Sweat and Tears

Dancers: Nadhi

Artwork: "Tree 2"

"We fostered this tree, Lord, not with water but tears. Have we the heart now to see it wither?"

By Subramania Bharati (1882-1921), Excerpt from "Freedom" (Tamil)

Translated by Prema Nandakumar

Additional translations by Rajendran

In her book, Iyer describes the experience of the son of a victim of the Sikh Gurdwara shooting in Wisconsin over 10 years ago. The victim's son feels the deep loss due to the circumstances of her death. As mothers (Nadhi and Rupy), we constantly struggle with how to raise strong children. Would they choose to be good in a world that might not be so kind to them because of their skin color, where they come from, or their background? What do we do when our children don't have us to guide them anymore? In this piece we explore the sort of impact we hope to have on the next generation.

XI. Call to Action

Dancers: Shruti, Lalli, Shelley, Aishwarya, Janani, Priyanka, Sanjana

Artwork: "A familiar place"

"...an American citizenship, an American accent, and an American childhood could not shield South Asians from hate violence..." - Deepa Iyer, Excerpt from "We Too Sing America", pg. 12

Since South Asians have been coming to this country, the anti-immigrant sentiment has taken various forms, the most terrifying being violent incidents motivated by hate. Recent incidents include the killing of six individuals at a Sikh place of worship in 2012, and the killing of Srinivas Kochibotla, a South Asian immigrant, in a Kansas restaurant in 2017, and countless others documented by [SAALI](#) (South Asian Americans Leading Together), the Sikh Coalition, and others.

However, this piece is an ode to our activists as well as our artists. Those who make their lives about standing up for what is right, in the South Asian community and beyond.

The End

ADDITIONAL REFERENCES

1947 Partition Archive - Witness Accounts (www.1947partitionarchive.org)

“The Karma of Brown Folk” by Vijay Prashad

Podcasts: Stu You Missed in History Class

Archives at SAADA and Pioneering Punjabis Digital Archive

“We Too Sing America” by Deepa Iyer

“The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India”

by Urvashi Butalia

“Raising Our Voices”, a documentary

Inspired by poetry written by: Jibanananda Das, Subramania Bharathi,

Amrita Pritam, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Dr. Mohammad Iqbal