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Published: March 9, 2014 22:38 IST | Updated: March 9, 2014 22:38 IST

### **U.S. group preserves memories of partition**

IANAS



History's biggest migration: Trains loaded to capacity moved between India and Pakistan during Partition.

*Photo courtesy: Directorate of Public Relations*

#### **Oral histories of witnesses collected in online archive**

Thousands of people from across the world have rallied to collect the moving stories of one of the greatest migrations after South Asia's 1947 violent partition and the birth of two nations — India and Pakistan.

Helping to preserve the history of that tragic event is a small team of volunteers based at the University of California in Berkeley and their newly founded organization, The 1947 Partition Archive.

The group uses web-based "crowdsourcing" to record and preserve witness oral histories.

#### **Crowdsourced and crowdfunded**

Over the last year, nearly 500 individuals from over 20 countries, trained as citizen historians through free online workshops, submitted nearly 1,000 video interviews ranging in length from 1 to 9 hours for preservation.

"Because we are huge believers in grassroots and crowdsourcing, we wanted to take that route. This way, anybody from anywhere can contribute," says the founder, Guneeta Singh Bhalla, who left a research position at Berkeley in December 2012 to volunteer full time for the project. The witnesses of the traumatic events of partition are mostly in their 80s and 90s.

Bhalla says she first became fascinated with the stories of partition when she heard her grandmother describe her own traumatic train ride, clutching her three children to her as she observed carnage and saw dead bodies around the railroad tracks.

The 1947 Partition Archive collected \$35,000 (Rs 21 lakh) through a crowdfunding campaign to equip itself for the task of documenting the witness accounts.

The ongoing project, which can be seen online at [1947PartitionArchive.org](http://1947PartitionArchive.org), features an online Story Map showing where each person's story originated.

"I feel like a bottled plant," writes Z. Ansari on becoming homeless overnight after he found himself on the wrong side of the divide as a Muslim. "I have no roots. I can be put anywhere."

Having lost all material property, he migrated with his family to Pakistan along with millions of other Muslim families.

“I looked up to see the same sky, the same stars, but this was India,” exclaims J. Hemrajani upon arriving in Delhi from a small town in Sindh, Pakistan.

“I feel like I was forced into exile,” recalls refugee G.S. Sekhon. “Except I did nothing wrong to deserve that.”

The archive also preserves pre-partition life and culture as well as post-partition migrations and life changes from all ethnic, religious and economic communities in the form of video and sometimes audio testimonies.

Interviews are conducted in the language that the interviewee is most comfortable with and already include English, Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Sindhi.

Keywords: [India partition](#), [1947 Partition Archive](#), [crowdsourcing](#), [University of California](#)

Printable version | Mar 11, 2014 6:06:45 AM | <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/us-group-preserves-memories-of-partition/article5767488.ece>

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