

‘Dere tun Dilli’

Exploring Identity Formation of Refugees from Dera Ismail Khan

Living in Delhi

Shilpi Gulati

SubVersions | Vol.1, Issue.1, (2013), 1-22.

Url: <http://subversions.tiss.edu/?p=109>

Content licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike License



Abstract

The paper records oral narratives of first generation migrants from Dera Ismail Khan (DIK), a small district located in the North West Frontier Province in Pakistan, who moved across the border and lived in refugee camps before ‘settling’ in government allotted housing in Delhi. It primarily investigates the transformation of the ‘refugee’ into a ‘citizen’ and identifies the markers of what constitutes a ‘rehabilitated’ or ‘settled’ refugee. What role does memory play in the identity formation of such a community? What is remembered and what is forgotten? How does the State, and its performance of nationhood, influence a refugee’s self-image? By closely examining the relationship between the two, the paper will challenge the notion of an original or an ‘authentic’ culture, it will explore what is ‘lost and found’ during a mass exodus, and how does this experience allow for an expansion of the concept of ‘home’ to include disparate geographies, ways of living and multi socio-cultural relationships.

The latter half of the paper will refer to the documentary film *Dere tun Dilli* (2012) made on the same theme, its journey of exploring theoretical arguments in an audio visual format and the reception of such a project by people of the community on which it is based.

Keywords

Dera Ismail Khan, refugee, siraiki, partition, Delhi, Derawals, oral history, memory.

You took away my land

You took away my home

But you can't take away my memories

Those are my own, my own!

-Anonymous¹

Oral history is an unwritten experience of the past, an alternative account omitted from the dominant hegemonic discourse of history which survives through memory and its manifestations in the everyday. As Pierre Nora states, 'history is perpetually suspicious of memory, and its true mission is to suppress and destroy it' (Nora, 9). Thus, when personal memories and experiences come in the way of the Nation's narration of itself, it advertently obliterates them from documented history. This paper aims at retrieving the memory and oral history of a refugee community and studies the role of the Nation in shaping its identity and self image.

The Derawals are originally from Dera Ismail Khan (DIK), a small district in the North West Frontier Province, Pakistan. During India's partition in 1947, about 10,000² Hindu Derawals are believed to have moved across the border; many lived in refugee camps in and around Delhi before settling in government allotted houses in the city. The study has been conducted with a sample size of twenty first-generation Derawal migrants and uses in-depth personal interview as the primary tool of research in order to retrieve personal histories. In *The Other Side of Silence*

¹ Shared by Mr. K. G Kadi in a personal interview.

² Figure taken from 'Humara Dera Ismail Khan: Tasveer-E-Ashiana' (Ailawadi, J), a privately circulated book on the community in New Delhi.

(1993) a documentation of personal narratives of women and their experience of sexual violence during Partition, Butalia states the challenge of such a project, 'this is the generality of Partition: it exists publicly in history books. The particular is harder to discover' (Butalia: 1993; 47). The Derawal narratives are particularly hard to find since their identity has been absorbed by what is believed to be a dominant Punjabi culture of Delhi when in fact, they are not from Punjab. The process of recording oral narratives not only retrieves these marginalized voices but also reveals the creation of meaning that takes place in the process of remembering, to see, 'how easily the past flows into the present, and how remembering also means reliving the past from within the context of the present' (Butalia: 1998; 23). It is, therefore, interesting to see, how the Derawals remember, what they choose to remember and how they choose to project themselves to other and to themselves.

Going Away

The Derawals do not remember 1947 as the year of Independence. They remember it as the year of Partition, as the time of leaving home and of reuniting with 'their own people' in 'their own land'. Evidently, almost all of them remember the experience of crossing the border which marked their final 'departure' and 'arrival'. DIK did not have a railway station and most of the refugees had to take a streamer across the river Indus, board a train from Darya Khan to Lahore and subsequently reach Amritsar. A special refugee flight was also arranged for government employees and for those who could afford an air ticket of Rs. 500. Many crossed the border on foot in clandestine travel groups as well. Ravinder Kaur, in her work on Punjabi post Partition migrants in Delhi, uses Virilio's theory on time-space-speed vectors to explain 'the speed at

which we cover the distance – on foot, motor vehicle, train and airplane – determines how we experience and remember the landscape en route, witness ordinary minute happenings and interact with the people inhabiting those landscapes’ (Kaur: 2006). As opposed to those who took the refugee flight, the Derawals who took the train journey across the border vividly remember the experience.

When we came by the special refugee train, we didn’t sit on the seats because they could shoot us through the windows. We didn’t speak a word. We wondered when we would reach Attari border. It was so difficult. It took so long. We were tired, hungry and parched. We were all filled in that one compartment: children, men and women. We were waiting when someone screamed ‘Atari is here! Atari is here!’ We came out of the train and believe me; we took the earth and put it to our foreheads. We were so happy. It was our nation. The soil of our land! ³

The act of putting the earth to the forehead highlights the embedded use of symbolism in the nationalistic discourse. Motifs like the ‘soil of our land’ are created in popular memory to bring together a unified sense of association and pacify rising passions against the Nation. Even today, symbols like the national anthem or the flag seem to be a tool used by the Nation to achieve certain homogeneity.

Interestingly, the very border, once a location of unimaginable violence and bloodshed, has been appropriated as the stage for the performance of nationhood. The gate shutting ceremony at Wagah border (near Amritsar) takes place every day, almost like a ritual. The soldiers, the flag and patriotic song and dance, all perform the Nation before the cheering crowds; and together they stand in opposition to the ‘enemy’, another spectator, on the other side. This qualifies as what Pierre Nora calls *lieu de mémoire* or the ‘site of memory’ - ‘any significant entity, whether

³ Personal interview with Indira Gulati, 2010.

material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community' (Nora: 1996; XVII) The Indo-Pak border into a site where the 'nationalist' is interpellated⁴ into a language of kinship which calls for 'a horizontal camaraderie of all' (Anderson: 1983; 7). For Anderson, this is an 'imagined community' (ibid.) but in a scenario where national subjects are gathered on one side with the 'other' across the border, this 'imagined communion' becomes tangible and real, even if to a limited extent.

Jawaharlal Nehru seems to be the protagonist in this performance of the nationhood. He features popularly in almost all Derawal narratives but the relationship they share with him is two-fold. He is seen as the great leader, a savior of the people; and also as the person who had to be pressurized for allotment of land and property for displaced refugees.

The camps had caught fire, so they kept some of the refugees in the Muslim cemetery in Nizamuddin. They had to give us a place to stay. We went to Nehru's house to protest. We were 5-6 men and 5-6 women. His men told him, 'these people have no houses; they have come to appeal to *Chacha* Nehru. What else can they do?' He climbed down the stairs, greeted us properly and asked his men, 'Have they been given anything to eat or drink?' We have had tea at Nehru's house, must have had a few biscuits too. I slept there for 2-3 nights. My husband refused, he didn't want to jeopardize his government job. There were about 15-20 of us who had brought our sheets and blankets to sleep in his garden. These houses we live in didn't come to us easily.⁵

Nehru was popular for personally meeting refugees during his 'open hours' or 'morning darshan' to address their grievances. The lawns of his house were thronged by hundreds of refugees every

4 A term coined by Althusser. In his explanation of Ideology and Ideological state apparatus, he suggests that 'all ideology hails concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject.'

5 Personal interview with Bhagwani Taneja, 2011.

day who were there to appeal, agitate and protest. There was also pride in having an opportunity of closely interacting with a celebrated figure, as exemplified in Mrs. Taneja's narrative which categorically mentions having tea and biscuits in his house in spite of having gone there to take part in a demonstration.

We didn't bring anything with us but the clothes we were wearing. Our stuff was taken over by our neighbours in DIK. We lived in Diwan Hall in Chandini Chowk after which Pandit Nehru sent us to Kotla...we were given small shops in Lodhi Road. My father and brother sold fruits and vegetables. I started doing small tailoring work.'⁶

Nehru stood for a glamorous national figure for the refugees who thought that it was a privilege to personally see or meet. There seems to be a star like quality to his presence which many popular celebrities and politicians enjoy in general. This stays in one's memory if a personal contact with this figure is established. In the sentence *Pandit Nehru sent us to Kotla* there seems to be a personal vibe to the statement as if Nehru was considerate enough to personally decide where the Derawals should go next. There is an absence of any comment about his politics; his mere presence in matters concerning the Derawal refugees seems to be satisfactory.

In 1949-50, you couldn't walk through the verandas of Connaught Place. The refugees were selling things on the pavement. They cut down their profit. These local traders feared that their businesses would get wiped out. They conspired with the municipality and passed a resolution that CP was becoming dirty and the people should be removed from there. The municipality came with the police...The refugees went and spoke to Nehru who got angry. He said, 'You people are having such trouble and these guys are trying to get onto your feet. It's my work to rehabilitate you.' He then came to CP and asked the police to get out. He told them, 'In the world outside we raise our heads and walk. People ask us how we are managing to feed lakhs of people and I proudly tell

⁶ Personal Interview with Mr. Hari Chand Gulati, 2011.

them Indians have self respect and they are standing on their own feet. They are not going to be beggars.⁷

Nehru had called upon the refugees to be resilient, to become engineers and doctors and shoulder the responsibility of building a future for the country.⁸ Camouflaged in this appeal was his vision for industrialization; there was also a strategy to evade blame for the impoverished state of thousands of refugees. By appealing to the agitating refugee, the State dismantled the benefactor-benefited relationship between the two and transformed it into one of interdependence, since ‘for both, the State and the refugee, the process of restoring and restructuring their lives began simultaneously’ (Kaur: 2007; 243).

It (the word ‘refugee’) sounded like a term of abuse because we were used to giving charity not receiving it. All of us had big businesses in DIK. And we had the respect and pride just like the *pathans*. We worked hard to get rid of the ‘refugee’ title. Some of us got small jobs, others became hawkers or traders buying and selling on a day-to-day basis. But we never begged from anybody and never sat down to lament our fate...Later some big officers came to visit us and said we were not *sharnarthis* but *purusharthis*, able bodied men capable of achieving the impossible. Earlier we had to write ‘refugee’ in everyday official document but in the 1960s we refused to be so described.⁹

The Derawals pride themselves for their resilient spirit. They strongly believe they were able to emotionally and psychologically handle their community and give themselves a dignified identity solely by their efforts. As mentioned in the above interview, this was achievable primarily because the Derawals could find jobs for themselves and start a living. It didn’t matter

⁷ Personal Interview with Mr. Sehgal, 2011.

⁸ Informal conversation with a retired engineer, Shobha Ram Lal, 2011.

⁹ Personal Interview with Mr. Sehgal (2011).

if it was below their economic status in DIK, all energies were converged in one direction: to make a household and restart a livelihood.

On the other hand, the State did not want to provide for the refugees indefinitely and instead wanted them to ‘stand on their own legs’. It was also felt that their dispersal would expedite their rehabilitation as their concentration in camps was not by itself a solution of the problem of their rehabilitation. The first step taken in this direction was the gradual reduction in ration of such families which had an adult member from 16 to 60 years, was otherwise physically fit, and who was employed on her/his own or through Government agencies. Those adults who refused to be employed in this manner were de-rationed along with their family members. Members of the DIK community claim they didn’t have to depend on the government for long because they knew it was important for them to become independent. The designed strategy of the Government in provoking the refugees to work is not acknowledged by the Derawals at all. *Why would I want to leave India then?* While on one hand the Derawal takes credit for his efforts, he also seems to be grateful to the State for providing him the opportunity to survive.

Lost and Found

The Derawals speak Siraiki, an Indo-Aryan language, also known as Derawali, Jatki, Multani, Hindki, Jhangko, Riyasiyati etc. It is spoken by populations spread around the river Indus in Pakistan. There are many Siraiki communities in India today, but the knowledge of the alphabet is absent. With the dwindling numbers of the first generation migrants, the use of Siraiki in the household has considerably reduced. There is no formal circulation of Siraiki literature within

the community either, apart from a bi-monthly newsletter 'Hindsandesh' published by Bohrianwalla Thalla¹⁰, which carries Siraiki poetry written in English or Hindi script.

The limited use of a particular language in the present can be analysed by investigating the attitude of the State and its policies during the process of refugee rehabilitation. The Derawals categorically mention the absence of Siraiki from academic curriculums in India. This also erased the scope of studying it at the university level. There was great emphasis on learning Hindi for survival in the local and English for the hope of employment in the future. The Derawals were known to be good traders. When some of them set up roadside stalls to do small businesses in the city, they had to adapt other languages than prioritize their own. For many, there was also a felt inferiority as they considered Siraiki to be crude and unsophisticated – a reason commonly used by many Derawals to justify the failure of the community in passing on the language to the younger generations.

We have chained our own language. We rely on the other fake languages. My mother and father who are dead right now will not be happy with the fact that I usually speak in Hindi or English. I wish I could speak to you too, someone who is from my community, in the same language, in our mother tongue. They will say 'shame on you! Did we educate you so much that you start talking in fancy language with us? Your parents will not talk to you in the language because they feel that in the environment that you're exposed you, there is no future or use of Saraiki...If you do a PhD in Saraiki, you will never get a job. But this is not the case with other languages...I want to be responsible for passing on the language. If people like you try looking for their roots, then there is some hope. Else this will die in some years in India but not in Pakistan...Some Bengali in Allahabad will still speak Bengali because he has the chance to go over to Calcutta and

10 A temple trust in Inderpuri and also, one of the most prominent places of worship for the Derawals. Many years after Partition, a branch of a sacred tree was brought from Pakistan and planted here.

interact with his people. We refugees are not even allowed to freely visit other Saraiki states.¹¹

The respondent's examples seem to suggest that the community has come to terms with the fact that Saraiki as a language will soon cease to exist in India. For him, this will not be the case in Pakistan where it is spoken in large parts of the country unlike India where Saraiki speaking people are scattered. He also suggests that access to one's place of origin is critical in formation of ethnic identity with respect to language. For him the freedom a Bengali enjoys of travelling back to Bengali speaking areas generates a community spirit by letting him personally interact in the same language which distinguishes his identity from the rest. The piece seems to suggest a tacit wish of having the freedom to cross the borders and speak the same language with people from the same regions. It is important to analyse why the language bonds are so weak even among the migrant families which are on this side of the border. It is generally used by first generation migrants among themselves but not used in the household by other members. Most third generation migrants do not know Saraiki at all. When asked about their cultural background, they identified themselves as 'Delhites' and the association with the word 'Derawal' seemed absent, even though many have attended cultural functions organised in the community. These cultural functions have also decreased over the years as the committees running them are slowly becoming inactive. Out of twenty *Derawal beradaris*¹² that once existed in Delhi, only one is currently functional. It organises a meet every year on Gandhi Jayanti in Kalkaji. Apart from this, Bohrianwalla Thalla and Dera Ismail Khan Seva Samiti¹³ organise small functions on the festival days of Basant Panchmi and Baisakhi. These functions host Derawali food, song and dance and sometimes Saraiki speaking

¹¹ Personal Interview with Mr. J C Batra, 2011.

¹² Hindi word for 'associations' or 'organisations'.

¹³ A charitable organization in Derawal Nagar.

competitions for the younger generation as well. These efforts can be seen as small struggles by the refugee community against the direction in which the Nation is moving.

The homogenisation faced by the Derawals seems to also be affected by their location in a place like Delhi. The cosmopolitan character of the city, with its refugee background, allows for a blurring of the concept of the 'native'. It is not uncommon for people from Delhi to ask each other where they are originally from - a question always underlined with the assumption that 'home' is elsewhere. Unlike Mumbai, where certain right wing groups have been aggressive with non-marathi migrants tagging them as 'outsiders', Delhi seems to have been more liberal allowing for porous insider-outsider boundaries to exist.

Coming Home

A migrant's identity is forged out of the reality of having two homes. He lives with two homes in his mind – nostalgia marks one and endeavour, the other and the mind expands to accommodate both (Puri: online source).

The Derawals interviewed in this study believe they are no longer 'refugees'. They feel settled in Delhi and do not wish to return to DIK. The choice is a result of an inevitable comparison between the two places. This comparison is three-fold: between a rural space and an urban one¹⁴; between an imagination or memory from seven decades ago and a tangible reality of the present, and thirdly, between the inhabiting Muslim and Hindu populations in the two places. The choice to stay in Delhi is also determined by its familiarity, by virtue of having spent more than sixty

¹⁴ The preference for Delhi is directly related to Derawal migration from a rural area to an urban cityscape. Experiences of those Derawals who do not live in big cities may be different: Prof. Anjali Gera Roy, informal conversation, 2013.

years here; also by the knowledge that DIK is inaccessible given the geo-political relationships between India and Pakistan.

How can we be called refugees now? Today I have such a big house, it is open on three sides and by god's grace it is architecturally modern as well. How can I be a refugee then? When I came here, I had worked as a servant in someone's house for six and a half years and today I have so many people working for me. In true terms, we can't be called refugees now. In a year or two, each one of us had got back on our feet because of our courage and strength. The government also helped us. The local people had sympathy for us. That way we are happy, we are well settled.¹⁵

Since the respondents to this study, interviewed through a snow balling technique, are primarily middle class or upper middle class, there are small success stories embedded in all their narratives. They pride themselves for having come a long way and achieving their current socio-economic status. While this may not be the case for all the Partition refugees, especially those for a different class, it is important to identify crucial elements which define what being 'settled' means. According to Ravinder Kaur, it is the 'ownership of fixed property that helped establish a personal stake in the locality; [the] establishment of means of livelihood in the locality; and entrenchment of social and familial networks that brought individuals closer to the locality (Kaur: 2007, 214). For the Derawals who live in the city 'the claim to a piece of land helped them concretize the relationship with that place' (ibid.) This is evident in Mr. Shobha Ram Lal's interview above and connects back to Mrs. Taneja's struggle for accommodation and agitation outside Nehru's house.

The Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation closed after 1965. By then all refugees were believed to be 'officially rehabilitated'. By providing property and livelihood after absolute

¹⁵ Personal interview with Mr. Shobha Ram Lal, 2012.

impoverishment, the Nation was able to interfere in the refugee's concept of 'home'. It metaphorically stood in the middle of his relationship with the local - between him/her and with his/her *dera*; and introduced larger concepts of nationhood and citizenship. The journey made from DIK to Delhi was a physical one but the Nation wanted to move the refugee metaphorically as well, by transforming his sense of belonging and association. This process of naturalisation, as analysed in this paper, has been carried forward by the use of national symbols in public memory, by performance of nationhood in ritualized ceremonies, by public personas of national leaders and by a complete destabilization of the very concept of 'home' for the refugee.

It is important to emphasize that this continual process of nation-building is always resisted by undercurrents created by personal memory. It survives in the everyday and is passed on through oral narratives and embodied practices. They continue to survive, transform and transfer in spite of the efforts to homogenise or erase them. Dera Ismail Khan and Delhi may be geographically apart and inaccessible, but contain each other by the very presence of a collective experience of Derawal community. There may be an aversion to even dream of going back to DIK, yet there is always a deep sense of association which is evident in any conversation about DIK. When asked if there is some semblance of Dera in the lifestyles of Derawals in Delhi, the prompt response was *DIK will continue to exist in Delhi till Derawals exist in Delhi*.¹⁶ In this way, there is an expansion of the concept of 'home'. It allows for an inclusion of disparate geographies, ways of living and multi socio-cultural relationships. In fact it seems to dismantle the idea of an 'original' or 'authentic' culture. It allows culture to exist, not as a way of life that once was - untainted and archaic, something we have moved away from - but as a dynamic experience of the present through an identity which constantly reshapes and redefines itself. The fluidity of a collective

lived memory expands the experience of culture beyond the limitations of time or territory and, in this case, allows the Derawal identity to dynamically exist as it filters through different generations.

The Documentary film

This section will look at ‘Dere tun Dilli’ (2012),¹⁷ a documentary film based on the Derawal community, as a case study to examine the process of using a dissertation to make a non-fiction film. It will look at ways of representing theoretical ideas in a visual- medium and the challenges of compressing extensive written arguments into a short video film. It will also make a brief comment on the reception of the film by the community including those who were interviewees of the dissertation and a part of the film as well.

‘Dere tun Dilli’ was made within a year of completion of the research dissertation at the Masters program in Cultural Studies and Media, TISS. The decision to explore it in a visual medium grew out of a need to visually document vanishing narratives of the community and make them accessible to a larger audience. The format of the film intertwines a series of personal interviews, letters, poetry and voice over to weave a post-partition Derawal experience. Since the dissertation is based on marginalised oral narratives, the filmmakers¹⁸ took a conscious decision to use the conventional ‘talking heads’ format. Eight interviews of different story tellers from DIK focussed on various aspects of refugee life as experienced by the community and roughly cover a timeline of seven decades. A majority of these storytellers are in their 80s.

¹⁷ English title: From Dera [Ismail Khan] to Delhi.

¹⁸ Shilpi Gulati & Divya Cowasji.

There could have been multiple ways of visually approaching a subject like this. Since the dissertation focused on certain key areas of theoretical enquiry, the film makers chose to start with precisely these areas: ‘home’, ‘history’, ‘refugee-nation’, ‘citizenship’, ‘memory’ etc. Based on experiences documented in the thesis, a rough chronology of events was traced. Once a broad script of the Derawal journey, driven by the theoretical concepts, was in place, the filmmakers looked for storytellers or subjects who could narrate different sections of the script. This can be seen as certain role casting like in fiction films. Extensive interviews were conducted with the protagonists but the parts finally chosen in the film were only those which fit the script appropriately. For example, once the dissertation revealed the Derawal experience of protesting outside Nehru’s house, the filmmakers looked for people who had personally experienced it. Subsequently Mrs. Bhagwani Taneja was chosen because her narrative gave a gendered perspective and beautifully described the community’s relationship with Nehru.

The use of the term ‘script’ with documentary seems out of place, given the belief that it is a naive representation of reality, shot through an objective gaze of the camera. A non-fiction film enjoys the benefit (and also bears the burden) of a certain truth-claim which is conventionally associated with its form. However, it is not a ‘reproduction of reality but...a representation of the world we occupy’ (Nichols: 2001; 20) that it ‘frames and organizes into a text’ (Nichols: 1991; 8). ‘Documentary, like other discourses of the real, retains a vestigial responsibility to describe and interpret the world of collective experience’ (ibid.), and this inherent interpretation and representation is achieved through the use of a script, a plot and an argument within the construction of ‘truth’.

The biggest challenge while making ‘Dere tun Dilli’ was to sift through the overwhelming quantity of data which extensively references and analyses key theoretical concepts. The

storytellers were used to cover the most of the important themes. Smaller details which were getting left out from the main body of interviews were put together using semi-fictitious¹⁹ letters and were graphically inserted into the format of the film. These letters - from a lover to another across the border, from a refugee to Nehru and from an old friend to another - were located in three different time frames post-independence in order to trace metaphorical transformation of the mind of a refugee into a citizen, as it were. Interlaced with these letters and interviews is a voice-over which speaks from the point of view of a third generation migrant. This was used to reflect a young person's access to her own history, a subject position most youngsters, even from other communities occupy and can identify with.

The film maker and their argument is inherently present in any documentary text. When observed carefully, the script and the constructedness of reality can be easily identified. There may be no scripted dialogues, but the choice of what will be talked about is consciously made by the filmmaker. Therefore, questions during direct interviews become the most important tool in order to decipher the argument of the film maker. For example, Mr. Shobha Ram Lal, who had shared a detailed account of his personal journey, was asked, in the film, *do you consider yourself a refugee today?* Given the knowledge of Mr. Shobha Ram Lal's location in the script, it was important to ask him a question which would point directly to what it means to be 'settled' today. His emphasis on owning a big house is theoretically connected with the importance of owning property in the transformation of a refugee into a citizen. In rough terms, his answer had already been predicted by the filmmakers and when finally delivered seemed to fit perfectly in the script of the film. In this way, the intent of the film maker can be identified.

¹⁹ I use the term 'semi fictitious' because we didn't find any letters during our research. However, they are not completely fictional their content has been assembled together from real narratives shared by different people.

While making ‘Dere tun Dilli’, the process of script development continued during the shoot and on the edit table. The decision of including the voice-over was made once the editing timeline roughly in place. However, during the shoot, like in most documentaries, several unscripted moments candidly made their way into the film. Directors are also editors of the film; the process of impromptu additions to the script becomes exciting. A perfect example would be the drafting of the opening and the closing sequence of our film. Before the interview with Mr. Hari Chand Gulati²⁰ was held, the filmmakers had been looking for a high point in the script - a point where all themes would come together and form the end of the film. While *Bade Papa* was being interviewed, there came a moment where he was asked to sing a song in Siraiki. The old man tried hard to remember some stray lines from a popular Derawali song but completely stopped in the middle. He was at a loss of memory. When he stopped midway through his song, the filmmakers immediately identified this moment to be a potential ending to the film and therefore decided to prolong it a little. An immediate addition to the script took place, and one of the filmmakers, almost playing a cameo role, entered the film and softly said, *Bade Papa, you forgot?*, thereby creating a poignant moment which was perfect for the end of a film about memory. Therefore, while the process continues to be a documentation of reality, it is also an interpretation and construction of reality within film text.

The film has been circulating within the community since its completion in May 2012. The primary response is that of appreciation by the elders of the community for it is heartwarming for them to see a young person from the community take interest in its past. Most of them also come forward to share their own experiences with the Partition and the life thereafter. At a screening which took place at the India Habitat Centre in Delhi in March 2013, the audience primarily

20 Referred to as ‘Bade Papa’ (or grandfather) in the film.

constituted of DIK members in Delhi with a few non-Derawals. The post screening discussion moved beyond the analysis of the themes in the film, which is usually the case, and turned into a forum where Derawals shared personal memories of childhood in DIK. Some of them who had the opportunity of revisiting Dera also shared their experiences.

The Derawals who feature in the film seem to not have much critique of how they have been represented in the film. During personal screenings, some of them have admitted to the fact that they don't understand why the filmmakers chose to do this project in the first place instead of making films in Bollywood. Two of them passed away without seeing the film at all. The most active response to the film has come from the second generation Derawal migrants as they are closest to understanding the realities of the older generation, are able to understand and speak in Siraiki, and also see the film as an opportunity of 'preserving' collective memory of the community.

There can be various approaches to film production which draws from written dissertations. This film was a case study to reflect on one way of doing it. However many they may be, there will always be an excitement of seeing a written piece of work transform into a visual medium. This also opens up the possibility of giving a new direction to academic research and allowing for wider access. 'Dere tun Dilli', a project which started with a casual conversation with *Bade Papa* has so far been explored in a written dissertation, a documentary film and several screenings and discussions over the last four years.

Bio Note

Shilpi Gulati is a documentary theatre and film maker with a background in literature, media and cultural studies. Her previous films, 'Inside Out' and 'Dere tun Dilli' have been screened and awarded at various film festivals across the country. She's currently enrolled as a research scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.

References

Ailawadi, J. (2005). Trans. R.N. Bhatia. *Humara Dera Ismail Khan: Tasveer-E-Ashiana*. New Delhi

Anderson, Benedict. (1996). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso / New Left Books.

Butalia, Urvashi. (1998). *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Penguin.

Nora, Pierre. (1989). 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire', *Representations*, 26, pp. 7-24.

Nichols, Bill. (1991). *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nichols, Bill. (2010). *Introduction to Documentary Film*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Kaur, R. (2007). *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants of Delhi*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Kaur, R. (2006). 'The Last Journey: Exploring Social Class in the 1947 Partition Migration'. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2221-2228.

Online sources:

History and Linguistic. n.d. Retrieved December 20, 2009, from Language Information Service - India: http://www.lisindia.net/Lahnda/lah_Hist.html

Kapadia, K. (2006). *Lost in Translation: A Case of Delhi*. Retrieved January 28, 2010, from Iso Carp: http://www.isocarp.net/Data/case_studies/801.pdf

Kaur, R. n.d. *Locating State in 'non-state' Spaces*. Retrieved August 19, 2009, from India Seminar: www.india-seminar.com/2006/567/567_ravinder_kaur.htm

Puri, K. N. n.d. *The Outsider*. Retrieved December 24, 2009, from The Academy of Punjab in North America: <http://apnaorg.com/articles/kamal-puri-1/>