

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: Royal Holloway, University of London		
Unit of Assessment: 28 History		
Title of case study: Advancing Public Understanding of the 1947 Partition of India in 21st - Century Britain		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Sarah Ansari	Professor of History	1993-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Britain today is home to over 3,000,000 people of South Asian heritage, and – because many of their forebears hailed originally from Punjab and Bengal – almost all their families were affected by the 1947 Partition of British India. Enduring historical perceptions about Partition continue to reinforce mutual suspicions at community level, with lingering bitterness a direct consequence of the violence that accompanied it. Ansari's research on Partition's long-term consequences highlights its complex legacies. By challenging engrained assumptions about Partition, her research directly informed the activities of interfaith and community groups, teachers, think tanks, arts organisations and young people in present-day Britain. Against the backdrop of its 70th anniversary (2017) and in preparation for its 75th anniversary in 2022, Ansari's historical expertise engages different publics actively with a key event that is as much part of Britain's history as that of South Asia. Ansari's research advanced understanding, learning and participation through shaping educational and community initiatives relating to Partition in present-day Britain.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Much history writing about India and Pakistan in the second half of the twentieth century was rigidly separated along nation-state lines, even though their histories remained 'entangled' due to having been part of the same British empire in South Asia. The result was an uncomfortable, at times tense, historiographical 'division' in terms of how far directly comparable social and political developments taking place in the two states were explored. This is a shortcoming in the existing literature that Ansari's research has consistently challenged. R1 sheds valuable light on the interconnected impact and legacies of the 1947 Partition of India. It shows how far Partition's 'aftershocks' went on to shape political relationships and social interactions on the ground and highlights how far these legacies are core to any understanding of the subsequent difficult relationships between different communities brought together by Partition.</p> <p>By identifying and explaining the common experiences shared by people living on both sides of the new border in the 1940s and 50s, R5, the culmination of a decade's exploration, makes a key contribution to a significant historiographical move away from understandings of Independence based on high-level political decision-making to instead accommodating popular experiences of the end of empire in South Asia. This research emphasises the crucial importance of taking proper account of what was happening in the localities as well as at centres of national power. It draws attention to shared, cross-border histories within the region more broadly, challenging the exclusivity of national narratives that have emerged thanks more contemporary political rivalries and concerns. Finally, by straddling the colonial and postcolonial periods, her historiographical approach connects key episodes in the history of South Asia that are have been addressed separately in much history writing.</p> <p>The AHRC collaborative research project associated with this Impact Case Study was directly prompted by the need to respond in a new historiographical way to issues exposed by Partition's 60th anniversary in 2007 (G1). Public events in Britain in 2007 highlighted very starkly the dearth</p>		

of comparative understanding about 'what had happened next' in both India and Pakistan. Crucial early years of state creation and nation-building remained poorly understood from a comparative perspective, with historians of South Asia generally overlooking these developments in favour of earlier or later events. Ideological fixities, nationalist histories and limited access to archives and other documentary forms of evidence had previously made comparative assessments of this transition period very challenging. Accordingly, Ansari's research on South Asia's 'formative' experiences in the decade after Independence, with especial reference to parallel developments in Pakistan and India, reveals what notions of belonging meant in practice during a key period of political transition and nation-state making.

3. References to the research

R1. Monograph: Sarah Ansari, *Life after Partition: Community, Migration and Strife in Sindh, 1947-1962* (OUP, 2005), ISBN-10: 019597834X. Available from HEI on request. **QI:** This monograph, published by a university press, was rigorously peer-reviewed and submitted to REF2008. "[*Life After Partition*] speaks to matters of pressing contemporary importance, revealing how history is inherently linked to, and informs, the present", Manu Bhagavan, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 38, 1 (Summer 2007); "[*Life After Partition*] makes the powerful point that partition continued to play itself out in the politics of Pakistan long after the events of 1947 and 1948". Joya Chatterji, 'New Directions in Partition Studies', *History Workshop Journal* 67, 1 (Spring 2009).

R2. Journal article: William Gould, Taylor C. Sherman and Sarah Ansari, 'The flux of the matter: loyalty, corruption and the everyday state in the post-partition government services of India and Pakistan', *Past & Present*, 219, 1 (2013): pp. 237-279 (doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gts045) (33.3% contribution). **QI:** *Past and Present* is a top-ranking international journal in historical research. This article was rigorously peer reviewed and submitted to REF2014.

R3. Journal article: Sarah Ansari, 'Subjects or Citizens? India, Pakistan and the 1948 British Nationality Act', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41, 2 (2013), pp. 285-312 (doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2013.768094). **QI:** *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* is a top-ranking international journal in historical research. This article was rigorously peer reviewed and submitted to REF2014.

R4. Edited volume: *Subjects to Citizens: Society and the Everyday State in India and Pakistan, 1947-1970*, eds. Taylor C. Sherman, William Gould and Sarah Ansari (including introduction and individual research chapter) (CUP, 2014), ISBN 13: 9781107064270 (33.3% editorial contribution) (book edition of special issue of *Modern Asian Studies* 45, 1 [2011]). Available from HEI on request. **QI:** *Modern Asian Studies* is leading international journal publishing on South Asian studies. The articles making up this edited volume, including Ansari's own individual contribution, were subject to rigorous peer review.

R5. Monograph: Sarah Ansari and William Gould, *Boundaries of Belonging: Localities, Citizenship and Rights in India and Pakistan* (CUP, 2019), ISBN-10: 1107196051 (50% contribution) (Listed in REF2). Available from HEI on request. **QI:** This monograph published by a university press was subject to rigorous peer review.

G1. Key Research Grant: 2007-2010 AH/E009255/1: 'From subjects to citizens: society and the everyday state in North India and Pakistan, 1947-1964' (GBP390,522). In collaboration with William Gould (University of Leeds). **QI:** Large collaborative AHRC-funded research project, competitively secured following rigorous peer-reviewed process whose findings underpin R2, R3, R4 and R5.

4. Details of the impact

Prior to this research (and before 2015), many people of South Asia heritage did not appreciate the complicated immediate or long-term effects of Partition on their communities. Ansari's research has raised awareness of Partition's legacies in Britain, both within South Asian heritage communities and in wider society. Her historical expertise has shaped activities of her partners across the cultural, heritage and education sectors and driven initiatives between 2015 and 2020 to generate better-informed public understandings of Partition. Key beneficiaries are community and inter-faith groups, arts organisations, theatre companies, youth charities, teachers, young people, and a race equality think-tank.

Advancing community reconciliation initiatives linked to 70th anniversary of Partition (2017)

Ansari's historical expertise informed the 'Partition History Project', an educational pressure group established by interfaith Church of England clergy (active between 2015 and 2018) to raise public awareness of Partition's continuing significance. Its founder Canon Michael Roden explained how Ansari's research changed their approach: "we had identified a problem but had not as yet a solution, so we reached out to secular academic historians working in this field to help. This is when you came to our help! ... giving a very clear explanation of the trauma of Partition, the huge difficulties of explaining this difficult history to pupils and, at the same time the complete necessity of trying to do so not just for inter-communal understanding but because it is now a major chapter in the history of Britain" (S1).

The Partition History Project ran a pilot programme of educational work centred on Partition with two schools in Bedfordshire (Luton) and Hertfordshire (Stevenage). Both towns contain sizeable South Asian-heritage populations - Muslims in Luton and Sikhs in Stevenage – whose families were directly affected by Partition displacement and violence. Ansari worked closely with the Runnymede Trust (brought in as a partner by the Partition History Project) to deliver this pilot study in 2016, which drew on educational materials prepared by Ansari and a teacher member of the Partition History Project. The Trust's evaluation report - 'Nations Divided: How to teach the history of partition' – was launched in the House of Lords in February 2017 to a positive reception. According to the Runnymede Trust, the initiative "chart[ed] opportunities and challenges in teaching this history and serve[d] as a case study for future projects ... students and teachers in the participating schools had a very positive experience of the pilot ... The pilot project was successful in increasing student understanding of the history of partition" (S2). The Partition History Project findings directly fed into and drove later initiatives to expand Partition education from 2018.

Shaping heritage and arts organisations' response to Partition's 70th anniversary (2017)

Ansari used her research expertise in the run-up to Partition's 70th anniversary (2017) to drive home the urgency of recognising the shared legacies of Partition, and why institutions in Britain had a responsibility to engage proactively with this history. In December 2015, she chaired the British Council's national scoping discussion in Manchester at which representatives from approximately 100 UK arts and heritage organisations addressed how to mark the commemoration in 2017. According to Jim Hollington (British Council Director Arts, South Asia), Ansari's "session was cited by everyone that I spoke to as the highlight of the day, bringing the events of 1947 to life through very personal reflections" (S3); indeed, many of the commemorative events that took place in 2017 focused precisely on individual, often intimate, memories of Partition as the starting point for enhancing public understanding of why and how and with what consequences it occurred.

Generating young people's awareness of the impact and legacies of Partition

Ansari's research on the legacies of Partition helped drive a successful Heritage Lottery Fund application by Slough-based youth and community organisation Aik Saath (lit. 'together as one') to fund a local oral history project in 2017. This 'Partition Women's Voices' community project brought together young people from diverse heritages (i.e. not just South Asian) who collected Partition testimonies from women belonging to South Asian communities in the town and then used these to mount a well-received local exhibition in Aug 2017. According to Aik Saath's Heritage Learning Officer, Charlotte Williams, "It was down to [Ansari's] introductory workshop, which engaged 40 young people in activities to explore the history of Partition, that the project got off to such a successful start.... Furthermore, [Ansari's] vital support advising on the content of the exhibition was crucial to ensuring that this significant event was told in an accurate and accessible manner" (S4). According to the other project partner Culture Studios, Ansari "encouraged the young people to use their imagination and empathy ... As a result, many young women were keen to volunteer and work on this project", and the project contributed to improved cross-community understanding within the town (S4).

As a result of the work with schools in Luton and Stevenage, Ansari's historical expertise was utilised to engage young people with Partition's continuing relevance. The Historical Association (UK National Charity for History that supports history teaching and learning) commissioned her

to provide its briefing on Partition to schoolteachers in its journal *Teaching History* (June 2017). Print copies of the edition which featured her briefing were distributed to [text removed for publication]. In 2017 The Historical Association's secondary membership reach was [text removed for publication], which included staff members in departments with access to the print or the digital copy. By December 2020, the briefing's page had been viewed [text removed for publication] on line since it was published **(S5)**. In 2017, the not-for-profit media outlet '*The Conversation*' commissioned Ansari to write a comment piece entitled 'How the Partition of India happened – and why its effects are still felt today', with publication timed to coincide with the 70th anniversary (August 2017). This article continues to be downloaded on a regular basis by huge international readership (Dec 2020 approximately 555,000+ hits, approximately 10-12,000 per month), and has also been republished in *Business Standard* (circulation: 96,000; one of the largest Indian English-language daily edition newspapers) and *The Independent* (online) **(S6)**. This international readership for Ansari's comment piece included school students, including students in the USA and South Korea who subsequently interviewed Ansari for their own 'National History Day' assignments, and produced projects that focused on the themes of 'Conflict and Compromise in History' and 'Partitions'.

Inspiring collaboration between theatre-makers and educational initiatives (2016-18)

Ansari's research was used by the playwright, Sudha Bhuchar to provide the historical context for the revival of her 2006 play *Child of the Divide* in 2016. The play contributed to the Partition History Project as the creative vehicle through which young people in Britain could understand Partition. The play resonated strongly with audiences: e.g. "Being a Muslim living in England, the play has really struck a chord. ... I will celebrate more [sic] on community cohesion and encourage and promote the same thinking among our younger generations" **(S7)**. In 2017, having obtained further funding (another GBP40,000 from The Kirby Laing Foundation and GBP80,000 from the National Lottery-Arts Council England), *Child of the Divide* toured nationally (London, Manchester, Burnley, Bolton, Luton, Liverpool, Bradford, Letchworth and Stornoway). As Bhuchar explained, throughout 2016-18, "Professor Ansari undertook talks, workshops and post-show platforms with the cast and creative team and inspired teachers and our team to grasp the historical knowledge and context so that they felt able to talk to students and audiences about the play with confidence" ... "This was a brilliant collaboration between a dedicated and passionate academic and artists which I think stands as a model for future collaborations". Bhuchar commissioned Ansari to produce the introduction for a new edition of *Child of the Divide* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017): "it really framed my play within the history of the period and provided a context for it in all the platform and post show events that Sarah was part of" **(S8)**.

Child of the Divide Production Report showed that 4,778 people watched the play, including 2,550 young people, and 25 creative learning and wrap-around events involved 2,009 participants. Between 40-50% of the total audience were of a South Asian/BAME background. A digital audience of a further 47,000 engaged with *Child of the Divide* via the 'Bhuchar Boulevard' website, and both national and regional radio coverage was deemed as "excellent". In May 2018 *Child of the Divide* (winner of the Best Stage Production category at the UK 2018 Asian Media Awards) was invited to Toronto's Harbourfront international festival for children and young people, where Ansari was resident historical expert, enabling Canadian audiences to understand why the story of a child in 1947 India remained so relevant in a world of travel bans and illegal border crossings **(S8)**.

Shaping South Asian history and heritage national initiatives (2018 onwards)

From 2018 onwards, Ansari's historical expertise has informed the 'Partition Commemoration Campaign'. This initiative was spearheaded by grandchildren of Partition survivors together with Faiths Forum London and the Grand Trunk Project and is backed by a cross-party group of MPs and British South Asian journalists and community organisations. In 2018, the Campaign organisers approached Ansari following her contribution to at a Grand Trunk Road public event at the British Museum in 2017, inviting her to co-chair its new 'Partition Education Group' with William Gould, University of Leeds. The Partition Education Group, which includes museum and archive professionals, community education specialists, schoolteachers and students, are

tasked with raising awareness of the urgency of teaching South Asian history – and specifically Partition – in British schools. The 2020-21 chair (Raj Unsworth) has highlighted how much this initiative has benefitted from Ansari's involvement, citing her expertise as "highly influential in our thinking about the Partition". Ansari "has actively and significantly helped [the Group] organise meetings, workshops and seminars, and has regularly put us in touch with important contacts as well as assisting us with funding applications" (S9).

The Partition Commemoration Campaign drew directly on Ansari's historical expertise in its four scoping meetings (2018-20), during two roundtable events in the Houses of Parliament (July 2018; February 2019), and at the launch of the Campaign's own 'South Asia Heritage Month' national initiative (July 2019). [text removed for publication] (S9). Despite the disruptive impact of Covid-19, the inaugural South Asia Heritage Month went ahead as scheduled between 18 July-17 August 2020 albeit online, holding over 60 official events and more than 150+ fringe events, with its hashtag #southasianheritagemonth gaining 83,600,000 impressions and a 30,000,000 reach around the world. According to one social media post in August 2020, "The biggest lesson I have taken from the first year of South Asian Heritage Month is how intertwined British history is with that of South Asia" (Ruby Bokhari) (S9; S10).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

S1 Testimonial from Canon Michael Roden, St Mary's Hitchin, corroborates the impact of Ansari's historical expertise on the activities of the Partition History Project.

S2 Runnymede Trust report (Feb 2017) corroborates the value of the Partition History Project's pilot project

(<https://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Partition%20History%20Project%20Evaluation.pdf>).

S3 Endorsement by Jim Hollington (British Council, Director Arts South Asia) corroborates the impact of Ansari's contribution to the British Council's Dec 2015 event.

S4 Testimonials from *Aik Saath* Heritage Learning Officer, Charlotte Williams, which corroborates the impact of Ansari's historical expertise on its 2017 Partition Women's Voices project (<https://partitionwomensvoices.com>), and from Daljeet Jutla, Director of Culture Studio, *Aik Saath's* partner in this community project.

S5 Testimonial from The Historical Association corroborating potential readership of Ansari's piece in *Teaching History* (June 2017).

S6 550,000+ (December 2020) downloads of Ansari's article in 'The Conversation' (Aug 2017) (<http://theconversation.com/how-the-partition-of-india-happened-and-why-its-effects-are-still-felt-today-81766>) corroborate global impact of her historical expertise. Also republished, e.g. in *Business Standard* (circulation: 96,000; one of the largest Indian English-language daily edition newspapers) and *The Independent* (online only).

S7 Audience questionnaires corroborate the impact of pilot performances of *Child of the Divide* (available from HEI on request), as does press coverage (e.g. <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2016/28-october/news/uk/project-tells-story-of-partition-of-india>).

S8 Testimonial from Sudha Bhuchar (playwright and founder of 'Bhuchar Boulevard'), which corroborates the impact of Ansari's historical expertise and contribution, and *Child of the Divide* 2107 production report 2017.

S9 Testimonials from (i) Partition Commemoration Campaign/South Asia Heritage Month [text removed for publication] and (ii) the 2020 chair of the Partition Education Group (Raj Unsworth) (includes PEG Constitution and Mission Statement, drawn up by Ansari). Partition Education Group website: <https://partitioneducationgroup.wordpress.com/>; for details of South Asia Heritage Month events held in 2020, see: <https://www.mminquarantine.com/south-asian-heritage-month>, <https://www.mminquarantine.com/sahm-events>.

S10 Media bundle, including, e.g. roundtable discussions in 2018 entitled 'Partition: Time to talk about the legacy of empire?', whose YouTube viewing figures (currently) stand at 867 views + 1,405 views; reprinting of Ansari's 2017 *The Conversation* piece in *Business Standard* and *Independent*, press and social media reporting of 2020 South Asia Heritage Month events.