KAUTILYA
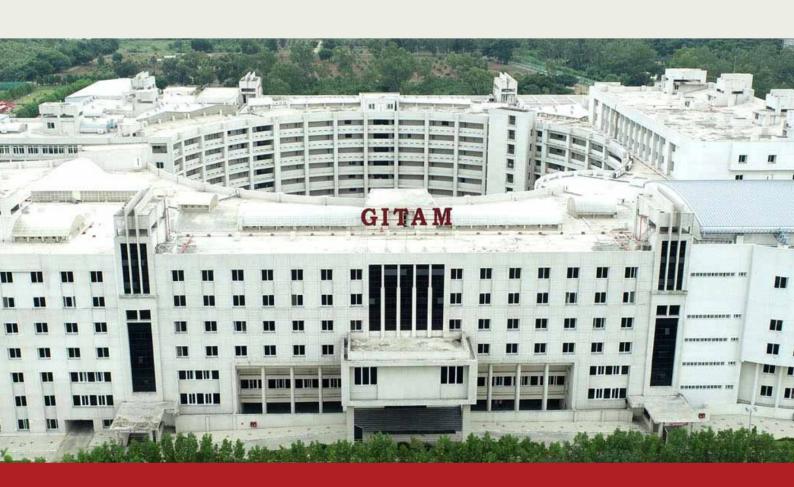## SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY

Issue
Brief
Series

GITAM

"Tracing The Influence of Partition on Third Generation Indians"

Issue Brief: IB-2025-39

Submitted by: Anoushka Sharan Tingal

Under the Supervision of: Dr. Kanica Rakhra, Assistant Professor, Kautilya School of Public

Policy

Tracing The Influence of Partition on Third Generation Indians

Abstract

This paper investigates the enduring psychological legacy of the 1947 Partition by analysing how displacement reshaped India's emotional and social structures across three generations. Using ontological security as the central framework, it argues that the collapse of collectivist trust produced adaptive patterns of silence, inwardness, and familial individualism that were inherited by the second generation and subtly reworked by Gen Z. Drawing on trauma literature, oral histories, and behavioural research, the paper demonstrates how the third generation is transforming inherited suppression into articulation. These intergenerational shifts offer a lens for anticipating societal responses to future displacement.

Introduction

The Independence of India can be infamously acknowledged to be as the one last blow by the British before the Sun finally set over their Empire. The country that was colonised for over two hundred years was struck with a scar it will carry for generations to come: the Partition. Known to be one of India's largest migration incidents, the Partition of India and Pakistan caused over 16 million people to abandon their homes and cross over the newly constructed borders, marking the bloodiest tragedy that continues to haunt India (Zakaria, 2022). While the people parted ways with their homes and gullies, what they kept safe were their memories of what used to be (Kaur, 2022). From 1947 to 2025, India has massively moved beyond its identity of a third-world country to the third largest economy in the world (PTI, 2025). Its people and its movements have reshaped the narrative of what is India and what it means to be Indian. Its colonial history and bloody past continue to find their space in its ontological structures,

constantly pushing Indians to distinguish themselves from English influences on value systems and world order (Svensson, 2020).

Yet beneath this narrative of progress, traces of Partition endure, not as active memory but as inherited dispositions. A set of survivors argue that physical objects are rather important in preserving the memories of the past (A. Kaur, 2022). While many survivors decided to keep the memories and recollect them often, there were also instances of grandparents holding back from elaborating upon their experiences, shunning into silence. A professor at Tulane University says that "we inherit pain. When it's not coped with, it gets passed again" (Vibha Amit, 2024). While the attempt could be to not pass on the trauma, it did cue in a behavioral adaptation that has passed on in the generations as a cycle of selective silence (ISAS, 2023).

A central argument that then gets formed is if memories of partition are inherited, they cannot be isolated from its history, by the simple reason that inheritance cannot be devoid or isolated from its past. If the manifestation of these memories is evident in terms of engagement with the world, it becomes imperative to dig at the roots of the origin to unpack the possible trends with potential traceability.

Theoretical Framework: Migration as a Continuing Condition

This paper brings the enduring emotional consequences of Partition within the framework of Ontological Security (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006). The concept of ontological (in)security explains the persistent anxiety experienced when one's sense of order, identity and or continuity is disrupted. Giddens (1991) explains ontological security to be the very confidence which individuals derive from the stability of their social and material environments, the feeling that life follows a predictable rhythm. When that rhythm is violently disturbed by displacement, violence, or social rupture, individuals and communities seem to lose not just their homes, but

also their trust in the concept of reliability on anyone, let alone the world. Mitzen (2006), expanding on the states, brings forth the argument that political actors also seek stability not solely for survival, but for preservation of identity.

Partition ruptured India's ontological security as ever level, familial; social; and national (Pandey, 2001). Forced migration, communal violence and sudden reconfiguration of boundaries and therefore of identity fractured the foundational trust that bound people to their homelands, and to one another (Khan, 2007). It reshaped the idea and perception of roots. Individuals, out of no choice but to resettle, rebuilt order through anchors they carried across borders, of family, idea of honor, education, savings and moral codes became alternative sources of order and predictability. The home replaced the community as the locus of belonging, silence replaced dialogue as the mode of protection (Veena, 1992). Mitzen (2006) also writes on ontological security in world politics, describing how actors stabilise identity through routine and control after trauma. This description, coupled with Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1977) shows the coping mechanisms crystalising into an insecurity habitus, a learned/inherited disposition of vigilance, restraint and guarded self-reliance.

Across generations, this habitus has evolved rather than disappeared (Danieli, 1998). Collective silence can now be seen manifesting as selective articulation, familial protection as individual self-preservation (Malhotra, 2023). Ontological insecurity thus provides a unifying framework to understand how the psychological residues of Partition persist, giving birth to vertical migration through generations, shaping and reshaping Indian social relations, emotional vocabularies and political behaviours long after the physical migration ended (Nandy, 1983).

Intergenerational Transmission of Partition Trauma

The Danieli Inventory of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma (Danieli, 1998) is considered to be one of the first 'global gold standard' for researching and preventing/finding early warning signs for intergenerational violence (ICMGLT, 2025). It distinguishes between the immediate, post-trauma adaptational styles, and the later stages of reparative adaptational cognisant impacts. Largely, the coping mechanisms of the survivors of Partition can be seen as inherited psychological templates. The mechanisms include cycles of silence, vigilance, and self-containment.

Aanchal Malhotra's (2017) Remnants of a Separation particularly documents survivors who provided only factual information about Partition, holding back the emotionally vulnerable narratives. This selective silence shielded families from pain but mistook emotional suppression for virtue. Such virtues found a strong hold within the Indian value system post-Partition, and became a commonly inculcated practice. Normalisation of trauma does not end here. It surpassed into general social behaviours of dealing with trauma, including the suppression of gendered trauma. There is evidence of the Indian community being reserved when undergoing tyranny, high tolerance for unspoken suffering. The National Family Health Survey of 2016 revealed that over 99% of sexual violence and abuse against women in India went unreported (Kundu, 2018). The National Crime Records Bureau (2021) maintained that the fear of stigma and familial dishonor remain one of the vital and persistent reasons for under/non-reporting. The experience of Partition was multifaceted, and, like most things and cultivated violence, gendered. Jisha Menon (2006) argues that women often become the subject and object of ideological wars, vessels that must construct and re-construct themselves with careful deliberation, while their bodies are used as pawns for wars and victories. Partition marked an unimaginable era of

violence and abuse. Scholars write that women, with uncertainty of the world and safety only within the borders of the house, ensured and extended by the patriarchs, shared collective grief, generational trauma and cyclical silence and reservation (Chauhan, n.d.). The shame associated with being weak when acknowledging and talking about their experiences further pushed women into corners of perceived safety, or rather, the lack of, and therefore, opting for silence for all kinds of trauma (Rani, et. al. 2020).

Aanchal Malhotra's interview with the Vice (2021) recounts grandchildren describing grandparents who hoarded food or slept with knives under pillows, like embodied reminders of insecurity. This further points to the probability of the ontological insecurity of partitioned families undergoing a change, where the idea of others, which previously made them feel secured, now seems like a threat. The rupture of social scaffolding resulted in the collapse of what people considered to be continuity- a shared identity of community, caste, rituals or even neighborhood, people felt betrayed by the social order (Pandey, 2001). This feeling of betrayal led to the rise of smaller, more predictable units of belonging. Turning towards their family, work, faith or self-discipline offered the safety net, a properly demarcated area where control and order could be re-established (Das, 1995). This shift also coincided, and may have been influenced by, with the rising global phenomenon of individualism due to economic development and globalisation. As Gyanendra Pandey (2001) writes in his 'Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India', a newer discourse of history is memory, privately held moments and individual stories and mottos over social and collective recollection. Like Pandey, this paper also does not suggest isolating the Indian movement to individualism from the global phenomena, and the changing national policies of economics and liberalisation as a contributor to the movement. However, the welcome and acceptance of the idea of

individualism can be traced to the trauma of Partition (Pandey, 2001). This paper argues that this potential shift from collectivism to individualism might as well be a reconstruction of the ontological security of Indians who went through the partition.

A research conducted in 2023 by the Institute of South Asian Studies using the Danieli Inventory to model Partition descendants found that the level of trauma in second and third generations was at medium (PMC, 2023). It was found that it was the mothers' coping styles that heavily influenced the children. This further confirmed that emotional regulation, particularly maternal silence, transmitted in the most powerful manner. This restraint became a sort of moral inheritance, with endurance replacing expression and emotiveness. The theory of postmemory by Marianne Hirsch further amplifies the said transmission, the second and third generations tend to relate with Partition through the channels of imagination, a longing affection than recollection. The emotional weight still remains authentic. The study explains that the flow of migration thus is downward, biologically, rather than upward, culturally. As a direct result, social norms reform and emerge into stoicism and pragmatic individualism. An active manifestation of this can be found in the newer debates brought by the third generations, of the Indian parenting style being conservative and emotionally reserved (Kesarla, 2025).

From Collectivism to Familial Individualism

Pre-Partition India was embedded in collectivist networks, of joint families, village solidarities, and inter-community trust. August 1947 shattered these systems. Ashis Nandy (1999) calls this the emergence of a "psychology of defensiveness," where the survival of communities required and commanded for retreat into smaller, controllable units: the household. Refugees' new moral geography privileged kin over community, safety over sociability, inwards over outwards.

Ashoka Mody (2023) in India Is Broken extends this micro-logic to the nation. The state's post-independence failures of corruption, inequality, communal polarisation bred civic distrust. As public institutions weakened, citizens invested trust in families and informal networks. Mody draws direct parallels between the Bengal of 1947 and the India during and immediately post covid 19. They revealed how crises tend to re-activate inherited survivalist logics, forcing citizens to retreat into private safety networks. Thus, partition's private survivalism mirrored India's public moral collapse: both replaced collective ethics with personal obligation, and still continue to negotiate the spaces that citizens engage in and carry with them.

The behavioral data echoes this shift. Descendants of Partition survivors show heightened need for control and guilt toward parental suffering (PMC, 2023). What began as survival instinct matured into a cultural code: self-protection as a moral duty. This can be observed as paralleling the constructivist view that identities evolve through interaction, and because perceived insecurity plays a determining role in these interactions, it becomes an identity constructor as well. India's internalised insecurity, born of colonial and migratory trauma, is seen to inform both domestic behavior and foreign-policy caution (Singh, 2019). This shift to individualism may also flow into other structures of voter behaviour and determine policy trust.

The Second and Third Generations: Imbibing and Breaking of the Silence

While the generation of survivors of Partition navigated through the 'ruptures' and witnessed their build social order collapse, the second generation (G2) took it to themselves to reconstruct the order and recreate the identity, based on what they inherited- displacement without the vocabulary of its expression. Butalia (2000) and Das Veena (2007) write that the silence internalised by their parents already spun the morals of endurance as the safest way to live in the second generation. Expression of loss and trauma for them was deemed unnecessary

and regressive, wounds that do not need to be touched but shunned under carpets. G2 instead turned fear into respectability and moral rectitude (Nandy, 1983). Thus, weaving the perception of discipline and duty from the threads of trauma. Daneli's inventory shows emotional restraint as an acceptable form to display strength.

G2 can be credited to lay out the template within and outside which the third generation of Partition began to reinterpret silence, not as strength but as symptom. Digital platforms have enabled public vulnerability once unthinkable: therapy dialogues, mental-health campaigns, and creative projects that transform inherited pain into narrative (Jude, et. al, 2025).

This aligns with Danieli's (1998) concept of reparative adaptation: descendants' conscious engagement with ancestral trauma through articulation. As Malhotra (2021) observes, interviews with young descendants reveal "complex, even contradictory" emotions, simultaneous empathy and distance, which mark a transition from inherited trauma to reflective processing.

The cultural phenomenon termed "Indian parenting"- emotional reticence and avoidance of sensitive topics, can thus be historicised as a Partition-era adaptational style (H. Kaur et al., 2023). Silence once protected; today, it constrains. By challenging it, Gen Z is not rebelling but evolving the same survival mechanism into openness. Their emotional literacy represents a collective attempt at national therapy, a psychosocial parallel to what Mody (2023) envisions as India's need for moral regeneration.

Third-Generation Navigations: Aanchal Malhotra and the Reclamation of Memory

Aanchal Malhotra's body of work, particularly Remnants of a Separation (2017) and the Museum of Material Memory project, epitomises this generational negotiation. Being a third-generation descendant herself, Malhotra translates inherited silence into curatorial storytelling. By collecting everyday objects carried across the border (keys, shawls, utensils) she transforms

private relics into public archives. These artifacts operate as mnemonic bridges between generations, converting unspoken trauma into tactile memory.

Malhotra's narrative method embodies what Hirsch (2008) calls "affiliative postmemory": remembrance not through direct inheritance, but through the ways of empathetic reconstruction. Her work thus reanchors the displaced past into new spatial and emotional geographies. For Gen Z readers and participants, this process reclaims mobility's moral dimension, recognising that movement does not end with arrival but continues through memory's circulation.

Thus, the third generation becomes both product and agent of migration's afterlife: inhabiting inherited dislocation while forging a vocabulary of continuity. Their engagement with Partition through art, podcasts, and digital museums constitutes a re-collectivisation of memory, an emergent solidarity that counters the familial individualism of their predecessors.

Migration as a Predictive Model for Future Displacement

By tracing behavioral evolution across three generations, we can infer a potential pattern for societies emerging from mass displacement:

Generation	Adaptive Logic	Social Expression	Psychological Mode
G1	Survivalism & silence	Formation of refugee networks	Containment
G2	Familial consolidation	Economic rebuilding	Endurance
G3	Reflexive articulation	Cultural reconstruction	Repair

This pattern suggests that intergenerational migration follows a predictable arc: from physical survival to moral reconstitution. Such a model has broader implications for global migration studies. It indicates that societies metabolise displacement over roughly three generational cycles, transitioning from trauma to narration to re-collectivisation. For policy and international relations, this offers a template to anticipate long-term civic consequences of contemporary migrations, whether climate-induced or conflict-driven. Since migration is a moral and political phenomenon, it holds the power to redefine state-society trust, and even structures in certain cases. The Indian case thus serves as a longitudinal laboratory for understanding how forced mobility shapes national identities, governance styles, and inter-generational trust.

Conclusion

Migration, particularly when forced, in forms such as the Partition, is not definitive. It continues to evolve, a live memory and a dynamic sense perception. The memories, learnings and even the trauma are inherited. Since inheritance derives its values, often from history, it cannot be isolated or devoid of its past. The Partition of 1947 produced not only refugees but a continuing migratory condition: a habitus of vigilance, silence, and familial centrality that still structures Indian life. Through the frameworks of mobility theory and intergenerational trauma, this paper traced how those traits migrated vertically across generations, transforming collectivism into individualism and silence into speech. It also brought another group of people who believed that the stories of sorrow, loss and negativity of the past should be confined to it. The attempt was to find a way to stop the tendency to hate others, in this case being Hindus and Muslims, Pakistan and India.

Ashoka Mody's (2023) indictment of India's "broken" moral economy finds its psychological parallel in this legacy: the privatisation of trust that began in refugee homes now permeates national life. Yet within that inheritance lies potential renewal. The third generation's willingness to name, feel, and remember signals a reparative turn, from containment to communication.

The author of this paper considers the passage of expression and experience bridged by the second generation a natural transgression in the cycle of continuation. Danieli's inventory confirms this in the transgenerational modeling of trauma. One thing to note is the inventory also suggests that there may arise patterns of resistance in future generations of trauma victims. By articulating what their grandparents endured in silence, Gen Z Indians enact a new kind of migration: from trauma toward empathy, from isolation toward a community of shared experiences and morality. Their openness is not merely generational but civilisational, a quiet re-collectivisation that may define India's future. What remains as a gap to be further studied is the still prevalent and ever-increasing strive towards individualism within the third generation, even after having relatively higher and active morality sirens. Partition, therefore, once a scar, can and has become a map: charting how societies move not just across borders, but through time, memory, and emotion. It still has the scope to decode the cycle of collective grief within communities and peoples, a prospect for traceable insights for a state.

References

Appadurai, A. (1996). Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization. *University of Minnesota Press.*

https://search.worldcat.org/title/Modernity-at-large-:-cultural-dimensions-of-globalization/oclc/34894343

Bourdieu, P. (1977). Outline of a Theory of Practice. *Cambridge University Press.*

https://search.worldcat.org/title/869770634

Castles, S. (2008). Development and migration—migration and development: What comes first? *Social Science Research Council Working Papers.*

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/011719680901800401

Chauhan, P. (n.d.). The Dislocated Women: A Study Identifying and Analysing the Voices of Women in Partition Literature. National Translation Mission.

https://www.ntm.org.in/download/ttvol/Contextualising_Migration_SpecialIssue/article%2015.pdf

Clifton, J. (2022). *The emotional economy* [PowerPoint Slides]. PDF.

https://www.shrm.org/content/dam/en/mena/topics-tools/tools/presentation/mena24-conference-expo/emotional-economy.pdf

Cresswell, T. (2010). Towards a politics of mobility. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 28(1), 17-31.

https://doi.org/10.1068/d11407

Danieli, Y. (1998). International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma. *Springer New York.*

https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-4757-5567-1

de Haas, H. (2021). A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework. *CMS 9*, 8.

    https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00210-4

Das, V. (2007). Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary. *University of*

    California Press.

    https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/j.ctt1pprtk

Das, V. (1995). Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India.

    Oxford University Press.

    https://india.oup.com/product/critical-events-9780199485291

El-Khalil, C., Tudor, D. C., & Nedelcea, C. (2025). Impact of intergenerational trauma on

    second-generation descendants: a systematic review. *BMC psychology*, *13*(1), 668.

    https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-03012-4

Glick Schiller, N., & Salazar, N. B. (2013). Regimes of mobility across the globe. *Journal of*

    Ethnic and Migration Studies, 39(2), 183–200.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.723253

Hirsch, M. (2008). Generation of Postmemory. *Poetics Today, 29*(1), 103–128.

    https://postmemory.net/generation-of-postmemory/

ICMGLT. (2025, July 29). *Danieli Inventory of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma*.

    https://icmglt.org/danieli-inventory-of-multigenerational-legacies-of-

    trauma/#:~:text=The%20Danieli%20Inventory%20is%20the,prevent%20intergenerationa

    l%20effects%20of%20violence

International Organisation of Migration, UN. (n.d.). *Fundamentals of Migration*.

    https://www.iom.int/fundamentals-migration

Menon, J. (2006). Rehearsing the Partition: Gendered Violence in aur Kitne Tukde. *Feminist Review*, *84*(1), 29-47.

https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.fr.9400299

Jude, A. V., & P, P. (2025). Social media activism: Delving into Generation Z's experiences. *Communication Research and Practice*, 1–18.

https://doi.org/10.1080/22041451.2025.2554375

Kaur, A. (2022, August 14). Pieces of Partition: Documenting the world's largest migration through objects. *The Hindu*.

https://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/pieces-of-partition-documentiong-the-worlds-largest-migration-through-objects/article65749598.ece#:~:text=Letters%20and%20postcards%20sent%20in,returned%20to%2C%E2%80%9D%20he%20adds

Kaur, H. & Jaggi, P. (2023). Intergenerational trauma in the context of the 1947 India–Pakistan partition. *Psychol Stud (July–September 2023) 68*(3):374–387

https://doi.org/10.1007/s12646-023-00730-w

Kesarla, A. (2025, October 12). The cost of being a "Good child." *The Talented Indian*.

https://www.thetalentedindian.com/the-cost-of-being-a-good-child/#:~:text=Indian%20Parenting:%20A%20Collectivist%20Approach,reciprocate%20care%20later%20in%20life

Khan, Y. (2007). The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan. *Yale University Press*.

https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1bzfp93

Kundu, P. B. T. (2018, April 24). 99% cases of sexual assaults go unreported, govt data shows. *Mint*.

https://www.livemint.com/Politics/AV3sIKoEBAGZozALMX8THK/99-cases-of-sexual-assaults-go-unreported-govt-data-shows.html

Malhotra, A. (2017). Remnants of a Separation: A History of the Partition through Material Memory. *HarperCollins*.

https://www.aanchalmalhotra.com/work/remnants-of-a-separation/

Mody, A. (2023). India Is Broken: A People Betrayed, Independence to Today. *Stanford University Press*.

https://www.sup.org/books/history/india-broken

Nandy, A. (1999). The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism. *Oxford University Press*.

https://archive.org/details/ashis-nandy-the-intimate-enemy

Pandey, G. (2001). Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India. *Cambridge University Press*.

https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/remembering-partition/E8BD2EEAD93B9680B805844CF12744E5

Press Trust of India. (2025, July 24). India to be 3rd largest economy by 2028: Morgan Stanley. *The Economic Times*.

https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/india-to-be-3rd-largest-economy-by-2028-morgan-stanley/articleshow/118983662.cms?from=mdr

Rani, A., & Hassan, F. U. (2020). Suffering in Silence: Stories of Indian Women with Chronic Mental Illness and Sexual Coercion. *Indian journal of psychological medicine, 42*(2), 168–174.

https://doi.org/10.4103/IJPSYM.IJPSYM_296_19

Standford Report. (2019, March 8). *Stanford scholar explains the history of India's partition, its ongoing effects today.*

https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2019/03/partition-1947-continues-haunt-india-pakistan-stanford-scholar-says

Singh, A. (2019). Cultural Identity and Postcolonial Discourse in the Serpent and the Rope. *International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology*, *8*(5): 2319-8753.

https://www.ijirset.com/upload/2019/may/205_Cultural.pdf

Svensson, T. (2020). Curating the Partition: dissonant heritage and Indian nation building. *Taylor and Francis Group, 27*(2).

https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/13527258.2020.1781679?needAccess=true

Vibha Amit. (2024, August 21). How Intergenerational Trauma Affects Modern Indian Families. *Mind Body Bliss*.

https://mindbodybliss.in/psychology-says/how-intergenerational-trauma-affects-modern-indian-59a4d2a4/#:~:text=Intergenerational%20trauma%20has%20thus%20deeply,and%20healing%20from%20intergenerational%20trauma.&text=Today's%20'Gen%20Z'%20is%20playing,future%20for%20modern%20Indian%20families.&text=For%20professional%20support%2C%20reach%20out,at%20Heart%20It%20Out%20today!&text=Kashish%20

Zakaria, A. (2022, December 9). The Ongoing Legacies of the Partition of British India. *Asia Society Magazine*.

https://asiasociety.org/magazine/article/ongoing-legacies-partition-british-india#:~:text=magazine%20text%20block,reached%20its%20apogee%20during%20Partition