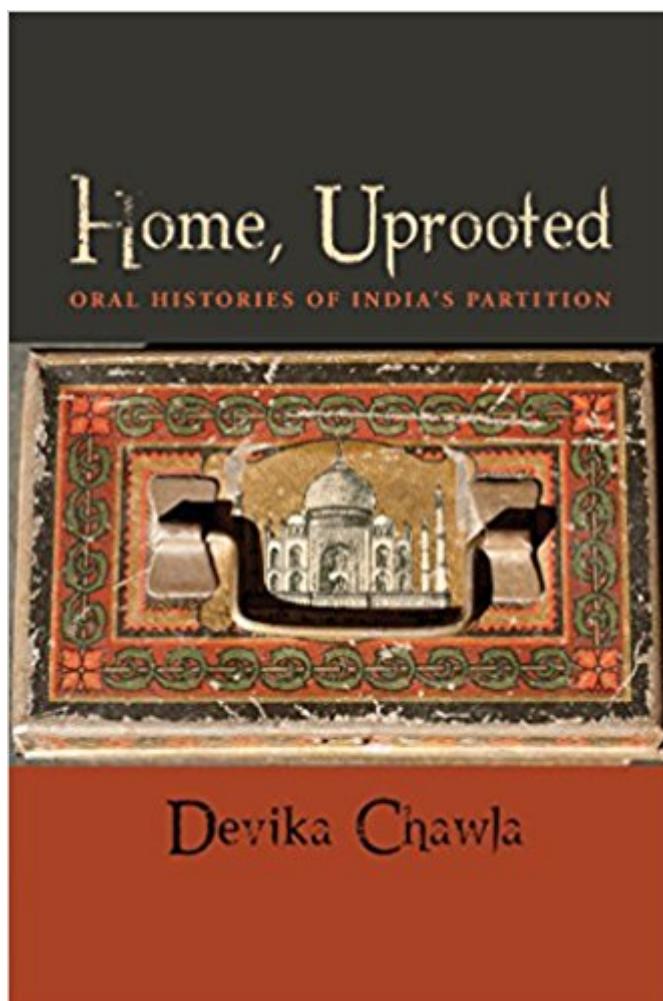


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# Home, Uprooted: Oral Histories Of India's Partition



## Synopsis

The Indian Independence Act of 1947 granted India freedom from British rule, signaling the formal end of the British Raj in the subcontinent. This freedom, though, came at a price: partition, the division of the country into India and Pakistan, and the communal riots that followed. These riots resulted in the deaths of an estimated 1 million Hindus and Muslims and the displacement of about 20 million persons on both sides of the border. This watershed socioeconomic and geopolitical moment cast an enduring shadow on India's relationship with neighboring Pakistan. Presenting a perspective of the middle-class refugees who were forced from their homes, jobs, and lives with the withdrawal of British rule in India, *Home, Uprooted* delves into the lives of forty-five Partition refugees and their descendants to show how this epochal event continues to shape their lives. Exploring the oral histories of three generations of refugees from India's Partition, *Home, Uprooted* melds oral histories with a fresh perspective on current literature to unravel the emergent conceptual nexus of home, travel, and identity in the stories of the participants. Author Devika Chawla argues that the ways in which her participants imagine, recollect, memorialize, or "abandon" home in their everyday narratives give us unique insights into how refugee identities are constituted. These stories reveal how migrations are enacted and what home is in its sense, absence, and presence. Chawla's own family history, which was also shaped by the Partition event and her self-propelled migration to North America. In contemplating and living their stories of home, she attempts to show how her own ancestral legacies of Partition displacement bear relief. Home is how we experience it and what it says about the "selves" we come to occupy. This is a crucial question of our contemporary moment. *Home, Uprooted* delivers a unique and poignant perspective on this timely question. This compilation of stories offers an iteration of how diasporic migrations might be enacted and what "home" means to displaced populations.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Chawla employs a lyrical writing style that is able to collapse the boundaries between ethnography and autobiography, and between academic history and personal reflection." (Asha Oral History)"Home, Uprooted is a beautifully written, theoretically sophisticated and disarmingly fluid analysis of the idea of home through oral histories with three generations of Partition refugees from Delhi, India. Devika Chawla explores what home means to those who have been displaced; how the notion of home has a life of its own, and why it is important to tell this story of an Un/homely Partition. Whether the Partition maintains a spectral presence or an embodied materiality in each rendition of home, in every story that she tells us, Chawla moves effortlessly through the shifting contours of loss, belonging and memory. Beyond history, beyond ethnography, this book is among the first of its kind in both - its passionate destabilizing of any fixed notion of home and its narrative form, which carefully combines personal history and autobiography with stories shared by other participants in the project. The book offers a much needed critical reflection on method, and a trenchant critique of Self/Other binaries by centering stories told and heard via multiple encounters between self, ethnographer, storyteller and interlocutor. Engaging and accessible in terms of writing style, Home, Uprooted will appeal to a large audience beyond the academy, and is a MUST read for anyone in the fields of Cultural Studies, Communication, Anthropology and Women's & Gender Studies." (Asha Himika Bhattacharya Syracuse University)"Chawla's family story is woven throughout the book, and many of its most moving moments are deeply personal." (Corine Colbert, Ohio University Asha Perspectives)

Blending cross-generational oral histories with current literature, Home, Uprooted follows three generations of refugees from India's Partition and explores how the watershed event continues to shape their present-day lives.

Read in an advanced class on ethnography and oral history. The book is fantastic! A delightful read that is thought-provoking, funny, and insightful. The author weaves together personal stories, stories from interviews, and memories from the field to interrogate the ways identity and home are in a complex relationship. As a history of how India's partition affected the everyday lives of people who lived through it, it is a fantastic exemplar of postcolonial theory, oral history, and everyday performance. The book would make a great addition to a variety of courses, and is a great personal read. You won't be disappointed!

A beautifully written account of the personal consequences of India's partition. The author weaves the experiences of her own family into the narratives that emerge from her exhaustive interviews with other individuals who experienced the upheaval of the time seamlessly and with a grace that exposes the universality of our negotiation of imposed boundaries.

“Home, Uprooted” is an insightfully and artistically rendered narrative exploration of three generations of refugees from India’s Partition. In an era of geographic, cultural and even technological

displacement, this monograph is well-timed and consequential. Chawla’s work examines the concept of home from the perspectives of both gender and culture(s) as crafted in the stories of participants from ten families collected over a three-year period from 2007-2010. Chawla uniquely examines

“home” as a unit of analysis and a conceptual focus. Her approach to inquiry provides perspectives into how migrations might be enacted across generations and how homes, as Chawla describes, “in their sense, absence and presence” might be locations from which the displaced center their everyday experiences as well as their identities. Expertly researched and written.

This book chronicles cross-generational oral histories of India’s Partition refugees. Chawla juxtaposes her own autoethnographic stories with narratives from ten middle-class Sikh and Hindu refugee families, tracking memories and activities related to home and deconstructing the notion that home is an unproblematised haven. The book has the rhythm and readability of a novel, yet deftly incorporates phenomenological, postcolonial, and anthropological theory to explain why few refugees go back to their homes in Pakistan, why Hindu and Sikh refugees “other” Muslims, and how women may feel especially displaced in

their homes after marriage. The book is a success in terms of its emotive poignancy, narrative fluidity, and theoretical grounding. I am most impressed by Chawla's ability to use narrative to explain material realities in the world. She uses her own voice and story as complement to a larger narrative about home and loss. *Home, Uprooted* was awarded "Book of the Year" from the Ethnography Division of the National Communication Association and honorable mention from the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry. It's a prime option for narrative and ethnography courses and is, simply, a great read.

The book tells a story through the words of people who have lived it! The author guides us through a complicated and at times painful history to help us understand and appreciate the meanings they hold of this experience. Elegantly and poignantly written

As a child of the partition on the other side of India, I found profound joy in reading the "thick descriptions" offered in the book, as the author negotiated the intricacies of the micro experiences with the macro-level transformations that constitute diaspora, citizenship, and migration. "Home, uprooted" is richly narrated through the everyday negotiations of space and cultural experiences as the author negotiates her movement in/through transglobal spaces. More poignantly, in doing so, the author offers deep theoretical insights about the interplays of affect and desire in global networks of mobility.

I recently assigned this book in my graduate seminar on Research Methods - the student responses to the text was overwhelmingly positive!

Relying on oral accounts from partition refugees in India, Chawla's *Home, Uprooted: Oral Histories of India's Partition* examines the idea of home. In making sense of these oral accounts, she masterfully weaves in the theory without disturbing the flow of the narrative. The book is a must read for students interested in oral history, ethnography, narratives, etc...

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