

alumna Lady Kishwar Desai curates India's first Partition 1947 Museum

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Kishwar Singh Ahluwalia BA Eco Hons 1977 LSR, the brain behind the Partition Museum in Amritsar. (Ravi Kumar/HT photo)



photograph at the Museum shows the process of division of documents and books between the two countries. (Ravi Kumar/HT Photo)



Hanging paper birds in flight showing the pain of migration, at the Partition 1947 Museum in Amritsar.
(Ravi Kumar/HT Photo)

The pigeons who have made their home in the long-neglected Town Hall building at Katra Ahluwalia near the Golden Temple complex flutter their wings in surprise as [their home is coloured](#), spruced up and gradually coming alive. This is the place chosen to house the Partition 1947 Museum inaugurated by Chief minister Capt Amarinder Singh on Thursday 17.08.2017 morning.

The inspiration for the Museum came from the stories of Urdu writer *Saadat Hasan Manto*, who is remembered as a brutally honest chronicler of the violent divide. He belonged to Amritsar and his family home in Gali Vakilan was among the 40 pc houses burnt down in the communal violence during Partition.

This is revealed by **Kishwar Desai** (BA Eco Hons 1977 LSR), the driving force behind this first attempt of a museum of its kind in India. “In the 50th year of Independence and Partition, I started working on Manto’s stories for television. It was then that I thought there should be a museum to Partition and it has taken me two decades to translate this dream into reality,” says Desai.

Why Amritsar? Because it was reduced to an inferno at that time with half the population fleeing across borders drawn by the Radcliffe Line. The city was the transit point of the massive migration on both sides of the border.

... Walk in and there are more pictures, narratives on videos and paintings by a few artists of those times, including Satish Gujral, SL Prasher and Krishen Khanna who migrated from **Lahore**, the cultural capital of undivided India.

Songs of Resistance

There is a hall of the freedom struggle with piped songs of resistance from the two regions most active in the struggle and finally cut into two pieces. We hear the plaintive poem by *Amrita Pritam* addressed to Waris Shah in which she points out the abduction, rape and killings of women.



Lord Meghnad Desai (f'ley Director LSE and Lady Kishwar Ahluwalia Desai



The Partition Museum housed in what was the Town Hall building in Amritsar. (Ravi Kumar/HT Photo)

Re-living all this pain, the viewer finds oneself in the Hall of Hope with paper hangings of migratory birds leading the way. This Hall has a huge **Tree of Hope** fashioned out of barbed wire by designer Neeraj Sahai.

The Museum has extensively delved into and displayed **Hindustan Times** archives to tell yesterday's stories of despair in the hope that tomorrow's generations will live in peace on both sides.

We're proud of ELSA Lady Kishwar (Ahluwalia) Desai and extend our sincerest good wishes to both Kishwar and her dear husband and renowned economist-thinker Lord Meghnad Desai Member House of Lords UK and formerly Director London School of Economics and Political Science LSE.

[click](#) Kishwar Ahluwalia Desai and Lord Meghnad Desai