

A different take on Partition & Punjab

By **Angad B. Sodhi** in New Delhi

THE MEMORY of a unified Punjab, unblemished by religious schism, persists like a dim, distant light in a generation in its 70s and 80s and is fast disappearing.

The stories of these ordinary elderly men and women, who watched the violence before and after Partition, were unrecorded until 2007, when Ajay Bhardwaj made his film, *Rabba Hun Kee Kariye* (God, What Should We Do Now?).

Bhardwaj, a documentary filmmaker from Delhi whose family comes from a village near Ludhiana, managed to locate people from the "undivided" generation with the help of his uncles and elders from his pind (village).

The documentary, filmed in villages in and around Malerkotla, Bathinda, Patiala and Ludhiana, recreates history as it unfolded in the eyes of people who'd stood on the sidelines as children. This is the generation that grew up weighed down by a sense of guilt and sorrow.

All that history has recorded so far are tales of horror narrated by Muslims as they fled to Pakistan, and by Hindus and Sikhs, who shared similar experiences when they moved to India. Refugees and survivors have told tales of people being massacred on either side of the border and these stories have passed down to us. "But what gets lost in our narrative of history is that if everyone was a victim, then

who were the perpetrators?" asks Bhardwaj. He says this "denial mode" of history only succeeds in churning out more hatred.

Describing the violence that accompanied the Partition as another form of genocide, Bhardwaj cites examples of countries like Germany that have admitted to genocide and dedicated museums and historic monuments that serve as reminders. They

remind people never to repeat the follies of their forefathers. With this parallel in mind, Bhardwaj filmed the stories of people talking about the perpetrators of violence from the Hindu and Sikh communities.

The film unravels through a series of anecdotes shared by those who survived the holocaust, developing an image of the time without passing value judgments.

The film opens with four old

men sitting and reminiscing about the loss of Urdu.

As the film progresses, the horrific incidents recounted by the Partition generation, with a stoicism that only age can bring, highlight the senselessness of that watershed in India's history. For that moment, Jinnah was proved right, and so was the RSS, but the sub-continent has only been bleeding ever since. If only God had the answers.



Ajay Bhardwaj tries to recreate the Partition through the eyes of people who'd stood on the sidelines as children in his documentary *Rabba Hun Kee Kariye*. It will be screened at 7 pm on Wednesday at the IHC.

