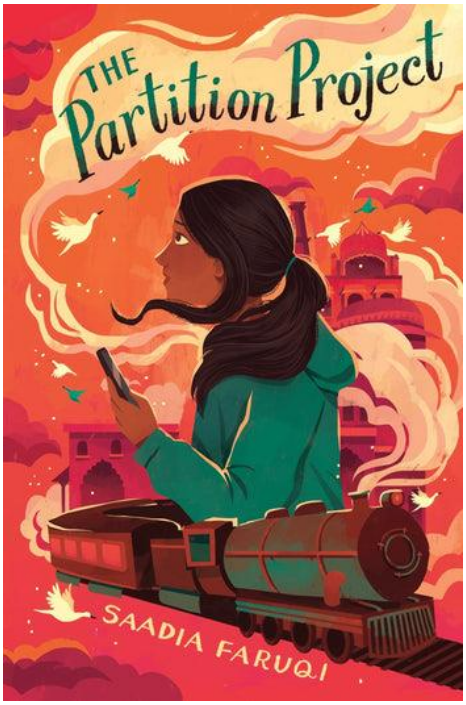


## The Partition Project

Written by Saadia Faruqi
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Mahnoor Raheem is a 12-year-old girl living in Houston, Texas, with her older brother, Talha. Born and raised in the U.S., she considers herself an American, even though her parents are from Pakistan. The Raheems are a typical family with working parents and school-age children. Mahnoor and Talha have never travelled to Pakistan, so they are unfamiliar with the country and its cultures. The story begins with the arrival of their grandmother, Dadi, from Pakistan, disrupting the safe cocoon of their home. Dadi, a longtime mathematics educator and fluent English speaker, settles in, cooks, and talks with her grandchildren. As Dadi reflects on the 1947 Partition, Mahnoor sees herself in her grandmother and learns more about her heritage. When she accompanies Dadi to the senior center at her father's hospital, she meets people from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, whose lives were also affected by the Partition.

Mahnoor is a good student, popular with classmates and teachers, and close with her best friends Kim and Ahmad. When an elective media class is offered, she eagerly chooses it because she wants to become a journalist. The class includes a documentary project, and as she searches for a topic, she asks Dadi about her life. Their conversations deepen as they discuss the Partition of India and Pakistan, and Mahnoor decides to make a documentary about Dadi's experiences. A strong bond forms as Mahnoor helps Dadi tell her story. Dadi's personality comes through as she describes reaching Pakistan, living in Walton refugee camp in Lahore, and losing her brothers, grandparents, and best friend to cholera.

The conversation begins with Dadi's childhood in Ludhiana, northern India, and the Partition that forced her to leave home and relocate to the newly created Pakistan. As details of Dadi's life emerge, Mahnoor sees how her story connects journalism, documentaries, and newsworthy events. Through the process, Mahnoor learns more about herself, her history, and her connection to a culture she had not known. Her focused work brings the community together, and the documentary reaches viewers far beyond her class when it is uploaded to YouTube. The story brings together Mahnoor's family life, school life, friends, and determination to learn her history through Dadi's stories. The novel's prose flows beautifully as the family members discover each

other's strengths and weaknesses. Being open to learning is an effective way to move away from prejudices and biases about people we do not know. History and heritage play a huge part in one's life, as Mahnoor discovers.

Several books on the same topic work well as pairs. In *Zarina Divided* (Reem Faruqi, 2025) the 11-year-old protagonist moves from her beloved home in India and relocates in Pakistan. *The Moon from Dehradun: A Story of Partition* (Shirin Shamsi & Tarun Lak, 2022) is a picturebook about the journey of a young girl and her beloved doll, left behind in the rush to leave their home in India. In the reverse geographical direction, Veera Hiranandani wrote the companion stories of twins Amil (*Amil and the After*, 2024) and Nisha (*The Night Diary* (2018) as they use drawings and diary entries to tell their stories of moving to India and searching for their identity as half Hindu and half Muslim during Partition.

Saadia Faruqi is a Pakistani American writer and interfaith activist who publishes children's and YA books. Her recent 2026 novels, *Some of Us Are Brave* and *Ms. Marvel: Remnants of the Past,* have rave reviews. She is the author of the Eisner-nominated graphic novel *Saving Sunshine* (Shazleen Khan, 2023), the popular early-reader series *Yasmin* (illustrated by Hatem Aly) and *Marya Khan* (illustrated by Ani Bushry), and other middle-grade novels, including *The Strongest Heart* (2025), *A Thousand Questions* (2020) and *Yusuf Azeem Is Not a Hero* (2021). She draws on her roots and culture to lend authenticity to the content she explores through her storytelling and writing. She was profiled in *O* magazine as a woman making a difference in her community and serves as editor-in-chief of *Blue Minaret*, a magazine for Muslim art, poetry, and prose. She resides in Houston, Texas, with her family. More information can be found on her website.

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