Creative states are states of fantasy. We break with the comforting allure of the tribe; produce mental jumps, reach to a point where rational thinking alone falters; where the brain has to give up a bit and something else, something far more riddle-some enters the essence of our being.

Imagine yourself sitting in the back of your car gazing at the passing events through the window. The Banyan tree reminds you of your first girlfriend’s hair. You notice a man arranging flowers on the wooden table of his stall is wearing trousers just like those worn on your graduation day. The three legged stray dogs are playfully fighting near the temple, as a man with a peculiarly large bottom walks his equally obese Labrador. They appear to be unhappy. Somehow you are reminded of your boss and that short English teacher at school and his sadistic cane. You toss away the nigling feeling that you are jealous of stray dogs. Meandering in your thoughts, you are “Free Associating”, to coin a psychoanalytic term, laying down random tracks, not so much, ‘x follows y, follows z’, more a detour that ‘x and y and x and ....’. What do you then do? Pick up your phone and distract yourself, or sit a little longer and get curious about what these creative associations might be hinting at? In short, do you allow yourself to pause?

In “The Interpretation of Dreams”, Freud teases and circles around our “involuntary ideas”, implying creativity as a kind of dream-state, a relaxation of the internal rational censor that controls the imagination. The brilliant psychoanalytic scholar, Jacqueline Rose describes that as a writer, she chooses her themes, from Peter Pan, to the Israel-Palestine conflict, “because I need to understand something and don’t. It’s about going to a place of difficulty, feeling one’s way around it, seeing if you can survive by creating some sort of order out of it”.

Psychoanalysis is itself a form of freedom and creativity. It is a disturbance. It breaks the fixtures and fittings. It legitimizes looking out the window. The consulting room is a space to pause. Through words we represent ourselves and by listening to ourselves, we hear the stories of possibility and limitation we place on ourselves. Creative language - read poetic language - is always musical and rarely conditional. The language we use, our self-medicating stories, are simultaneously inside and
outside ourselves. “Daddy, it’s raining up my nose”, says my friend’s daughter after her first taste of fizzy lemonade. Yet we adorn ourselves with ready-to-wear figures of speech, commonsensical platitudes as though obedience to clipped verbal conformity will protect us from something. Boredom comes where we are tired of our own words. We need a new narrative. What is it that is so dangerous if we loosen-up the words that rigidify ourselves? What disturbance may occur if we bring a little jazz into the story, loosen-up the mutterings about ourselves and our world? To be in a creative state is to redirect, to twist, to drift, to meander away from the absolute, the strictures of linguistic certainty.

What then happens if we dare seek out the dissenting voice that hovers in the landscape of inside and outside? Without listening to the hints, what might the three legged dogs be really playing with for example, we risk rigidifying our identity, “I am x but I am not y”, closing off, placing limits on ourselves and writing limited stories on what we experience. It’s a short autobiography that reads “Hindu, male, married, bored in a corporation”. If we dare to experiment with “having a whole wardrobe of identities”, as Amartya Sen puts it, we open possibilities for being less bored and a richer autobiography. Leadership of our lives, or any endeavor requires creativity: leadership that gives hope, vitality, a sense of belonging and meaning. A half whispered concern I hear is the self-accusation by leaders that “I am a bit boring”. Being boring is living in language that is full of cul-de-sacs, dead ends, the traffic of creative opportunities and new experiences faces a stop sign, a halt. Perhaps it is more apt to say that “I am boring myself, me, with the same words”, representing through my communication, a disregard in commitment to my own happiness, and well-being.

The difficulty I am drawn to, where I am willingly lose my bearings, is Partition; the partition with a capital “P”, that signifies the brutal division of India and the creation of Pakistan. I associate it with the everyday partitions we bare, albeit on an unbearable scale: the painful loses that come with divisions between people; the displacement from village to city that lives on, the odious lines we draw within ourselves between the prohibitive voices that pass for the truth and the daring thoughts that arise in moments of pondering. The partition of words we allow ourselves to use and those we make off-limits and keep us being bored.

How to even think about trauma and legacy of Partition, or to think about anything creatively through language and in language, poses a challenge and a threat. As lethal and transformative this division
of a people was, it is profoundly difficult to speak, to write about, without disappearing in reductive and simplistic categories of victim and persecutor. Yet the same can be said of everyday ordinary living. How to speak of ourselves as more than the victimised by some force or other, be it government, the corporate structure of the business or the husband or wife that doesn’t show-up the way we want them too. We use them to stop entering a creative space, to prevent disturbing ourselves and holding the threat of failure at bay.

Opening up our language, noticing how speech distributes power, refusing to resist self-awareness by locking ourselves in corsets of words, contaminated by endless repetition of the same ways of communicating, we find ourselves making the risky manoeuvre of saying “and”, saying “but”. Psychoanalysis is then a maker of new sentences. Freud, of course, from his earliest writings associated creativity with mourning – adjustment to loss – a way of averting sorrows, boredom, and depression in a subtle, yet forceful determination to fight for the vibrancies of living. That is what it means to be creative. But we have to be willing to be disturbed. Surely it can’t be as bad as being bored.