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## ANALYSIS AND BOOK REVIEW: THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE: VOICES FROM PARTITION (BOOK BY URVASHI BUTALIA)

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### ABSTRACT

*In The Other Side of Silence, Urvashi Butalia reveals the various layers of partition history as told to her, particularly by women. Close conversations bring back memories from the past. Butalia meticulously depicts the saga of displacement, victimisation, and the gruesome shattering of women's bodies and souls.<sup>161</sup> History and politics always shape human existence, but the history of partition nearly eliminated women. They were so brutalised that they were rendered speechless. They were silenced and discarded. Their sense of belonging and citizenship was constantly called into question. As a result, the partition history is difficult to forget. Women attempted to live a half-life, erasing the past. Butalia starts her work by stating that two Indian poets believed that the history of the Partition was harmful to remember yet impossible to forget. The history of the partition includes incidents of violence against women. Sexual assaults against women, including as rape, kidnapping, forced marriage, and prostitution, have increased. Without morals or scruples, there was widespread sexual violence. Under the pretence of safety, honour, or purity, women's rights were regularly infringed. The political split turned out to be a scheme to suppress women and brutally encroach upon them. Women have been used as pawns in power conflicts throughout history, and the partition of India was no exception. It left women with severe mental wounds that could not be healed. The injury got worse with worry of suffering more exploitation and abuse at the hands of family or the state.*

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<sup>161</sup> Jyoti Jaimini, "Gendering partition; hardship humanity harmony", IJNRD, Volume 7, Issue 5 May 2022, Pg.73

## INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of time, women have been the target of violence. The long-standing taboo of seeing women as objects of violence and servitude still exists. Women are considered subordinate in a patriarchal culture. Their views, convictions, aptitudes, desires, and wishes are essentially irrelevant. As a result, women made little progress even after Independence. "According to Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, the story of women's "development," is viewed as three steps ahead and two steps back, a sluggish and imperceptible advance". The land was divided in order to achieve India's independence. Chaman Nahal's novel *Azadi* vividly depicts the horrors of the partition and the inferno brought on by the riots<sup>162</sup>. India's partition in 1947 became one of the most horrific events in history. People on both sides of the border were overcome with horror and trauma. Interestingly as Rituparna Roy points out in *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh*, that 'the experiences of women at the time of partition' remained left out both in the elite historiography and subaltern history. In the 1990s, the feminist perspective gained traction, and female authors began to view Partition as a masculine narrative in which women were sacrificed, kidnapped, or found after being lost in a battle that prioritised group and hierarchy above individual rights.<sup>163</sup> Urvashi Butalia reveals the various facets of the history of the division as told to her, particularly by women, in her book *The Other Side of Silence*. She searches the divider for ladies. Through in-depth interviews with the partition witnesses, memories from the past are brought back (Especially women). The experiences of partition victims are documented by Kamala Bhasin and Ritu Menon in *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*.<sup>164</sup> They use oral testimonies, like Butalia, to examine the complexity of women's lives during the division. Butalia carefully depicts

the narrative of uprooting, victimisation, and the horrifying splintering of women's bodies and souls. Politics and history constantly influence how people live, but the history of the division nearly eliminated women from the world. They were so brutalised that they were rendered speechless. They were kept in the dark and treated like trash. Their feeling of citizenship and home was always under attack. Therefore, it is still impossible to ignore the history of the division. Women made an effort to erase the past by living a half-life. It was clear that division would cause widespread displacement, loss, death, and damage, but few anticipated the level of animosity, anger, and violence that would follow. The country was created as Mother, and cutting off her body symbolised the "violation of the body of nation mother."<sup>165</sup> People were traumatised by the nation's division, and the partition therefore solidified their sense of national identity. "National honour" refers to the honour placed on Mother India's body as well as all Hindu and Sikh mothers and future mothers<sup>166</sup> India already had a history of Sita's kidnapping and her ability to maintain her purity. "The whole nation put up arms and went to fight for the sake of one woman who was carried away by Ravana." However, millions were brutalised during the division, and the nation's and men's efforts to stop the violence barely succeeded.<sup>167</sup> *The Repetition of Silence: Partition, Rape, and Female Labour in Bapsi Sidhwa's Cracking India*, written by Lopamudra Basu, discusses bringing history to light via the silence of women who were tortured, abused, and raped. On both sides of the border, individuals used violence against women and children as a weapon of retribution during the division. The passage "The reality is, both sides died," from Khushwant Singh's "Train to Pakistan" also refers to a comparable circumstance. Both of them used a gun, a knife, a spear, and a club. Both were tormented Both were raped.

<sup>162</sup> Chaman Nahal, "Azadi", p.167

<sup>163</sup> Rituparna Rooy, "From Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh", p.19

<sup>164</sup> Kamal Bhasin and Ritu Menon, "borders and boundaries: Women in India's partition", p.1

<sup>165</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "The other side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India", ed.1 1998, pg.189

<sup>166</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "The other side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India", ed.1 1998, Pg. 191

<sup>167</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "The other side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India", ed.1 1998, Pg. 177



**AIM:**

This research paper aims to critically analyze Urvashi Butalia's book, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, in order to understand how Butalia uses personal narratives and oral histories to challenge dominant narratives of Partition and its aftermath in India and Pakistan. It also aims to explore the legacy of Partition, particularly in terms of its impact on gendered experiences, and the role of art and literature in times of trauma and conflict.

**OBJECTIVES:**

- To analyze Butalia's use of personal narratives and oral histories in challenging dominant narratives of Partition and its aftermath.
- To examine the legacy of Partition and its continued impact on the social and political landscape of India and Pakistan.
- To explore Butalia's focus on gendered experiences during Partition and its contribution to our understanding of the intersectionality of violence and trauma.
- To evaluate Butalia's examination of the literary and cultural production of India and Pakistan after Partition and its contribution to our understanding of the role of art and literature in times of trauma and conflict.
- To assess how *The Other Side of Silence* complicates dominant narratives of Partition and its aftermath by centring the experiences of marginalized communities, particularly women and minorities.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. How does author use personal narratives and oral histories to challenge dominant narratives of Partition and its aftermath in India and Pakistan?
2. How has the legacy of Partition continued to shape the social and political landscape of India and Pakistan, and what role does *The Other Side of*

*Silence* play in contributing to our understanding of this legacy?

3. In what ways does writer focus on gendered experiences during partition contribute to our understanding of the intersectionality of violence and trauma
4. How does Butalia's examination of the literary and cultural production of India and Pakistan after Partition contribute to our understanding of the role of art and literature in times of trauma and conflict?
5. How does *The Other Side of Silence* complicate dominant narratives of Partition and its aftermath by centring the experiences of marginalized communities, particularly women and minorities?

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The doctrinal method of research was used to approach the aforementioned topic in this research work. It is a type of source-based research in which the information is gathered from both classic and current written text sources such as books, journals, newspapers, and e-sources. This strategy is both descriptive and analytical. The project's challenges have been thoroughly investigated using an extensive literature review. To present an informed and perceptive study, the researcher has attentively examined all sources. Opinions of research scholars, academicians, and other specialists who have worked on this topic have been incorporated as a genuine contribution to this study.

**ABOUT BOOK**

*The Other Side of Silence* book by Urvashi has won many awards; The oral history association book award in 2001 and Nikkel Asia Prize for culture in 2003.

"This book is without a doubt one of the most important books ever to be written about the partition of Indian subcontinent. More than the history, more than a memoir, it is also the extended reflection on narrative form. Official

history has always flinched from acknowledging the full extent of the human cost of partition. Urvashi shows us why we cannot afford to forget the suffering, the grief, the pain and the bewilderment that resulted from the division of the subcontinent." – Amitav Gosh

"This book is a ground breaking account of partition that gives primacy to the voices of the people, particularly the women, who suffered in the great convulsions of cruelty and revenge. Anyone who wants to understand the foundations of modern India should read it" – Ian Jack

"This is a magnificent and necessary book, rigorous and compassionate, thought provoking and moving. Oral history as its best" – Salman Rushdie

"These shaming histories – so long under wraps are narrated with honesty and clarity and informed by compassion" – Bapsi Sidhwa

"A brave, moving and troubling book that voices, for the first time, dark truth about our history" – Sunil Khilnani

This extraordinary book is testament that words can evoke an unbearable degree of pain, memories, anguish and lost words. The silence that surrounds the partition is always been unnoticed because of the defining discourse that have sought to explain and recuperate the coming to be of the nation. Butalia's work, among its many accomplishments, reminds us that all too much of our attention has been focused on that which is spoken or written – at the cost of ignoring the immense ocean of meaning that constitutes our silence" – Theory and Event.

### BOOK REVIEW

The Other Side of Silence is a piece of a larger body of work that uses human storytelling to approach history. There is no doubt that hearing the perspectives of those who experienced a particular historical episode is illuminating, even if it does not offer a "objective" viewpoint. However, there is ongoing debate within

historical discourse as to the validity of such an approach (a fact Butalia frequently brings up in order to justify her chosen angle). (Of course, it is dubious to say that conventional history is by definition objective.) The reader is exposed to a variety of persons who experienced the atrocities surrounding the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 and lived to tell the tale in the current book, which is the product of several years' worth of research and interviews. This is no small accomplishment considering that almost a million people perished and 12 million were forced to flee their homes in only two months. 75,000 women were kidnapped, raped, and taken hostage. It is understandable why Butalia is frequently questioned by those she interviews about, "Why do you require this information? What's the purpose of this? ". Butalia doesn't provide a succinct solution to this query. She simply knows she cannot stop her investigation now that she has started it. People who have experienced pain of this kind frequently desire to forget; novelist Krishna Sobti is quoted by Butalia as saying: "Partition is impossible to forget but harmful to recall." However, the legacy of Partition is still felt in every act of communal violence committed today on the subcontinent. The tale goes on, and although appreciating the humanity of both the perpetrators and the victims won't necessarily change the way history turns out, it could help us comprehend it on a very fundamental, human level.

Being a co-founder of the Indian publishing firm Kali for Women, Urvashi Butalia is well recognised for her work in feminist publishing. The current work is an excellent example of a feminist research, since one of the virtues of feminist scholarship is to bring to the fore the unsaid, the subaltern, in other words, the "other side." It is, however, much more than that. Butalia has a really close relationship with her subject? Her own traumatic family background serves as her starting point, and she isn't hesitant to put herself right in the middle of her sources. This book is a deeply personal work that should be approached with care. Oral

histories have great impact since they are about everyday individuals like the girl next door, someone's grandfather, or someone's daughter. Because Partition is not about a well-oiled machine of state-sponsored violence or institutionalised mass-murder, it naturally prompts issues about the apparent "otherness" of the protagonists of these personal horror stories. It is about how a hysteria of paranoia, anger, and fear is tearing apart families, friends, neighbours, and communities.

Are all men capable of committing rape? Is everyone capable of murder? The stories in Butalia's book imply that at times of crisis and despair, ideas of honour and pride are so undermined that any methods are seen to be justified in order to defend them. When pride and honour are threatened, it is thought that using all methods necessary to protect them is justified. It follows that it is preferable to cut one's own daughters' throats than for them to be sexually assaulted by followers of a different religion, and that it is preferable to exclude from society those women who were actually kidnapped rather than force them to raise any "illegitimate" children from such relationships. The litany of tragedies is never-ending, and Butalia expresses boundless sympathy for both her interview subjects and – indirectly – her reader. In spite of being involved with their story and allowing her informants to speak freely, she nevertheless manages to convey her own fury and allows us—her audience—the opportunity to do the same.

We also hear tales of what occurred to children and members of Scheduled Castes, even though Butalia's major focus is on what happened to women. The second subject in particular seems to be particularly deserving of additional study, as the dominant emphasis of Partition literature tends to be the connection between (caste) Hindus and Muslims, despite the fact that there was undoubtedly another group that was not included in any community. However, the stories of the women in the book are the most horrific since they seem to have

been stripped of their humanity during the time of Partition. Even when things are going well, female equality in South Asia is not well-known—publishing Butalia's firm has done much to make this point—but what happened during Partition was in a class by itself. Butalia's keen comprehension of how much can be expressed via silence has significantly contributed to our understanding of how violence is committed and subsequently covered up. She gestures in the general direction of a Delhi family, many of whose members perished during the uprising. She is aware that two of her informant's sisters vanished, but this is not brought up in the interviews: ". . . it was when I went back over our conversation that it struck me that that awkward silence, that hesitant phrase was perhaps where the disappearance of the two sisters lay hidden: in a small crack, covered over by silence. I realized then that in this silence lay the many hidden histories of Partition, the histories that have always hovered at the edges of those that have been told, the histories that describe the dark side of freedom"<sup>168</sup>

How the problem of missing women is addressed post-Partition is a symptom of a far more significant issue involving agency, autonomy, and ideas of purity. After 1947, it was decided that forced marriages and conversions would not be recognised on either side of the new border, even if the woman made it clear that she intended to remain in her new circumstances. Two significant concerns are brought up by this ruling: first, the notion that women should not be allowed to make their own decisions and that the state is better equipped to do so. Two, the degree to which women feel they have no agency, which makes them think that a marriage that results from an abduction is as acceptable to one that has been arranged by and within their own society. This is maybe the strongest message in the book. Women are property, non-entities whose sole purpose is to carry on the lineage and maintain its purity, women have no voice, and

<sup>168</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "The other side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India", ed.1 1998, Pg 106





women do not exist. This is the opposite side of quiet. Not only were males from hostile groups responsible for the violence against women in the killings of 1947 and their aftermath (as one might regrettably anticipate), but also the women's own kinsmen and kinswomen. Due to the absurdity of the situation, maintaining honour became of the highest importance, and these communities' women served as symbols of honour. This helps to explain why kidnapping and raping "their" women is thought to be an effective strategy when one group wishes to lower the morale of another.

Given her feminist credentials, one would not anticipate Butalia to feel the need to defend her methodology or even feminist history as a whole. However, the first chapter is devoted to her methodology's reasons and explanations, which frequently come off as excuses. It seems as though Butalia is struggling to accept the legitimacy of her viewpoint, the permissibility of using her experience as a historical lens rather than "facts and dates," or perhaps the validity of her perspective at all. She often clarifies who she is, saying, "I am not a historian. History is not my subject. I have come to this work through a political and personal engagement with history, contemporary communalism, and a deep and abiding belief in feminism", she writes on page 9. Then, on page 71: "I am not a historian and have neither the capability nor indeed the interest to explore these [historical] questions. I am concerned instead with the consequences of Partition for people then, and its ramifications now, in their lives. My focus here is on the small actors and bit-part players, whose lives, as the lives of all people, were inextricably interwoven with broader political realities". Two pages later she writes: "It is the smaller actors I am interested in, the bit-part players" (p. 73) It is really disappointing that even a well-known feminist author thinks she cannot follow her chosen technique without going on the defensive, aside from the fact that such repetition does not make for enjoyable reading. I don't necessarily view this as Butalia's particular issue; instead, I

see it as a global problem of women's uneasiness about the legitimacy of speaking up. Because "the other side" always deserves to be heard, this practically makes the book the message as well as the medium.

The other side of silence does not aspire to be a perfect book, and indeed it is not. It suffers from, in my view, sloppy editing, too much repetition, and at times a lack of direction. There are also methodological problems, in that the author in reality draws on a very limited number of informants.<sup>169</sup> To my mind, however, none of that matters. This book is worth reading, if only because Butalia had the courage to write it.

#### **CHALLENGING DOMINANT NARRATIVES OF PARTITION THROUGH PERSONAL NARRATIVES AND ORAL HISTORIES: A STUDY OF BUTALIA'S APPROACH.**

The partition of India in 1947 was a seminal moment in the history of South Asia, resulting in the division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan. The partition led to large-scale violence, displacement, and loss of life, as millions of people were uprooted from their homes and forced to migrate across the newly drawn border. The partition has been a subject of much historical study and debate, with scholars offering different interpretations of the event and its aftermath. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in personal narratives and oral histories as a way of challenging dominant narratives of partition and its aftermath. Author used personal narratives and oral histories to challenge dominant narratives of partition and its aftermath in India and Pakistan.

#### *Challenging Dominant Narratives:*

Urvashi Butalia's approach to writing about partition is grounded in her belief that personal narratives and oral histories offer a way of challenging dominant narratives that have tended to focus on the political and diplomatic dimensions of the event. She argues that these

<sup>169</sup> Lalita du Perron, "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society", Nov., 2002, Third Series, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Nov., 2002), pp. 390-392





dominant narratives have tended to ignore the experiences of ordinary people who lived through the partition and its aftermath. In her book, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, she writes:

“History, as it is written, tends to be a story of the powerful, and hence a story of politics. This can often leave out the voices of those who were less powerful, less articulate, less able to make themselves heard. In the case of the partition, this meant that the voices of women, children, the elderly, the poor, the illiterate, and the marginal were largely absent from the historical record.”<sup>170</sup>

Her approach is therefore to use personal narratives and oral histories to bring these voices back into the historical record and to challenge dominant narratives that have tended to marginalize them.

#### *Personal Narratives and Oral Histories:*

In the book author brings together a wide range of personal narratives and oral histories to construct a multi-layered and nuanced account of the partition and its aftermath. The book includes interviews with survivors of the violence, refugees who migrated across the border, and those who stayed behind in what became India and Pakistan. The stories that emerge from these interviews are often painful and traumatic, but they offer a rich and detailed account of the partition that goes beyond the political and diplomatic dimensions of the event.

For example, one of the stories in book is that of a woman named Naseem Akhtar, who was living in Amritsar at the time of partition. Akhtar's family was Muslim, but they had many Hindu friends and neighbours, and they had always lived in harmony with them. However, when partition was announced, everything changed. Akhtar's family was forced to flee to Pakistan, leaving behind their home and all their possessions. In the chaos of the migration,

Akhtar's father was killed, and her mother and sister were abducted by a gang of men. Akhtar herself was saved by a Hindu friend, who hid her in her house until the violence subsided.

Akhtar's story is just one of many that Butalia tells in her book, but it illustrates the power of personal narratives and oral histories to challenge dominant narratives of partition and its aftermath. By focusing on the experiences of ordinary people like Akhtar, author is able to show how the partition affected people in different ways and how it continues to shape their lives today.

Butalia's work also challenges the gendered and communal biases in the dominant narratives of Partition. She argues that the dominant narrative of Partition has focused primarily on the experiences of men and has largely ignored the experiences of women. she writes:

“Partition narratives have almost always tended to be male stories, male-centred and therefore male-biased. Women's experiences, especially their experiences of violence, have been seen as marginal to the main event, as a footnote or a postscript to the main story.”<sup>171</sup>

Author use of personal narratives and oral histories challenges this male-centric narrative by giving voice to women who lived through the partition and its aftermath. For example, she includes the stories of women who were abducted and raped during the partition, as well as those who lost their husbands and had to fend for themselves and their children in the aftermath of the violence. By highlighting these stories, she is able to challenge the dominant narrative that sees women as passive victims of the partition and instead shows them as active agents who struggled to survive and rebuild their lives in the face of tremendous adversity.

Her approach to writing about partition is grounded in her belief that personal narratives and oral histories offer a way of challenging

<sup>170</sup> Urvashi Butalia, “*The other side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*”, 2000, p. x

<sup>171</sup> Urvashi Butalia, “*The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*.” Duke University Press, 2000, p. 5

dominant narratives of the event and its aftermath. By focusing on the experiences of ordinary people, especially women and marginalized communities, She is able to construct a multi-layered and nuanced account of the partition that goes beyond the political and diplomatic dimensions of the event.<sup>172</sup> Her work challenges the male-centric and communal biases in the dominant narratives of partition and shows how the event continues to shape the lives of people in India and Pakistan today<sup>173</sup>

### THE ENDURING IMPACT OF PARTITION ON NATIONALISM, IDENTITY, AND COMMUNAL RELATIONS

The legacy of Partition, which refers to the division of India into two separate countries, India and Pakistan, in 1947, has had a profound impact on the social and political landscape of both countries. The traumatic events of Partition resulted in widespread violence, displacement, and loss of life, and created deep-seated divisions along religious and communal lines that continue to shape national identity and politics. The legacy of Partition has affected nationalism, identity, and communal relations in India and Pakistan, and will examine the role that *The Other Side of Silence* plays in contributing to our understanding of this legacy.

One of the most significant ways in which Partition has shaped the social and political landscape of India and Pakistan is through the construction of national identity. In both countries, the traumatic events of Partition have been incorporated into national narratives that emphasize the suffering and sacrifice of their respective communities. For example, in India, the memory of Partition has been used to construct a national identity that emphasizes the country's Hindu heritage and emphasizes the need for a strong, unified India in the face of

external threats<sup>174</sup>. Similarly, in Pakistan, the memory of Partition has been used to reinforce the country's Muslim identity and to justify the creation of a separate Muslim.<sup>175</sup> These narratives have contributed to the perpetuation of communal tensions and have made it difficult for the two countries to forge a lasting peace.

The legacy of Partition also had a profound impact on individual and communal identity in both countries. This resulted in the displacement of millions of people, many of whom were forced to leave behind their homes, families, and communities. This created a sense of loss and dislocation that continues to shape individual and communal identities in both India and Pakistan. For example, in India, many Muslims who were displaced during Partition continue to feel like outsiders in their own country and struggle to find a sense of belonging.<sup>176</sup> Similarly, in Pakistan, the legacy of Partition has contributed to a sense of insecurity among religious minorities, who fear persecution and discrimination.<sup>177</sup>

The enduring impact of Partition on communal relations is perhaps one of its most significant legacies. The violence and displacement that accompanied Partition resulted in deep-seated divisions between Hindus and Muslims that continue to shape communal relations in India and Pakistan. These divisions are often fueled by political rhetoric that emphasizes religious identity and seeks to mobilize communities along communal lines.<sup>178</sup> The result has been a series of communal conflicts, including the 1984 anti-Sikh riots in India and the ongoing sectarian violence in Pakistan<sup>179</sup>.

<sup>172</sup> Chakrabarty, D, "Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference", 2010, Princeton University Press, p.21

<sup>173</sup> Parth Chatterjee, "The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories", (1913) Princeton University Press, p.8

<sup>174</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, "Hindu Nationalism: A Reader". Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 28

<sup>175</sup> Mridu Rai, "Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir", Princeton University Press, 2000, p.8

<sup>176</sup> Butalia, Urvashi. "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India". Duke University Press, 1998, p. 207

<sup>177</sup> Mridu Rai, "Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir" Princeton University Press, 2000, p.9

<sup>178</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, "Hindu Nationalism: A Reader". Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 37

<sup>179</sup> Urvashi Butalia "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India". Duke University Press, 1998, p. 216



The Other Side of Silence, provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of the legacy of Partition. Through interviews with survivors and their families, Butalia explores the personal and social impact of Partition and provides a nuanced perspective on the experiences of those who were affected by the events of 1947. By giving voice to those who have been marginalized in official narratives of Partition, Butalia challenges us to reconsider our understanding of this complex and traumatic event and to recognize the ongoing impact of its legacy on the social and political landscape of India and Pakistan.

The legacy of Partition has had a profound and enduring impact on the social and political landscape of India and Pakistan. The traumatic events of 1947 continue to shape national identity, individual and communal identity, and communal relations in both countries. The Other Side of Silence contributes to our understanding of this legacy by providing a nuanced perspective on the experiences of those who were directly affected by Partition, and by challenging official narratives of the event. This essay has highlighted some of the ways in which the legacy of Partition has affected nationalism, identity, and communal relations in India and Pakistan, and has shown how The Other Side of Silence can help deepen our understanding of these issues.

It is important to note that the legacy of Partition is not only limited to India and Pakistan, but also has regional and global implications. For example, the ongoing conflict in Kashmir, a disputed territory between India and Pakistan, can be traced back to the events of Partition and the political and communal divisions that emerged as a result. The legacy of Partition also continues to shape the relationship between India and Pakistan, which remains fraught with tension and conflict.

In order to address the ongoing impact of Partition on the social and political landscape of India and Pakistan, it is necessary to acknowledge and confront the communal

divisions that were created as a result of the event. This requires a commitment to promoting understanding and tolerance across religious and communal lines, as well as a willingness to challenge dominant narratives of national identity and history. This book provides a valuable resource for this work, by offering a perspective that is grounded in the lived experiences of those who were directly affected by Partition, and by inviting us to listen to their stories with empathy and compassion.

### **GENDER AND VIOLENCE DURING PARTITION: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE**

The Partition of India in 1947 was a momentous event in the history of the Indian subcontinent, marked by immense violence, displacement, and loss of life. Feminist analysis of Partition has highlighted the gendered nature of violence and its intersection with other forms of oppression, such as class, caste, and religion.

#### *Gender and Violence during Partition: Intersectional Analysis*

Feminist scholars have argued that gender was not the only factor in the violence that occurred during Partition. Instead, violence was shaped by intersecting systems of oppression, including class, caste, and religion. As Maithreyi Krishnaraj notes, "Partition violence cannot be understood solely in terms of gender but must be seen as a result of the complex interplay of multiple axes of power and difference"<sup>180</sup> For example, women from lower castes or classes were often more vulnerable to violence than upper-caste or upper-class women. They had fewer resources to protect themselves and were more likely to be viewed as disposable by both communities. Similarly, women from religious minorities were often subjected to more violence than women from the majority community. This is because they were seen as a threat to the dominant community's religious identity and were therefore targeted for violence.

<sup>180</sup> Maithreyi Krishnaraj, "Beyond victimhood: Gender, violence and the politics of place in postcolonial India. *Gender, Place & Culture*", 2007, 14(3), p.381

"The Other Side of Silence" includes several accounts of women's experiences during Partition that highlight these intersecting forms of oppression. For example, one woman interviewed describes how her family was attacked because they were from a lower-caste community. She was able to escape because she was passing as an upper-caste woman, but her mother and sister were killed.<sup>181</sup> Other women describe being targeted because of their religious identity, with Hindu women being abducted by Muslim men and vice versa.<sup>182</sup>

#### *Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Violence during Partition*

Despite the complex intersectional dynamics of violence during Partition, feminist perspectives have been instrumental in highlighting the ways in which gender shaped the violence experienced by women. As Radha Kumar writes, "feminist approaches to Partition have shown how gender is both a marker of difference and a site of contestation and power"<sup>183</sup>

Feminist analysis has highlighted the sexual violence that women experienced during Partition, which was often used as a weapon of war. As Urvashi notes, "sexual violence became a form of warfare in which women were reduced to sexual objects, their bodies sites of conflict and conquest".<sup>184</sup> Women were often subjected to brutal gang rapes and mutilation, which not only caused physical harm but also had long-lasting psychological effects.

This perspectives have also emphasized the active role that women played in resisting violence and working towards peace and reconciliation. Women's organizations played a crucial role in providing relief and support to survivors of violence, and in advocating for peace and reconciliation. As Tanika Sarkar

writes, "women's experiences of Partition must also be seen in terms of their active participation in both violence and resistance"<sup>185</sup>

It sheds light on the impact of violence on women's reproductive lives. Women's bodies were violently disrupted, with sexual violence resulting in unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted infections. Many women were forced into unwanted marriages and conversions, which further eroded their autonomy and agency. Additionally, forced sterilization and abortions were used as tools of violence against women, violating their reproductive rights and causing long-term physical and psychological harm.<sup>186</sup>

Furthermore, it also emphasise the importance of acknowledging women's experiences and voices in historical narratives. As Urvashi Butalia writes, "the Partition story is incomplete without the story of women".<sup>187</sup> Women's experiences and perspectives have often been marginalized or erased from official histories, which have focused on male political leaders and military strategies. Feminist analysis challenges this narrow view of history and centres women's experiences as a vital part of the Partition story. This inclusion of women's experiences in historical narratives not only gives them agency but also helps in understanding the gendered nature of the violence during the Partition.

Feminist scholars have also highlighted the role of patriarchy in perpetuating violence against women during Partition. Patriarchy created a culture of silence around sexual violence and enforced strict gender roles that prevented women from speaking out against violence.<sup>188</sup> Additionally, patriarchy also contributed to the construction of women as passive victims of violence rather than active agents of resistance. This portrayal of women as passive victims

<sup>181</sup> Urvashi Butalia "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India". Duke University Press, 1998, p. 69

<sup>182</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India", Duke University Press, 1998, p. 71

<sup>183</sup> Radha Kumar, "The history of doing: An illustrated account of movements for women's rights and feminism in India, 1800-1990", 2007, pp. 396.

<sup>184</sup> Butalia, Urvashi. "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India". Duke University Press, 1998, p. 25

<sup>185</sup> Tanika Sarkar, "hindu wife, hindu nation: community, religion, and cultural nationalism", 2007, p. 397

<sup>186</sup> Ritu Raj, "feminist analysis of partition: impact on women's reproductive lives", 2017, p.197-198

<sup>187</sup> Urvashi butalia "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India". Duke University Press, 1998, p. 14

<sup>188</sup> Uma Chakravarty, "the other side of silence: voices from the Pakistan of India", Durham, NC: Duke university press, 1998, p.30



obscures their active role in resisting violence and working towards peace and reconciliation.

They have emphasized the importance of an intersectional analysis of gender and violence during Partition, which takes into account the complex interplay of multiple axes of power and difference. As Maithreyi Krishnaraj notes, "feminist analysis of Partition needs to attend to the intersections of gender with class, caste, religion, and region"<sup>189</sup> This intersectional analysis reveals that women from lower castes or classes and women from religious minorities were more vulnerable to violence during Partition due to their marginalized positions in society.

Women were subjected to forced abortions and sterilization during the Partition riots. She shares an account of a woman who was taken to a hospital where her uterus was removed without her consent as a punishment for refusing to convert to Islam. The woman had to suffer both physically and emotionally as she could not have children anymore and her husband divorced her.<sup>190</sup> Similarly, Uma Chakravarti highlights how women who were abducted during Partition faced the double trauma of rape and forced pregnancy. They were often abandoned by their families and left to raise their children alone, facing social stigma and discrimination.<sup>191</sup>

It also highlight the importance of acknowledging women's experiences and voices in historical narratives. As Urvashi Butalia writes, "the Partition story is incomplete without the story of women."<sup>192</sup> Women's experiences and perspectives have often been marginalized or erased from official histories, which have focused on male political leaders and military strategies. Feminist analysis challenges this narrow view of history and centres women's

experiences as a vital part of the Partition story. For example, feminist scholars have documented women's roles in resisting violence and promoting peace during Partition. Women's organizations played a crucial role in providing relief and support to survivors of violence, and in advocating for peace and reconciliation. The All-India Women's Conference (AIWC), for instance, organized relief camps for refugees and set up medical facilities to treat survivors of sexual violence. The AIWC also worked to promote communal harmony and disarmament, organizing peace marches and public meetings.<sup>193</sup>

Feminist perspectives have also highlighted the agency of women who fought back against violence and resisted oppressive social norms. For example, many women joined militant organizations and fought for their rights during Partition. The Communist Party of India (CPI) organized women's squads that actively participated in the armed struggle for independence. These squads were made up of women from all classes and castes, and their actions challenged the dominant patriarchal and casteist norms of the time.<sup>194</sup>

Feminist analysis provides a valuable lens through which to understand gender and violence during Partition. It highlights the intersectional nature of violence and the ways in which it was shaped by multiple systems of oppression. Feminist perspectives also emphasize the importance of acknowledging women's experiences and voices in historical narratives and challenge narrow views of history that focus only on male political leaders and military strategies. By centering women's experiences, feminist analysis offers a more nuanced understanding of Partition and its lasting impact on women's lives.

<sup>189</sup> Maithreyi Krishnaraj, "gender and ethnicity in the violence of partition", 2007, p.382

<sup>190</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "the other side of silence: voices from the partition of India" 2000, Duke university press, p.36

<sup>191</sup> Uma Chakravarti, "Gendering the partition: a study of forced migration and displacement", 2018, oxford university press, p.87

<sup>192</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "the other side of silence: voices from the partition of India" 2000, Duke university press, p.14

<sup>193</sup> Sugata Bose, "His majesty's opponent: subhash chandra Bose and India's struggle against empire", 2013, Harvard university press, p.306

<sup>194</sup> Radha Kumar, "The history of doing: an illustrated account of movements for women's right and feminism in India 1800-1990," p.160

## THE CULTURAL LEGACY OF PARTITION: AN ANALYSIS OF THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

Author analyses how the literary and cultural productions of India and Pakistan after Partition have contributed to our understanding of the role of art and literature in times of trauma and conflict. One way she does this is by highlighting how literature and art provide a more nuanced understanding of Partition than official histories and government narratives.

For example, she notes that government narratives often focus on the violence and bloodshed of Partition, while literature and art offer a more complex view of the events. Through novels, short stories, poetry, and visual art, artists and writers can capture the human experiences of Partition, including the trauma, loss, and displacement that accompanied it. "In the absence of official records or a reliable history, literature and art become repositories of memory, witnesses to the past."<sup>195</sup>

By examining literary and cultural productions that deal with Partition, Butalia is able to highlight how these works can offer a means of processing and coming to terms with trauma. For example, she notes that literature and art can help individuals and communities to heal and move forward after experiencing trauma. Through her analysis of literary works such as Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" and Ismat Chughtai's "Lihaaf," Butalia demonstrates how these works allowed individuals to confront the violence and trauma of Partition and to begin to come to terms with it. As she notes, "Literature offers not just a means of making sense of the past, but also of making sense of the present."<sup>196</sup>

Furthermore, she highlights how literature and art can serve as a means of resistance and empowerment in times of conflict. She notes that these works can offer a way to challenge dominant narratives and assert one's identity,

particularly in the face of violence and oppression. Through her analysis of the works of Pakistani feminist writer Fahmida Riaz, writer demonstrates how literature can serve as a means of challenging patriarchal and nationalist narratives and asserting the voices and experiences of marginalized groups. As she notes, "Literature can be a powerful tool of resistance, a means of asserting the voice of the marginalized and the oppressed."<sup>197</sup>

Overall, the examination of the literary and cultural production of India and Pakistan after Partition highlights the important role that art and literature can play in times of trauma and conflict. By offering a more nuanced understanding of traumatic events, facilitating healing and reconciliation, and serving as a means of resistance and empowerment, literature and art provide valuable tools for individuals and communities dealing with the aftermath of traumatic events.

## CENTRING MARGINALIZED VOICES IN THE HISTORY OF PARTITION: THE CASE OF THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE

The partition was a momentous event that led to the displacement of millions of people and the loss of countless lives. While the dominant narrative of partition often focuses on the experiences of the Hindu and Muslim communities, the book "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India" complicates this narrative by centring the experiences of marginalized communities, particularly women and minorities.<sup>198</sup> In doing so, author sheds light on the complex and diverse experiences of partition and its aftermath, and challenges the notion of a monolithic and homogenous South Asian identity.

One way in which she complicates the dominant narrative of partition is by highlighting the experiences of women.

<sup>195</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India". Duke University Press, 2000, p.30

<sup>196</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India", Duke University Press, 2000, p.143

<sup>197</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India". Duke University Press, 2000, p.166

<sup>198</sup> Urvashi Butalia, "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India", Duke University Press, 2000, p. 1.



Women's experiences of partition have often been overlooked or marginalized in mainstream accounts, which tend to focus on the experiences of men. However, she argues that women's experiences were central to the process of partition, and that they played a critical role in shaping its aftermath. She notes that women's experiences of partition were diverse and complex, and that they faced a range of challenges, including sexual violence, forced migration, and the loss of family members.<sup>199</sup> By centering women's experiences, author challenges the idea that partition was primarily a male experience, and shows that women were active agents in the process of partition and its aftermath.

Another way in which writer complicates the dominant narrative of partition is by highlighting the experiences of marginalized communities, such as Dalits and Muslims. These communities have often been excluded from mainstream accounts of partition, which tend to focus on the experiences of upper-caste Hindus and Muslims. Butalia argues that this exclusion has led to a distorted understanding of partition, and that it is important to centre the experiences of marginalized communities in order to gain a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the event. She notes that Dalits, for example, faced a range of challenges during partition, including violence, displacement, and the loss of livelihoods.<sup>200</sup> By centring the experiences of marginalized communities, Butalia challenges the notion of a monolithic and homogenous South Asian identity, and shows that the experiences of different communities were shaped by their social, economic, and political contexts.

Finally, Butalia also highlights the experiences of minorities, such as Hindus and Sikhs, who lived in Pakistan after partition. These communities have often been overlooked in mainstream accounts of partition, which tend to focus on the

experiences of Muslim refugees who migrated to Pakistan. Butalia argues that it is important to center the experiences of these communities in order to understand the challenges they faced in the aftermath of partition, including discrimination and violence. She notes that many of these communities were forced to leave Pakistan in the years following partition, and that their experiences challenge the idea of a monolithic and homogenous Pakistani identity.<sup>201</sup>

"The Other Side of Silence" by Urvashi Butalia complicates the dominant narrative of partition by centering the experiences of marginalized communities, particularly women and minorities.<sup>202</sup> By doing so, Butalia sheds light on the complex and diverse experiences of partition and its aftermath, and challenges the notion of a monolithic and homogenous South Asian identity. Her work is an important contribution to the field of partition studies, and provides a model for how to center marginalized voices in the writing of history.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research paper highlights the significance of Urvashi Butalia's book, "The Other Side of Silence," in uncovering the layers of Partition history as told by women. Through a feminist perspective and intersectional analysis, the study delves into the enduring impact of Partition on nationalism, identity, and communal relations, with a focus on gender and violence. The research paper underscores the cultural legacy of Partition and the importance of centring marginalized voices in its history.

The study revealed how women were brutalized and silenced during the Partition, with incidents of widespread sexual violence. Butalia's work brings to light how women attempted to live a half-life, erasing the past, and how their sense of belonging and citizenship was always in

<sup>199</sup> Urvashi Butalia, *"The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India"*, Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 109-112.

<sup>200</sup> Urvashi Butalia, *"The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India"*, Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 155-157.

<sup>201</sup> Urvashi Butalia, *"The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India"*, Duke University Press, 2000, pp. 197-200.

<sup>202</sup> Urvashi Butalia, *"The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India"*, Duke University Press, 2000.

question. The research paper stresses the significance of challenging dominant narratives that erase or silence the experiences of those who were most impacted by this historic event.

Overall, this research paper underscores the importance of personal narratives and oral histories in revealing the complex and difficult truths of history and honoring the voices of those who have been silenced. Butalia's work provides a powerful example of how centering marginalized voices can help us understand and learn from our shared past.

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