

From Honor to Exile:
Reclaiming History through Counteremory in Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence*

Rameen Saad

Advisor: Darrel Chia

Preceptor: Jessica Landau

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Introduction

Following the separation of Pakistan and India in 1947, the rhetoric of Islamic state-building has been extremely prevalent amongst Pakistani leaders, decreeing that a generalized, homogenous notion of Islam – namely, an exclusionary Sunni outlook – would be the basis of the Pakistani legal system. Growing up in Pakistan, I never found room to question this, understanding it as an accepted part of life. As the children of those who lived through the harsh realities of Partition, we collected stories like they were answers to questions we did not have the language to ask. It came in many forms: over dinner tables, in casual conversation, from the armchair. Tales of caution that informed us of the intangible horrors of how our independence came about.

Within the classroom, our history books differed drastically from the stories told to us at home. We would trace our prime ministers and presidents chronologically, failing to release their imposed ‘facts’ from the violence of bias. I remember learning about the 1947 Amritsar Train massacre with wide eyes, where a train carrying Muslim refugees arrived in Lahore packed with passengers, all of whom were dead. (Kaur 949) The full extent of the tragedy was replaced by the politics of the rivalry between India and Pakistan rather than emphasizing on the inhumanity of the acts themselves.

We were taught history through the lens of the winners, the politicians, educated in esteemed institutions. We assumed the versions we heard, the political events that were recounted by our teachers and dates we memorized from our history textbooks were all that were

needed. Disassociated from wider realities, we perused the pages of Nigel Kelly's *The History and Culture of Pakistan*.¹ This is our history, all these sources said. This is how we came to be.

Maybe this is why Urvashi Butalia's work has burrowed its way into my brain and heart. To its very core, it is a history that refuses sidelining. It displays how resilience comes in many forms — public and private. Most importantly, it shows how the history of Partition is a history of womanhood, of deep violence that permeates the consciousness of everyone around us. Memory is often brushed aside as an unreliable medium of evidence, and yet it is the main subject of Butalia's work. This change in perspective is what allowed me to realize there multiple doors that can be opened by allowing women a voice in the way Butalia has done, forming the outlines for a project that seeks to reclaim history.

Through an investigation of memory, cultural symbolism and oral history, I aim to focus on Butalia's oral accounts as a counter-memory of Partition. Having a shared collective memory creates a cultural moment that allows for a subjective truth. I would like to explore these accounts as forms of agency that can transform history, leaving space for women to be self-idealized, autonomous bodies rather than a battleground for the state. The importance of a collective memory exists beyond political opportunism. Butalia's work becomes part of an intersubjective symbolic system, enmeshing itself in history and providing a retelling that centralizes a people's experience. Butalia uses recorded oral accounts of the women who survived Partition and lived to tell the tale. She gives a voice to those who have been abducted from their homelands and had their sexualities controlled and contained. This passage from the Abducted Person Collection lays out the relevant statistics:

¹ The required history coursebook assigned to students taking Cambridge International Examinations.

The abductions that were officially reported in Pakistan amounted to roughly 50,000 Muslim women and children, while 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women and children were reported missing or abducted in India. The noted historian, Urvashi Butalia estimates the number of abducted women on both sides to be around 75,000. In contrast, Mridula Sarabhai, the organizer of the Indian recovery operation believed that the official figure of 12,500 women abducted in Pakistan in 1948 was incorrect and the actual figure was probably ten times more. Of those abducted, 9032 Hindu and Sikh women were 'recovered' from Pakistan while 20,728 Muslim women were 'recovered' from India by 1955. (Abducted Person Collection)

These survivors are the victims of the widespread sexual violence that occurred during Partition where as many as 75,000 women were said to be kidnapped and raped by men of religions different to their own. Thus, Butalia's work is an exposé of the reality of the violence of Partition that still continues to exist around us. The violations committed against abducted women are distorted for political gain and used as a point of centralization for men to focus their rage around. Too frequently the grand narrative for Pakistan's creation has been the focal point in creating a shared, generalized history of the martyrs who voluntarily gave their lives for their country.

I remember routinely perusing the pages of *Young World*, the children's accompaniment to Pakistan's famous newspaper, *Dawn*. There, I read an eleven year old's take on what Pakistan would look like had our founder, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, survived the tuberculosis he contracted just a year after Pakistan's creation. She wrote of Pakistan as a global superpower and tech-giant, surpassing the world in our progress and intellect. It is this blind faith that began my discomfort surrounding what truly lies at the core of the violence I grew up around. I was raised in Karachi,

the City of Lights whose streets were raging with ethnic riots and urban violence. My middle school was in Saddar, an area with frequent riots and roadblocks. As young as we were, we rejoiced when our school shut for weeks on end, under threat of bomb strikes. Over the years, we allowed the drone of the television to echo in the background, headline upon headline of terror fading in and out. We find it difficult to understand why Geo News Network is on every night, why our fathers must base their day around the condition of the city. Too young to imagine the damaging nature of these events, of lockdowns we were put under, drills we underwent for fear of invasion from terrorists. It is only when we grow older that we find reality pressing against our necks.

The roots of the Pakistan Movement can be founded in Muslim minority provinces in North India. Amidst the separation of the country, people migrated to ‘safer’ places where they found others of their religious likeness. This prompted them to nationalize around the symbol of religion (Brass 167) The Pakistan movement permeated the folds of our nation by means of cultural and historical mythmaking. Pakistan became our motherland, *humara watan*. Muslims found ways to identify with each other and cultivate a sense of grievance for their original position in India. The religious and political elite, in turn, used this communal identity for political organization. This rhetoric determined who wrote history, and ushered forth a sense of nationalist pride for what became Pakistan. To question the nation was to question the symbols – namely, its religion – it was created around, as the emphasis on solidarity exceeded critique.

When a nation’s women are abducted by their rival, it is as if a limb becomes severed. Thus, a nationalist project begins to retrieve a nation’s women, where they are made objects of imperial rescue for the state to further its own propaganda. The tragic irony of this calamity is the fact that this violence is shared between the two countries – India and Pakistan. (Abbas 155; 159;

163) The enmity between their people is juxtaposed by the duality of the violence they experience, where each takes from the other in a nightmare-ish cycle that they cannot seem to win.

Stories of Partition continue to follow us long after its enactment in 1947, of violence and blood that exists beyond the confines of a textbook. Instead, it comes in the form of tales told and retold to us regarding events that transpired, of realities of the mass migration that separated families and spread disease and carnage across the two nations. And what of the people on the sidelines, suppressed amidst this insistence on a continuous historical narrative? Do we inadvertently collapse the experiences of suffrage in favor of a universal sense of belonging? When we grow older, we struggle to put two and two together. We wonder, where do all of these stories come from?

The deep importance of having a material memory runs further than cultural and historical symbols because it is set in our habits – what remains of the time before. Rather than painting over history through textbooks of events, disguising political opportunity with nationalism, It is here that I read the accounts of history she has exposed in her retelling of Partition, and see the similarities within each region. As nation-building through a collective identity was the basis around which the Partition formed, complications arose in addressing injustices against women. The nationalist movement urged the citizens of India to mobilize during the freedom struggle by using the symbol of India as mother, “*Bharat Mata*”. Simultaneously, Pakistan was undergoing the same process. There were efforts being made by the elite who held political sway to reduce women to vehicles for Muslim nationalist agenda, forced to embody universal Islamic values of infinite love and sacrifice. The state’s insistence on objectification was to make women more passive, and therefore make them unable to break free

from their mold. What is at play is, even within the agenda of the Partition, a need to situate the patriarchal system in the forefront and marginalize women so as to still keep them away from the legal sphere. By denying them legislative power, a class hierarchy is kept in place.

The champions of the Partition movement urged women to leave their homes and bring their battle to the streets, encouraged by the masses as ‘mothers’ of the nation. While they were allowed outdoors, men still placed them under the banner of their protection. Due to this control, women became objects under the care of men, quickly becoming the locus of a nation’s honor. It placed their primary function during the Partition as vehicles for securing nationalist endeavors, especially myth-making is a powerful tool in realizing the aims of a nationalist movement. Women’s position in society drastically changed once the need for them to collectivize for the movement arose, stemming from the fact that the nation placed their honor within the body of women. The trauma of Partition was not limited to the immediate aftermath and many of these women struggled to reintegrate into their families and communities due to the stigma and shame associated with their experiences. The government and society as a whole failed to address the issue of abducted women during and after the Partition. The lack of proper rehabilitation programs and legal support left many of these women without any means of redress. Furthermore, the silence surrounding the issue perpetuated the stigma and shame, making it difficult for survivors to speak out and seek help. (Butalia 186; 190)

Women’s forcible removal, the violation of their bodies and continued trauma debased them. Despite efforts to reunite these women with their families, many chose to remain with their new husbands and communities. This was often due to fear of violence and social ostracism, as well as the development of new relationships and a sense of belonging in their new homes. As outlined in the text, Butalia discovers that abducted women likened their kidnapped state to that

of marriage, unable to see the point of leaving their new husbands. It was already a violation, an assault, usually by an unknown man. Why then should this assault be any different? (140) But this was considered unacceptable by the nation as a whole as women had become representations of it. Women's sexualities were, up until now, controlled and contained under the banner of their positions as mothers. Once abducted, they were defiled and expressly treated as such. To lose them was to lose the war. Men took it upon themselves to "purify" (150) them and bring them back. Most were made to abort and get rid of their illegitimate children, born between India and Pakistan and hence between religions. The problem was identifying where the child belonged – on Hindu soil with the father, or with the Muslim mother? It was a source of humiliation to be tethered to this offspring, mothers frequently perceived as having forsaken their claims to a legitimate motherhood due to their decision to keep them.

Something is deeply lost and rendered irretrievable once women become objects of rescue for their nation, causing them to be relegated into forgetfulness and silence. Once women who were abducted as spoils of war were made objects of imperial rescue, they become projects for new nations to further their own propaganda. They are shunned by their society and become a burden on their family. Even those who are rescued claim a part of them remains tarnished. They become exiles within their own communities, unable to recalibrate themselves into what they used to be. Edward Said, in *Reflections On Exile*, conceives of exile as "an unhealable rift between a human body and a native place, between the self and its true home." (173) Their position is degraded, their condition of constant trauma, their "spectrum of choice... gravely narrowed; the alternatives... death, imprisonment, or a one-way ticket to oblivion." (Mukherjee 73) This construction of a woman who survives creates a completely new norm of social being, a state of existing within multiple personalities all at once– her national identity, a wife in an

unfamiliar world, a mother to a child who has no home. The paradox is a heavy, unmitigated burden to bear for women, and they continue to be held to the standards of what it means to be a ‘good’ woman in public while gaining absolutely nothing in return.

My aim is to call to notice the fact that millions of stories exist in places no one thinks to look for, that these stories are attached to you. They may have a beginning, but they have no end.

Reclaiming Space for Women in Partition through Collective Memory

There is no need to convince anybody that there is such a thing as individual memory; memory attaches to persons in the singular. But does it attach to them in the plural?

(Assmann 49)

Memory is a core component of Butalia’s book. She uses oral histories as a means to access overlooked parts of history, making her writing not just an invocation of memory, but rather an archive of ideologies that allows a society the ability to tie individual lives together, shared with each other in the form of a narrative that creates an “intersubjective symbolic system.” (Ibid 50)

When perusing the notion of storytelling, these are the difficulties that come up. Stories insist on perspective and narrativization. The color of this medium lies within its resplendent imagery, metaphorical stanzas, and flashes of poetics. The delivery of a story is crucial as well, necessary for narrative and tone – the storyteller fills their tale with their own vision, experiences and opinions. To be a storyteller is to manage the art form within your own realm of understanding. In this way, stories remain dynamic and unfold to surmise a people’s politics and values.

By using storytelling as a medium of exchanging memories, Butalia creates a *collective memory*. First introduced by Maurice Halbwachs, the term suggests a social framework that opens up the possibilities for new forms of research. People within the ‘collective’ are incorporated within this dimension, allowing the construction of shared practices and discourses, marking specific boundaries, and defining new principles of inclusion and exclusion. By initiating this process of learning, it becomes internalized and creates a collective identity. (Halbwachs 43) Participation in social memory is always varied because it is based on lived experience and tied to autobiographical memory. This is irreducibly unique in its location, viewpoint, and experiencing quality. Those who employ a variety of techniques to access communal memory participate in cognitive learning (or semantic memory) about the past, creative and emotive connection with things, people, and ideas, narratives, and different sorts of action, such as celebrations, processions, and demonstrations. Abstract and generalized ‘history’ becomes re-embodied communal ‘memory’ when it is transformed into forms of common knowledge and public engagement. (Assmann 65)

The self-conscious narration of Butalia’s collected oral accounts generate a narrative of what it means to be an abducted woman, recovered or not. One of the issues, though, of foregrounding narrative around one’s experience is of presenting the Partition survivor as “pure presence.” When revivifying marginal voices, it is easy to cast them under the banner of a unified subject-agent. (Menon 32) Joan W. Scott refers to women as having experience rather than as being “constituted by experience.” She has warned against the dangers of developing a pre-discursive basic category of experience. This makes the vision of the knowledge based upon the evidence provided, sapping one of individuality. (25) I maintain that the conception of women, the agency they garner through these conceptions, as well as the knowledge production

through the recounting of their experiences, is grounded in the discourses of nation, gender and ethnicity. The experience, while still essential, is foregrounded by the affective power a survivor's potentiality gives them via the power of representation and voice.

The voicelessness of survivors of Partition can include them under the banner of subalternity, a notion that is situated within the context of imperial power. This dilemma is encountered by Gayatri Spivak in her foundational essay, '*Can the Subaltern Speak?*' She analyzes Western (or more popular) approach to the subaltern: "to speak for or to silently let them speak for themselves." The amalgamation of these terms is the reason behind the silencing of the subaltern, as they are "being stood in for" and "embodied" by others. In other words, the subaltern's subjectivity is destroyed by the portrayal of the other. (Maggio 422)

Amongst the question of whether a subaltern can ever be understood, or has to always be spoken for, emerges a different kind of voice: do we have the ability to speak for the survivors of Partition? Their solitude, the uniqueness of their experience, and the inability of a paganized society to accept them suggests an unhealable rift between them and their native place. Amongst discussion of spatiality, where does the abducted woman fit?

According to Susan Sontag, collective memory is another word for identity – groups define themselves by what they feel is important and what stories they accord prominence. (86) This can, through transmission through generations, be re-embodied, transforming something that is a "fuzzy bottom-up memory" into a "much more explicit, homogenous, and institutionalized top-down memory." (Assmann 54) The trouble with this is that memory is not always shared by individuals. Institutions take over, such as "nations [and] governments" who "make" memories through the use of "symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places and

monuments.” Thus, an identity is “constructed” based on “selection and exclusion.” It becomes an institution’s prerogative to decide what is relevant, grafting itself into the minds of individuals. Its efficiency relies in part on the patriotic fervor it instigates. While the term “memory” has replaced the term ‘ideology,’ it has strengthened the term ‘identity’ on a personal level and especially a communal one. (Ibid 56-7)

The durability of political and cultural memory seems to trump that of shared individual experiences as the latter is “grounded in lived experience[s] that vanish with their carriers.” (Ibid 55) Institutions and establishments benefit from acts of forgetting, which makes any advances in the field of history through the unity of people a threat. A split occurs between memory and history, wherein the authority of historical truth becomes reliant on the “act of forgetting.” (Renan 41) Marginal voices, such as those of women, are curtailed to evade the possibility of a new space of historical truth.

Associated almost irretrievably with nationalism, exile is a state that stands in opposition; where nationalism asserts belonging and placehood, the state of exile is the *lack* of it. Using Said’s *Reflections*, we can draw multiple similarities between the ‘subaltern’ Partition survivor and the condition of “true exile”. Both are a terminal loss, an inability to return to one’s true home, and a constant, unending journey to “overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement.” Said’s view of the exile is of an “unbearably historical” figure that is “produced by human beings for other human beings.” It is a denial of identity, the compounded misery of a people who live without a truly tellable history. Nationalism, on one hand, suggests a community, culture and custom. Exile, on the other hand, is the inability to access these facets. Said brings in Hegel’s dialectic, asserting that nationalism and exile oppose each other as much as the master and slave analogy, wherein opposites “inform and constitute each other.” (173-174)

The notion of ‘un-belonging’ asserts an understanding of a displacement that cannot be discussed in neutral terms. It is fundamentally a “discontinuous state of being,” one where the exile is cut off from their land and their peers. It does not account for the other. As Said claims, you cannot talk about the exile without talking about nationalism. Instead, we must see both terms as collective sentiments as well as private emotions without a language that can truly encapsulate each. The project that is insisted upon is doubly insidious: by needing to ratify the definition of exile, you are taking away their broken history to pronounce it as a whole. (Ibid 175-177) How does one reconcile the concept of “nationlessness” with nationhood? Should the two be seen as a binary, or a collective group sentiment?

The state of being a recovered woman is much like having a rupture in one’s social fabric where their ‘tarnished’ status leads them to being discarded by society. The crucial part of her identity is the broken nature of it – the deep violence of her condition. She is unable to find a place for herself within the community, and must either silence herself and her trauma to be included in the grand historical narrative of nationhood propelled by India and Pakistan, or be secluded by society as a whole. While the women of her family recognize that injustices have been done to her, their ideological foundations do not allow them to accept her back. The key point is that, in today's society, a condition of exile free from this conquering ideology is practically unachievable.

The emergence of women’s voices therein becomes an “excavation and recharting of the past from a postcolonial view.” This allows for a “new post imperial space.” While political forces work around the people of India and Pakistan to rechart this new space, the site struggles with overlapping memories and narratives. (Said 182) Only by understanding the core of what makes a collective memory a new form of identity can we continue on to acquire a narrative that

productively looks at the *people's* history rather than history seen through a nation's politics and institutions.

The purpose of defining abducted women as exiles is not to confine them under a rudimentary gaze, which would label them as broken and unable to recover due to their nationless status. They are, after all, victims of circumstance and tradition, entrapped within symbolism and notions of nationhood themselves. Herein, we see that the subaltern *can* and *should* speak to counter decades of violence enacted against them. I would like to cast our gaze towards real women who were recovered, who went through unimaginable violence and lived to tell the tale. It is necessary to trace the formation of women as symbols during Pakistan and India's freedom movement to understand the spectrum within which they are allowed to operate. This then influences the forms of agency they are capable of exercising.

Women are thereby created as myths within a nation. The idea of myth here is "an idea, an event, a person, a narrative that has acquired a symbolic value and is engraved and transmitted in memory." (Assmann 69) This new definition of myth contends that real-life historical events also contribute to mythology by becoming part of the communal memory. There is an opportunity to excavate a new space for women to acquire a new narrative for themselves. After ascertaining the importance of memory in creating new versions of history, it is integral to see why abducted women become a social group of their own within the nation. I will therefore engage in a discussion on the figure of the woman and what social possibilities are created for her after she has been used as a tool by the nation.

To Make a Myth of a Woman

Historically, Partition has determined not only the place South Asians occupy on the map, but impacts our very core identity. There is always a “before Partition” and an “after Partition”. This perception conceals parts of history from us, essentializing the experience of the separation of the two nations. There is a perception that harmony existed between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs before Partition, a deep romanticization that does not acknowledge the complexities of religious and sectarian divisions of identity that were derived from British colonialism’s emphasis on ‘divide-and-conquer’ when they invaded the region.

There have been objective similarities as well as differences in “language, religion, culture, diet and dress between Hindus and Muslims in India.” (Brass 119) Separatism emerged at the level of political elites through the creation of symbols for each religious affiliation. In this way, history is created by common people instead of determined solely by political events transcribed in a textbook. This manipulation of symbols is carried out by mythmaking. In fact, Muslims and Hindus derived inspiration from different symbols, which also determined their separatism. (Ibid 120-22) It is often a mistake that is made to use this mythmaking as the sole, self-sufficient truth to the history of Partition.

Animosity created by separatist movements² ultimately erupted in a competitive spirit between the two factions, infusing into nationalist organizations that truly intensified the separatist ideology beginning to take root. A core value of this was by means of language. As

² According to J. J. Roy Burman, there were several movements entering India that promoted syncretism of Hindus and Muslims, such as the Bhakti and Sufi tradition that promoted “eclectic faiths” and lessened the religious orthodoxy. (1211) While elite groups were still prone to religious identity-based distinction, this was particularly true for the populace. Revivalist movements on either side entered the fold, where Muslim movements sought to discover why Muslim power decreased in India while Hindus wished to look back on their previous civilizations and their power before Muslims took over the subcontinent. For Muslims, this led to a focus on pan-Islamism, and is due to the eradication of “heretical ceremonies and rituals derived from Hindu-Muslim religious interactions.” (Ibid 126)

Urdu and Hindi share many similarities, these languages united the Muslims and Hindus of the subcontinent by means of shared understanding. This changed when symbolism was attached to each of the languages, signifying a departure from this sense of unity. Urdu was hailed as “the language of the educated,” while Hindi was called “nothing more than a collection of non-standardized dialects spoken by illiterate villagers.” This generalization created controversy. For Muslims in North India, Urdu remained a symbol of their cultural identity only secondary to Islam. (Ibid 128; 133; 136)

This controversy ushered in the development of Muslim separatism, reinforcing the Hindu-Muslim conflict. The competition for administrative and political power between elite Muslims and Hindus grew, and they actively began to use language and religion as symbols. They wanted to maintain their position of privilege by appealing to the historical importance of each of their religions – villainizing each other by generating fears of the eradication of each other's languages. Each feared the recognition of the other’s cultural symbols, and acted accordingly. (Ibid 137) The political elite were responsible for carrying out this process, using these symbols to establish regional and national allegiances across India. These were often of literary, religious and political-historical importance, outlined as a very distinctive world view, promoted through education, administration, and mass media—including movies and popular magazines. As a result, these symbols were used as indicators of regional disparities. (Cohn 22; 32)

By investigating within the narrative, we find the relationship between the aforementioned ‘Muslim’ identity and the fragmented identities of India’s Muslims, all of which

share experiences and aspects of history³. Rather than seeing any one identity as a spokesperson, it is important to focus on their multiplicity to get a more accurate view of Pakistan's history. In much of the commentary on Partition, we focus on the Muslim identity as a "moral foundation for the Pakistan demand." (Gilmartin 1070) Though the aim of separating the two nations was to create Muslim unity, it ended up defining a "symbolic center to give moral and political meaning to the concept of a united 'Muslim community' in India." Focusing on a multiplicity of identity went against this formation and threatened to fracture the symbolic concept of Pakistan. Thus, the missing literature and scholarship on people's individual lived experiences was due to the intense identity politics undergone in creating a Muslim, and hitherto Hindu and Sikh, political identity. (Ibid 1072-3) Alongside the previously mentioned developments, Muslim nationalism was rising steadily and had long been playing a major role in the restructuring of power and self-definition among Indian Muslims. The heavy internalization of religious authority was cumulatively asserted on both an individual basis as well as throughout the community. Here, one hotly debated topic became that of women.

In her article, *Community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India*, Butalia goes into detail regarding the way women were treated during and after Partition. She asks important questions regarding what became of women who were dislocated, unequipped to deal with the trauma of Partition. She writes that "women remain essentially non-violent", being "at the receiving end of violence as victims and "left with the task of rebuilding the community."

³ For some British Indian scholars, Partition is treated as a "failure of the 'modernizing' impact of colonial rule, an unpleasant blip on the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial worlds." (Gilmartin 1068) Though contention surrounds the question of the historical narrative that underlay the creation of Pakistan, it has become known as "the unfortunate outcome of sectarian and separatist politics," and "a tragic accompaniment to the exhilaration and promise of a freedom fought for with courage and valor." (Menon and Bhasin 3) What is lost in the expanse of history, however, are the personal histories of the millions made to live through the violence of separation. It is important to see the underlying reason for this "marked disjunction in the historical literature" as "the story of the 'high politics' of Partition, the negotiations between the British, the Congress, and the Muslim League that led to the creation of Pakistan, and the narrative of popular history, of 'history from below'." (Gilmartin 1068)

They are often primary victims to communal violence. She refers to the incidents of March 1947 as an example, where 90 women in Thoa Khalsa voluntarily jumped into a well to their deaths to avoid the 'shame' of conversion. Their goal was to preserve their community. When we read accounts like this, we read them as stories of valor. Mass suicide committed by women at the bid of their family's will. Butalia discusses that prior to their deaths, an 'atmosphere' had already been created in the village by the community that expected them to take this action. She posits the question: what is agency when we deal with the question of victimhood? (34; 37; 39)

To even begin to answer this, we must see that the debate on women's position in society goes hand-in-hand with those on what it means to have a moral community. Morality and public image became a "touchstone of Muslim identity", which was a crucial element of defining the Pakistani community. Devotionalism, like reform, developed special political significance in the context of the newly developing public arena, where the 'love' by independent individuals for Muslim symbols grew to create new constructs of community that went beyond tangible divides of interest and status. "Public agitations" came out as dramatic forms of displaying one's 'love', leading to widespread public demonstrations with an emphasis on "personal sacrifice" to display "moral unity." (Gilmartin 1076-8) An expression that evoked both the particularistic (and fiercely competitive) loyalty attached to family and other kinship-based identities as well as a widely popular patriarchal family structure, calls for devotion and sacrifice in support of communal symbols frequently drawn heavily on the gendered language of male honor. Moreover, as the language of devotionalism by its very nature required public action, its expression tended to be transient. (Ibid 1077-8)

The struggle for Pakistan formed its basis during the Khilafat Movement, which was "of considerable value as an instrument of creating public consciousness in the Muslim masses."

(Munawar) The movement provided a space for Muslims to mobilize, allowing the formation of a national rhetoric that would inadvertently lead to the two-nation theory. This movement, with broad based support even in the Muslim consciousness, required a common symbol that it could thus mobilize around, and easily identify with. One such symbol was that of women, creating a space for them to be allowed in the reactive, revolutionary public sphere to further nationalist agenda. The consequences of this have been jarring, making women more vulnerable when they enter public spaces.

A Woman's Body is a Battleground

The flames of Partition had already set women alight, unable to be doused by any law or regulation that was being passed at the time. Butalia, in her chapter on Women, discusses the question of government intervention and its futility against the symbolism already thrust upon women in India and Pakistan. Religion, a pivotal force that ruled the psyche of both nation's inhabitants, had already relegated women to a secondary position, the "cause of man's fall from grace. Men were what was sacred, women the polluted." (Saxena 1257) This was offset by reformers who concentrated on education and literacy for women, specifically on the basis of home economics and orthodox practices. This shift, while superficially acting as a defense for women, seemed only to further thrust women within the 'communal' ideology of the nation's symbolic center.

The judicial and commonly held opinion of the masses was that education was a male-concentrated domain. The purpose of these courses of study were supposed to do for women what they did for men – promote civil thinking as well as Islamization. This was not due to an increased urge for women's reform. Instead, it was part of the general Islamic revivalism

and intended as a means of conversion for women who had previously lacked understanding of Islam.

In 1869 Nazir Ahmad published his first novel promoting women's education titled the Miratal-arus; in 1874 Altaf Husayn Hali produced the Majalisunissa, a didactic work on the benefits of female education; in 1896 a women's section was created at the Muhammadan Educational Conference; in 1898 Mumtaz Ali began publishing a women's magazine called Tahzib-e Niswan; in 1904 Shaykh Abdullah began another women's journal, Khatun; in 1905 was published Ashraf Ali Thanawi's monumental female curriculum, the Bahishtizewar; and in 1906 the Aligarh Zenana Madrasa was opened.
(Devji 141)

The other side of the movement was blatant classism as it was largely influencing the ‘*Shurafa*’⁴. Faisal Devji remarks that this indicated a “radical shift in an inter-Muslim dialogue.” (143) The transformation occurred in the social and sexual domain of society, demarcated by sites of legal discourse as well as the orthodox discursive realm. Devji further elucidates on this legal, or *Shariat*, culture by separating Islamic society into the public-discursive and private-nondiscursive realm. Here, the public is a place of “located action...a sort of stage composed of the mosque, courts, schools, and market.” (143) Only male actors were allowed here, whereas ‘abstract groups’ such as those belonging to the private, silent spaces of women, were not recognized as having legal status or agency. Male actors were the moral and religious representatives fulfilling public duties and creating a “moral community.” (Ibid 144)

⁴ A group of professionals inspired by *Shariat* culture who wished to re-evaluate the status of the private sector, namely the position of women within it.

The private “wilderness”, a space for “slaves, youths and women,” (Ibid 144) was where rational discourse did not occur. It was a “pagan” area that was highly unregulated due to its lack of representation. This became a source of “*fitna*”⁵ that was exerted by the sexual desire the “*zuafa*”⁶ created.

“So the body of the zaif was eroticized to such an extent that the woman, for instance, came to be commonly described as a living sexual organ (awrat) which had to be hidden. If a stranger knocked on her door she could not answer him (for the sweetness of her voice induced fitna) but had to clap. If she ventured abroad she was not allowed to move in a way which made her jewelry jingle, for this caused fitna. Even her scent caused chaos.” (Ibid 145)

This threat had to be regulated, and thus a strict separation between male and female had to be maintained that existed beyond the physical – it had to be sartorial as well as behavioral. In the nineteenth century, this was offset by the emergence of *Shurafa*. The reality of this was that “colonialism had crippled the moral city” by “destroying or ignoring traditional structures of spacial authority.” What was ‘public’ became ‘private’ as Indian men became dislocated from their position of authority. Religious areas became part of the private realm as the emphasis became on “inner belief” rather than a moral city. These values were thus exported to the countryside where kin networks became the “geographical focus of the *shurafa*.” (Ibid 149)

Within this restructuring, *zuafa* became “pagan idols lodged within the gates of iconoclastic Islam.” (Ibid 149) Now that men had become part of the private sphere as well, they found themselves being attacked from the inside by the threat of the women. Her position

⁵ Social chaos or disruption.

⁶ Slaves, youths and women.

endangered the fabric of honor within Muslim society. Thus, the reason to include women within the new *sharif* polity was to neutralize this threat and promote Islamization. (Ibid 150) This need for 'reform' did not free the *zaif* women. Instead, it was that the world outside would be a corrupting force for them and they must now be protected. Men were, therefore, made into "a sort of guardian of orthodoxy" for the "non-sexual mother figure" that women were allowed to take up. Herein, women were exalted as a force of good in the city that colonialism had made immoral. This image of passivity was used as "propaganda for women's reform," making it a great ideal. As Devji concludes: "*She [the Muslim woman] does not speak, she just is. The woman as an exclamation of Islam.*" (151-53)

Through these ideological connotations, we can see how religion creates the basis for metaphysical speculations in society where treatment towards women, and thus their place in history, is decided. Blood splattered across the subcontinent, the millions displaced, and the elevated tensions between two nations therefore are caused by the political decision of a few. When we look at the countless abducted women and the agonies of those who survived, we can view the reality of the deep violence that had become the reality of the inhabitants of India and Pakistan. The people paid for the consequences of the birth of two sovereign nations.

Abducted Women Enter Reform

The suffering of women soon became too grave a problem to ignore. The authorities decided to take action on 1st September, 1947, when Mahatma Gandhi spoke up.

In my opinion it is a matter of great shame even if one woman is abducted. Why should this happen at all? To abduct women just because she happens to be a Hindu, a Sikh or a Muslim and to forcibly rape her is really a limit of depravity... (Saxena 1266)

On April 8th, the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan, Jawaharlal Nehru of India and Liaquat Ali Khan of Pakistan, signed the India—Pakistan Agreement that vowed to “immediately set up an agency with which representatives of a minority shall be associated to assist in the recovery of abducted women.” (Nehru and Khan) Henceforth, the governments came up with the Inter-Dominion Treaty of December 6th, 1947, to recover as many abducted women as possible.⁷ Not once did this take account of the choice of the woman herself. According to Gandhi, these women had “fallen into the hands of evil men” and that “society must gracefully accept them.” (Saxena 1266) His words ring true to the separatist movements brewing and creating anti-Muslim sentiments, wherein women were seen as victims in the hands of the barbaric Muslims.

The breakdown of this confinement to the private, we see, only began occurring when political figures realized the importance of women in cultivating a mass presence, a symbol that a movement could base its struggle around. We see it through Gandhi’s revolutionary Salt March. Previously, he had been vehemently against the involvement of women, saying that “just as it would be cowardice for Hindus to keep cows in front of them while going to war, similarly it would be considered cowardly to keep women with them on the march.” (Karlekar) He was aware that women were keen to join, but felt they were more suited to the realm of the private. The access to salt resonated deeply with women as they “naturally preside over culinary operations.” (Karlekar) Gandhi used this opportunity to press the topic of working women as a symbol for India’s nationalist endeavor, brimming with infinite love and the spirit of sacrifice. Even while he was in jail, this led to women’s voices coming through and gave them space to

⁷ Within this legislative sanction, to be ‘abducted’ meant that “after March 1st, 1947, any woman who was seen to be living with, in the company of, or in a relationship with a man of the other religion would be presumed to have been abducted, taken by force.” (Butalia 114-5)

raise awareness of their own demands, while forming a stronger opposition against unfair reforms.

Pakistan, too, required a similar revolutionary ire to that of the Salt March if it was to become a nation separate from Hindustan. As Ayesha Jalal notes, “what Muslims needed above all was to overcome the limitations of being a minority ... to assert that Muslims were not a minority but a nation entitled to being treated on par with the Hindus.” (Jalal) It was there that we see to tap into this nationalism, Jinnah had recourse to Islam, borne from “political necessity—the need to win the support of a community that was a distinctive category in official and popular parlance but with no prior history of organizing on a single platform.” (Jalal) Jinnah could not let go of real political objectives as that would detract from areas where Muslims were in majority, and this mobilization through Islam became his only option to “steal the populist march on their rivals.” (Jalal)

Jinnah employed Gandhi’s tactics of centering around the symbol of women to the Pakistan movement, creating a common ground for Muslims to mobilize around. Women’s issues (such as their “dignity and status” (Khan) being granted through legal status and addressing *Pardah* restrictions) were an “impediment to the progress of Muslim society as a whole” (Khan) as the common belief was that following Islam would inevitably provide due legal and social conditions for women. This was owing to the rationale of the Khilafat Movement, which held that protecting Islam also defended its reputation, which included women. This diverted their attention from their problems and grouped them together without solely emphasizing female reforms.

Jinnah's "reliance on Islamic symbolism was ... one of the ways in which his political tactics undermined women's issues." (Khan) While it remains true that his ideally envisioned democracy included "women and all citizens [being] guaranteed their rights according to humanitarian principles," (Ibid) but this seemed to take a backseat when short-term political goals came into question. The tipping point for this was during the matter of the Shariah laws of inheritance. Initially, Jinnah had made Shariah laws a "symbol of commitment to the Muslim community" (Ibid) in order to win support from minority Muslim areas. The debate over inheritance was met by opposition from the Punjabi Unionist Party, who would end up losing their own land. This party was led by landowners who monopolized the popular vote, and so Jinnah "compromised with the Unionists in order to win support from the landed classes in the Punjab." (Ibid) This included backing out of the promise for the legislation on the inheritance of agricultural land. Women were betrayed in their attempt to create agency. Working class women were unable to break from these constraints, and this set a precedent for the de-prioritization of women's issues.

Women were made to represent the enduring Islamic virtues of unending love and sacrifice while serving as tools for the Muslim nationalist goal. This insistence on objectification led to making them more passive. Even within the agenda of the Partition, there is a need to situate the patriarchal system in the forefront and marginalize women so as to still keep them away from the legal sphere. By denying women legislative power, a class hierarchy is maintained.

The Consequences of Gendered Violence

By briefly delving into these theories and events, I noticed that while the Partition was exceedingly a win for the Muslim consciousness to form and create a nation around religious lines, it contributed negatively for the marginalized such as women. Even now, we can note that women in Pakistan must “[accept] the existing pattern of sex-structured roles but [attempt] to elevate their status within this framework.” (Khan) Power structures go unchallenged, even as individual victories are won. Jinnah and Gandhi, both leaders who attempted to address women’s issues, failed to consciously see them as separate and important which required individual attention and effort. Today, “less than one quarter of Pakistani women are literate.” (Khan) I note my own extreme privilege to be part of the lucky portion of this statistic. It is a number that can only be made sense of if we add cultural and historical significance to our understanding of the marginalized.

This intervention, while aiming to recover women in spirit and physicality, was much more daunting than any politician at that time could realize. Kamla Patel, a freedom fighter at the forefront of the recovery of Abducted Women, wrote in 1997,

It is not possible to put into words the anguish and sufferings of these abducted women. After having led a full happy life with their families, they had been forced to live a life full of fear with those who had massacred their husbands, brothers or fathers. As if this was not enough, as they belonged to different religion, they had to suffer with bowed heads the way they were looked down upon by their abductors and their families. And despite these, they had to serve these people and be at their beck and call. There was no one there whom an abducted woman can call her own, in whom she could confide her misery,

and somewhat lighten her burden. There was no way of redressing their grievances or appealing for help through legal means, courts or the government. There was not even a faint ray of hope on the horizon for her to be free of her imprisoned status. (16-17)

The state ensured that religion played an integral role in shaping women's identities. The implications of how their lives would go were determined by the extreme acts of violence that were committed against them, both during and after their abductions, with little chance of recompense.. As religion had become a unifying factor in grouping people together, the success of one group became the failure of the other, and vice versa. The discontentment and grudges were carried out in imaginary spaces and symbolic objects. Herein, men were sacred while women in contrast were seen as "polluted and mundane." The gender differences had already been pronounced over the decades, and there arose a need to 'cleanse' a particular area . This 'ethnic cleansing' included rape as a weapon of war with the express purpose to humiliate women of a community, in order to degrade the community itself. The acts were carried without control, and even had a celebratory air to the matter where the attacks were exulted.

Shorish Kashmiri informs that women were stripped 'just like bananas are peeled', were paraded naked in the market place, were forced to dance naked in Gurudwaras and were raped in presence of their men folk. G.D Khosla quotes a civil surgeon of Shiekhupura who testified to the Fact Finding Team on the violence in Guru Nanakpura on August 26, 1947 and said that, 'women and young girls in all forms of nakedness' were brought to his hospital, 'even the ladies of the most respectable families had the misfortune of having undergone this most terrible experience. The wife of an advocate had practically nothing on when she came to the hospital.' (Saxena 1258)

Another popular means of enacting violence upon women became the branding of the body with slogans announcing “*Pakistan Zindabad*” or “*Hindustan Zindabad*.” These violations divided women as an entire community from both religions as artifacts used for political gain rather than humans unto themselves. In other cases, women were impregnated deliberately as a means of polluting the body. This had a two fold impact – she could not go back to her family, and her womb symbolically held evidence of the denigration of one community over the other. As a result, there was a new degree of “cleansing”. Several women were subjected to routine medical examinations as part of the post-Partition process of rehabilitating them in order to rule out the chance that they may get pregnant with the enemy's children and therefore contaminate the biological national source of family. Thus, a woman was viciously raped by one group before being forced to get an abortion by the other, which happened to be her own, if she was pregnant. Her ability to procreate was exploited to stop the unwelcome spread of the enemy's offspring. (Saxena 1259)

The community and its religion both suffered stigma through the profaning of women's bodies. The physical realm is not the only one being altered. Now, spiritually, too, is the woman violated. Women were converted as acts of war as each nation played into the identity of honor being vested within a woman. The abducted woman is left a “truncated subject”, having to re-configure her conception of her social identity. Conversions, much like rape, “forcibly penetrate the borders of communities in a deliberate attempt to sully them.” Women's bodies were appropriated for exploitation in a variety of ways by erasing their social identities violently through conversion to another religion. (Menon 34)

Within this domain, we see how deeply these violations and acts of cleansing affect women, as well as their communities who effectively must face the conundrum of accepting one

that has been ‘polluted’ back into their home. There, they employ a strategy of silence when it comes to women who are returned to their original homes. The crimes are concealed, obscured, and re-signified to keep with convention and allow a “re-writing” of “their own violent past.”⁸

These discontinuous identities fumble with the classification thrust upon women. Rather than people unto themselves, they are made to balance within the nation’s configuration of what they must be: a wife, a mother, someone meant to be protected and saved. This results in the goal of the state: to mute women’s voices in ‘official’ history, that which is considered valid by a government body. This has been the principal archive for history, which could not be shaken by orally sharing stories. By writing down the stories of abducted women, Butalia has introduced a new form of agency for them: an addition to Pakistan and India’s archive.

Rewriting Agency

As Agha Shahid Ali captures, “your history gets in the way of my memory.” (Ghosh) The endeavor undertaken by Butalia centralizes the stories of abducted women by focusing on their narratives, allowing a rewriting of their identity. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes in *Provincialising Europe* that a historical approach to the histories and voices of minority groups can aid in dislocating the centrality of Western, or commonly held thought. The act of writing in itself is privileged as it allows for a physical testimony of one’s experiences. Butalia’s collection of stories thus acts to collectivize a set of similar experiences, allowing a cultural formation.⁹

⁸ The erasure of history can be seen in the widespread political rhetoric around both India and Pakistan. In India, abducted women were classified as “mythical Sitas.” Their invocation was that these sacred women required protection from Muslim abductors who were re-configured as “sexually excessive” to benefit oriental clichés surrounding them. Hence, patriarchal control was seen as a necessity via the State. (Menon 35)

⁹ A collective experience whose meaning is formed by cultural, or collective, memory. (Assmann and Czaplicka 129)

This allows for a resurgence of a form of agency for abducted women, where instead of promising to rescue them, it allows them a voice within their own scholarship.

Agency is a complicated arena to approach, especially in locating women's agency in South Asia. Greater consideration has to be given to the definitions and make-up of the institutions in place for women, in order to develop interventionary choices that promote a politics of change. It is simple to assume that women are constrained by patriarchal shackles and religious oppression, especially when looking at it from the perspective of Western academics. Instead, there are alternative ways in which to see agency within women. Saba Mahmood in her book *Politics of Piety*, discusses in length the hegemonic praxis of feminist thought where the woman's consciousness is not taken into consideration. Rather, there is a focus on "instruments of oppression" (7) that surround her and lead to her domination. Mahmood problematizes this, saying that women's actions reinscribe these "instruments of oppression." Instead, there are "moments of disruption" and "articulation of points of opposition to male authority." Hence, agency here becomes "the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles." (8)

What are the conditions that allowed women to narrate their stories? Was it just that, for once, somebody had asked them? Butalia remarks that while interviews took place, women were rarely alone – their husbands and sons tended to take over stories and narratives. (12) Likewise, they would defer to men if spoken to directly or say they had nothing of importance to share. Butalia recognizes this dual nature of collecting oral narratives as finding two distinct, often even opposing points of view, one of which puts ideas in the context of men's social dominance and the other of which focuses on the direct reality of a woman's experience. (280) More specifically, the story of Basant Kaur stands out here, one marked with death in various forms – sacrificial,

moral, traditional, or emotional. The sacrifices of women and children in Thoa Khalsa were viewed as an elevation of women's position by their deaths, bringing honor to their families. Basant Kaur was one of those whose attempt to jump in did not lead to her demise. Instead, she survived and lived to tell the tale.

She narrates the murdering of women around her to save them from the social death sentence of conversion and their subsequent abduction. The decision to jump into the well was seen as a collective one, where women, girls and even boys took it upon themselves to jump into the well. The reason she survived was merely a technicality – she describes it as putting “rotis into a tandoor, and if it is too full, the ones near the top, they don't cook, they have to be taken out.” (158) The well became so full that those who jumped near the end were cushioned by the bodies of the dead. She lived, as did her tale. “They are stories after all,” she says. “You tell them and tell them until you lose consciousness...” (160)

After going through Basant Kaur's account, Butalia introduces Bir Bahadur Singh, Kaur's son. His narrative details the incidents that occurred, validating Kaur's words but filling it with phrases such as the ‘martyrdom’ of women who gave up their lives to ‘save’ the purity of their religion. (162) His explanation of the events addresses each death as a tragic yet understood fact. He talks about his taya's pregnant daughter-in-law who ordered her own murder, “prepared for death...she had death in her control and it was only when she wanted it that death took her...She knew she would die...so much control...over death.” (164)

The difference in the two accounts is extremely telling. Bir Bahadur Singh adds his own voice to his retelling, incorporating an understanding that mirrors the sentiments of his community. Notably, he says very little about his mother's position in the incident, nor does he

claim her as his mother. Though he attributes bravery and heroism to his sister's heroic death, the survival of his mother disturbs the honor of the family.

Talk of the martyrdom of women is almost always accompanied by talk of those women whose lives were saved, at the cost of those which were lost, and although there may not be direct condemnation, it is clear that those who got away are in some ways seen as being inferior to those who 'offered' themselves up to death to save their religion.

(Butalia 165-6)

Freedom of choice is thus a contentious subject. While women make the decision to take their lives, the premise of this belief is bolstered by expectations of the society they are in. As Mahmood discusses, Individual autonomy is important for both facets of freedom so it is hard to determine that these are sound decisions made by consenting individuals. In this context, it can be said that agency is enacted "in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms." (15) This complicates the notion of agency, straying from poststructuralist ideas such as Judith Butler's. While in Butler's understanding, the question of agency is posed "in relation to the meaning of a performance" that "must be interpreted and recognized by another," (Butler 8) Mahmood focuses on how norms are embodied. For her, the body is treated "as a medium for, rather than a sign of, the self," that the way "subversion or destabilization of norms" operates differently within the imaginary. Thus, the disruption of these norms would lead to one literally "retutoring" the body rather than destabilizing structures set up by norms. Reform cannot be enacted through this as one interested in changing these traditions "cannot simply assume that resignifying virtues and practices would change the meaning of these practices." (166)

Women's ability to act as agents is unique in that they are governed by patriarchal systems. Patriarchies are resilient not only because they are ingrained in social stratification, labor divisions, other political structures, religious/cultural practices, institutions, and categories, but also because they contain a contractual and consensual component that, along with patriarchal systems, is subject to continuous and consistent reformulation. It is thus important to see women as “evaluative agents.” A change in narrative for women, then, may create a social disjuncture that shifts the subjectivity of “female knowledge and the changing relation between moral and affective structures.” (Sangari 872) For the exile, a completely new social space of being opens up where agencies can be allowed to slip through structures. Abducted women can use this space to act differently and independently by having the power to organize within their shared state of exclusion from the society they live in by creating a shared history through their recollections of Partition.

Countermemory as a New History

If we are to look at history and memory as interactive forces on a scale, polarized on either end, a space can be created for what has been cast into the shadows of the past: a *countermemory*. By learning that memory has a history and that history is a type of memory in and of itself, both history and memory become self-reflexive; a sense of their construction is acquired. History and truth are under the power of institutions like the church and totalitarian regimes. In contrast to premodern cultures, where there were no media or institutions of writing independent of power or authority that could support independent accounts of the past, the institution of censorship served the purpose of destroying competing media and carriers of counter histories that threatened the stability of a uniform view and an authoritarian voice of history. History textbooks are the “weapons of mass-instruction” that serve as the nation's

“vehicles of national memory” across all cultures. (Assmann 54) So, totalitarianism may be viewed as an attempt to revive the premodern state's monopoly over history in modern circumstances and using current means. Acknowledging the various and varied effects of the past, and in particular the impact of a traumatic past, on its people means granting memories, both individual and collective, a new status and right in the mediated democratic society. (Ibid 62-5)

Here, we surmise that the past, which until recently was seen as “closed and fixed,” can be open to change. It is constantly in flux and new constructions of it arise to alter the course of history and politics, continually being reclaimed as a source of “power and identity politics.” (Ibid 57) Edward Said remarks, “collective memory is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning.” (185) It depends heavily on transitions from history into memory involving the “framing of historical events in the shape of affectively charged narratives and mobilizing symbols.” (Assmann 68) The wider context of memory is thus foundational to discovering why it succeeds in mobilizing people: “by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way” it is a selective process that is “frequently, if not always, manipulated and intervened in for sometimes urgent purposes in the present.” (Said 179)

Memory becomes an important facet of both the mobilization of marginalized people, as well as a dimension for them to be able to have a say in the run of history. Rather than seeing memory and history as polar opposites, both inform each other and fill in the gaps of what is missing. Contributing to collective memories to centralize around can be an incredibly productive venue, with different perspectives and experiential qualities to create different

channels to access each memory. These can be images, autobiographies, narratives, celebrations or demonstrations. As Assmann notes, participants in such endeavors access “cognitive learning” or “semantic memory”, turning an “abstract” history into a re-embodied collectivity. (65)

As Margaret Atwood explicates in her lecture at the University of Ottawa in 1998, “it is the very things that aren’t mentioned that inspire the most curiosity in us,” (1509) referring to the parts of history that remain shrouded in secrecy. It is this belief that has turned academics, creatives, and historiographers alike to their own roots, focusing on what the past can reveal. The past must be told, and retold as “individual memory [and] history are all selective...no one can tell all the stories there are.” (Ibid 1516) It is doubly important to reclaim the past and explore it, infusing it with meaning for those who are alive today – the survivors, and those who follow them.

Butalia uses her words to allow women abducted during Partition to reclaim their voice, helping create a more honest image of the nation. Her use of oral histories to explore “history from below” (Virdee 49) allows for a pivot in India and Pakistan’s joint womanly histories, providing ample opportunity for documentation that aids in a new understanding of the realities of Partition’s violence. We see agency exercised through many forms: through complaints made of their life as of now, of the way they have been and continue to be treated by their community, of the many traumas left for survivors to carry. By writing them into the archival history of Partition, Butalia allows their words to gain political importance. Hence, these accounts act as testimonies that support the lived experiences of abducted women and allow them space in the growing scholarship on women’s experiences of Partition.

Conclusion

Butalia asks the question, “How do we reach beyond the stories into the silences [abducted women] hide; how can we assume that speech, the breaking of silence, is in itself a good thing?” (10) After decades of using women as symbols of state-building, Pakistan and India’s archive requires recontextualization to allow space for the history of the people. By acknowledging the creation of women as a symbol in India and Pakistan’s nation-building project, we recognize them as a social group separate from other victims of Partition. By using the collective memories of abducted women, Butalia points to a counter-memory that enters the folds of official history. Such a construction allows for women to exercise agency by the use of their individual voices to share their stories.

Simultaneously, beyond *The Other Side of Silence*, Butalia has done work to attend to missing parts of history. As an activist, Butalia has remarkably contributed to the history of Partition, earning a *Padma Shri*, India fourth highest civilian award, as well as opening a leading publishing house in Delhi, *Zubaan Books*, a feminist publishing house. (*Feminism in India*) Her formative work has created a legacy for abducted women, inspiring others to reclaim accounts of gendered violence and allow these stories to persevere. The re-emergence of Partition in the public shapes a new kind of community in Indian, and even Pakistani life. The generations post-1947 whose lives are still actively affected by Partition become privy to their ancestral history, allowing the citizens of both India and Pakistan to realize their interconnectedness. It recognizes the responsibility they have towards the traumas of the past and situates their experiences within discursive contexts to show how readily they apply in the present.

Consider the play *Aur Kitne Tukde (How Many Fragments?)* by Kirti Jain, which describes the manner in which Partition profoundly changed the lives of women. Premiering in 2001, it dramatizes the violence committed against women's bodies, using stories inspired by real accounts from *The Other Side of Silence* – specifically the stories of Damyanti Saghal, a social worker, and the previously discussed Basant Kaur. The title of the play, *Aur Kitne Tukde*, highlights the value of fragmentation and calls attention to the fractured component of memory that is explored in the several sections that make up this play within the formal dramatic framework. Jain's disjointed and jumbled account dramatizes the oral historian's struggle to preserve these voices in time, acting as a reminder for real events that actively altered people's lives. (Menon 31-32)

Representation of this kind allows women who survived their abductions to remain within the public discourse, challenging socio-political norms and engaging with the high politics of Partition. In addition to adding to the growing body of knowledge on gendered violence in South Asia, writers like Butalia and Jain generate a sense of urgency within society to accept responsibility for the past and form an ethical connection with the numerous traumas connected to it. In an endeavor to simultaneously study and reconstruct political history, their work prioritizes the experiences of political non-actors. It is this privileging that allows for new possibilities for women's voices to be heard and accepted into the public narrative. It leaves open many questions especially around the linearity of history. Memory becomes the conduit through which history is written and rewritten, emphasizing the point that history can be told from many perspectives. It is time women are given that space.

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