Recalling the Feminine and Juvenile Voice From the India-Pakistan Partition: With Reference to the Other Side of Silence

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Abstract: The partition of India in 1947 led to the division of the Indian subcontinent into two separate nations, India and Pakistan. This event caused immense suffering and trauma for millions of people, particularly women and children. Urvashi Butalia's book, "The Other Side of Silence," retells the stories of these victims and explores the traumatic experiences of those affected by Partition. This paper aims to shed light on the silenced history of women and children during this period, highlighting their resilience and the trauma they endured.

I. INTRODUCTION

The India-Pakistan Partition of 1947 is often portrayed as a conflict between Hindus and Muslims, but it also had significant socio-economic and political implications. The partition led to the displacement of millions of people, and the resulting traumas have been largely silenced in the history of the nation. Women and children, who were not the primary focus of the narratives, were often the most affected by this upheaval. This paper seeks to bring these silenced voices to the forefront, examining the experiences of women and children in the aftermath of the partition.

II. OBJECTIVE

Women and children were subjected to violence and suffering during the partition and its consequences, shaping their lives. Historians who dealt with Partition and related problems were seldom concerned about the trauma of women and children, and very often history is conveyed by product of their narratives, rather than by the experiences of the victims themselves. Urvashi Butalia in her book "The Other Side Of Silence" mainly focuses on the stories of women and children.

This paper also tries to remove the veil of silence thereby bringing into light the much darker side of Partition. Butalia’s work is mainly based on the perspective of the silenced living beings i.e. women and children. This paper unravels how haunting memory is for these muted beings and also their search for identity in a disintegrating nation like India.

III. HYPOTHESIS

3.1 Honour and Purity

Honour and purity were two key factors taken into regard by the religious groups for mass killings. Women and children were killed by men in their families before they shifted to safer places. The former was killed out of the fear of getting raped or abducted, whereas the latter was killed in fear of getting converted. These men didn’t want their blood to be converted into another religion. When Hindu women were recovered their community was not ready to accept them because they believed that these women were impure and this questioned their identity and belongingness. The main problem with the Partition era is that both the victims as well as the perpetrators either belonged to the same community or the village. There was widespread attacks especially against the women and children which was unjust and unpardonable. However, these women and children were ready to shed their lives for protecting their honour. In many villages the women jumped into the wells along with their children inorder to avoid getting raped or abducted. These women are considered martyrs as they killed themselves inorder to protect their honour. Women of one religion were not just raped by men of other religions but also by men of their own religion. When we look back at the history, it is nothing but a history of grief and shame. In the name of purity these women were discarded even from their families. The situation of women with children after abduction is different. Many families were only ready to receive the mother alone and not the child. Such women had only two options- either to keep the child with them and stay away from the family or to give up their children. Bringing these women and children back into normal life was a big liability. They had to mentally prepare inorder to forget the past which itself was the most difficult task.

Children as Subjects of History: Butalia says that “as subjects of history children are difficult to deal with” (Butalia p. 249). A woman could be brought back into life through repurification, but for a child born from a father and mother of two different religions it is difficult to weave his/her disintegrated life. There is the question of identity and belongingness here. Many children who lived during...
IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Partition created a barrier not just between the two countries but also between two different religions, mainly Hindus and Muslims ( Sikhs were also affected). As discussed in Urvashi Butalia’s book *The Other Side of Silence* the voice of women and children is muted. The traumatic experience of Partition and the displacement from their motherland created an astounded fright in them which led to the destruction of their identity. According to the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, trauma creates bodily wounds affecting the mind. The critic Cathy Caruth who was inspired by Freud’s writings also considers trauma as a “bodily wound.” For Caruth, survival also is a by product of trauma apart from isolation. The psychological and physical problems due to trauma and displacement developed mainly during the World Wars. The survivors of the two World Wars and mainly the Jews who came out of the concentration camps in Germany were the main victims of trauma and displacement and the resulting identity crisis. Displacement is another major issue faced by the people during Partition. All people had to meet some kind of loss due to their displacement, be it the loss of their family or the loss of their properties. Migration of people led to the problem of identity formation as well as identity crisis. For example, a child born to a Hindu father and a Muslim mother faced the problem of identity crisis. If he/she is abducted from a Hindu family and shifted into a Muslim family he/she then became a muslim which becomes his/her identity from then on. Hybridity is a crucial problem the immigrants had to face. Forced migration led to problems such as adaptation and displacement. Many women and children were abducted by men of other religions as well as from their religion. As a result of this they are relocated into an entirely different society where they are exchanged from one hand to another. This forced dislocation also led to physical and mental problems as well as difficulty in cultural adaptation. Hunger, pain, and illness—both mental as well as physical became common in people, and children were negligently affected by these issues. Unlike the women it is difficult for children to express their trauma as they had to witness more than what they could bear to witness in that tender age. It is with great difficulty that they constructed an identity for themselves after their relocation. However, the psychological problems that they faced was really
difficult to cope up with and as a result of this they led a secluded and lonely life in the remaining years.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is during the 1984 Sikh riots in India that Butalia came in touch with the people who were the children of Partition. Butalia through her book *The Other Side Of Silence* reveals that the effects of partition can be seen even now in the multi-lingual, multi cultural country like India. Nobody has taken any initiative before in recording the personal interviews of the victims of Partition and this work of Butalia has in turn become an influential oral history record and a prudent move into the future. This non-fictional work of Butalia however contains the personal interviews of about seventy people who had to witness the traumatic Partition era. But Butalia here deals with the partition in the Punjab province and she has not included the partition in the East Pakistan.

The author deals with the personal lives of people who were perturbed by Partition which resulted in their segregation. Often Partition works deals with collective memory where people recall the incidents during that time as they had first hand experience of it. Butalia however gives preference to private memory of the people where the actual survivors of Partition recounts their traumatic and painful experiences. Even though the focus of Butalia is small she includes the unheard voices from that period which was excluded from the mainstream history. This book clearly points out that Partition will clearly affect the relation between India and Pakistan in the future years. Butalia reminds that noone can escape from the reality of partition. Butalia writes that, “I am more than ever convinced that it is necessary, and important, to explore Partition memories, I am also convinced that this is not a search that allows us access to a wealth of information and a different kind of knowledge” (Butalia p. 366). *The Other Side of Silence* is considered as a break away in the area of Partition studies.

VI. ANALYSIS AND MAJOR FINDINGS

According to the statistics, around 75,000 women were raped during Partition. Women were not just raped but were also tortured in many other ways. They were tattooed with the signs of the other religion, made to walk naked through the streets, many women were forced to have sex with men from other religions and produce their children. After giving birth these babies were taken away from them. As a result of all these hardships, these women acquired the strength to face any obstacles in the future. The case of older women was different- women in their fifties and sixties were abducted for their property. Women were categorised and attached with a price tag. Butalia included an interview of Ahis Kidwai, who worked with the muslim refugees. She says, “In all of this sometimes a girl would be killed or she would be wounded. The “good stuff”, would be shared among the police and army, the “second rate stuff”, would go to everyone else. And then these girls would go from one hand to another and then another and after several would turn up in hotels to grace their décor, or they would be handed over to police officers, in some places to please them”(Butalia pp. 148-149). But for an abducted women or child her rescuer was like a god, who unlike the god of her religion showed some mercy on her.”...there were some women who were born into poor homes and had not seen anything other than poverty. A half full stomach and rags on your body. And now they had fallen into the hands of men who bought them silken salwars and net dupattas, who taught them the pleasures of cold ice cream and hot coffee, who took them to the cinema. Why should they leave such men and go back to covering their bodies with rags and slaving in the hot sun in the fields? If she leaves this smart, uniformed man, she will probably end up with a peasant in rags, in the fifth, with a danda on his shoulder. And so they are happy to forget the frightening past, or the equally uncertain and fearful future, and live only for the present”(Butalia 150). It is analysed that the torturers were not impenitent of their actions. In Gujarat there was a Nawab who used to sit on his throne and watch the abducted girls being paraded. He used to enjoy them and categorise these girls into numbers based on their beauty. Children too had to face similar conditions. Two Hindu boys whose parents were killed during the riots were kept by a Muslim family. When they were asked to return the boys, the family who already had three boys replied negatively. When the family was asked for a reason the lady said that, “...there is a method behind this. We don’t just simply pick up somebody, we don’t just take the garbage. We choose who we take. Now these boys, they are studying alongside my boys, they have tuitions and both of them and my children they are all studying and then I will send them to England because I have money. These children are so intelligent that they will influence my boys, and when they marry, these two boys, their children will be vey intelligent, and we have only one regret about the Hindus having gone away, that lovehas gone to the other side of the border, we want to bring that in here and multiply it. The children of these children they are being brought up as good Muslims ...”(Butalia pp. 156-157).

Many parents were in search of their lost children even after the recovery operations were ceased. Some of them whose parents were either killed or couldn’t find them remained in ashrams and orphanages. Those children who remained in such places couldn’t unfold basic details such as their age or their residence. These women and children was denied with their rights and their voice was suppressed. Studies prove that the number of Muslim women abducted was more than the abduction of Hindu and Sikh women. According to Leonard Mosley around 100,000 girls were abducted on all sides.

The following table gives the number of abducted and recovered women:

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<th>Abducted</th>
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<td></td>
<td>(Between Dec 1947-Dec 1949)</td>
<td>From Pakistan</td>
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<td>Muslims</td>
<td>HINDUs and Sikhs</td>
<td>From Pakistan</td>
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After understanding the experience of women and children during Partition all that one can conclude is that what is revealed to the outside world is limited and scanted. We need to understand and perceive that the problems that is thought to be settled was actually not settled but has only become more tragic and complex. Women and children recall incidents from a disorienting bygone past. One can find a complex and bizarre situation in which the women and children had to face identity crisis and such issues were revealed by Butalia in her book. The dark memories of Partition will remain forever and the three Indo-Pak wars already witnessed by the two countries is a reminder of it. The tragic experience of the women and children during the Partition even now is unbelievable. Even though the aim of partition was to end the antagonism between India and Pakistan one has to doubt if this goal has been achieved.

REFERENCE