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DESCRIPTION OF MENTAL AND PHYSICAL TRAUMA IN URVASHI BUTALIA'S  
*THE OTHER SIDE OF SILENCE* : FEMINIST ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Butalia tries to reveal the hidden side of Partition by taking the interviews of female victims of Partition. Memories of trauma of Partition are brought back by intimate conversations with the victims. Butalia carefully narrates the saga of displacement, oppression and horrific shattering of the existence of women as well as their soul and body in this male dominated society. Politics and History always shape the existence of human being but the women were almost non-existent and neglected in the history of Partition. They were oppressed and suppressed to the extreme that they become astound. The History of Partition, therefore, remains very difficult to forget for women. Women became subject for physical violence. They were abducted, raped and killed on a mass scale without any hesitance.

The Beginning of Partition was a political rift between two communities but it turned out to be a conspiracy and a plot against women and it was used as a tool to make them silent. Women's rights were continuously violated on the name of honour and purity. They were treated as a scars on the family's reputation. The women were just pawn in power struggle from the ancient times; and Partition of India was a fine example of it. This violence made immense wound on the minds of women which were not going to heal ever. This paper aims to bring into light the saga of exploitation and regulation of women's body, mind and soul by patriarchal society in the name of religious pride during Partition as captured by Urvashi Butalia in her *The Other Side of Silence*.

**Keywords-** Partition, Displacement, Violence, Trauma, memory, Oppression.

In current scenario Partition seemed as a stage for a politics of upper class, majoritarian domination. On this stage people with minorities and who were at the bottom of the ladder of caste were merely puppets. People on the top of the ladder enacted their role very violently. Amrita Pritam and Krishna Sobti : both are the witness of

Partition and also the first generation of Partition's writers. Krishna Sobti said about Partition that "Partition was difficult to forget but dangerous to remember". On the other hand Amrita Pritam (writer of "Pinjar and the Other Stories) referred the mass abduction and rape of women during Partition through her poetry. She addresses poet Waris Shah

who created the romantic – tragic story of Heer and Ranjha in her poetry-

“I ask you Waris Shah

Let your voice rise from within your grave

When our Heer died in Punjab

You penned an epic lament

Now that hundreds of Heers are being violated

Why are you silent Waris Shah

Let your voice rise within your grave”.

In many ways both writers rises their questions on this most difficult problem of dislocation. Partition was like a war, a war of religious emotions, war of superiority of one group over the another. This war affected all : who lived through it and died and equally to them who lived through it and survived. One of the greatest human upheaval of history was a result of a result of political conflict and riot. Many people exchanged their home and countries unwillingly. The new governments of India and Pakistan were not prepared for this upheaval. Partition of India was preceded by a series of events like the feud between Congress and Muslim league and a ideological differences and debate between leaders of both parties. Partition was not only a political divide, or a division of properties and liabilities between two communities but it was a division of hearts. Partition of India was announced on June 3,1947. But the beginning of Partition was not announcement but it was the demand of Independence. All communities were eagerly waiting for Independence since many decades. But with the announcement of Partition, now they all were in hurry to go in their own announced countries named India and Pakistan. But it was not easy for both the communities to leave their homeland and properties.

Krishna Sobti who is a Partition’s eye witness and also a writer always speaks about a whole generation of women who were victims of Partition’s riot. This generation was deeply affected by Partition. Women were treated like a honour of whole family and that’s why they were raped and killed brutally so that one community could prove their superiority over other.

The Partition of India included the division of Punjab province into West Punjab(Pakistan) and East Punjab (India) and the similar partition of Bengal Province of British India into East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Partition of India was declared in the Indian Independence Act 1947 and resulted as the end of British Raj in India. Riot between both the communities started even before the Partition and within sometime take the place of massive migration of people and bloodshed. Urvashi Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence* is considered to be the first book which dig out into the memories of Partition and open up many layers of silence. It reveals individual’s experiences of this catastrophic events. The existing history of India does not reflect violence, trauma and feeling of dislocation during Partition. So writers like Urvashi Butalia, Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon and many others try to reveal the reality of Partition by their factual narration. Therefore Butalia states- “I focus on the stories of smaller, often invisible, players : ordinary people, women, children, scheduled caste . I do this principally through interviews and oral narratives”(Butalia 11).

In history there are some events which are so heartbreaking and horrific that in the words of Butalia, it “does not give you leave to forget so easily”(Butalia). Urvashi herself belongs to the second generation of Partition. Her family had to migrate but her uncle (Ranamama) stated back and for survival converted to Islam. When Urvashi met to his uncle she could discover the sad memories which silenced Ranamama these long years. Although conversion was his own choice he felt like an outsider in his family.

“Even today when I walk out to the market I often hear people whispering, ‘Hindu, Hindu’. No you don’t know what it is like. They never forgive you for being convert”(Butalia 38). During the conversation again he confesses, “One thing I’ll tell you, I have not slept one night in these forty years without regretting my decision, not one night: your past follows you, it hounds you”(Butalia 38).

Although Ranamama was not physically dislocated and displaced but psychologically and metaphorically he was certainly alienated and

exiled. As he was a converted one, so he was not considered a loyal citizen by the others. He was not dislocated still he don't have the feeling of his own homeland. So this instance shows how individuals were also deeply affected by the Partition and how they continue feel a emotional dislocation. People who were really dislocated and were to forced to leave their home and country, they could at least live peacefully after this upheaval as they considered the new land as their new home. This is not only the case with Butalia 's family but "there is no way of knowing how many parents lost their children in the sweep of this history, no way of knowing how many of them were lost by accident and how many by design"(Butalia 54).

When Butalia interviews Damyanti shahgal, she realised that Damyanti is traumatised because of her sense of homelessness. She was deeply shocked because of the sudden change in the environment from the protective to brutal mass – killings and dislocation. This feeling of homelessness just can be feel only by the people who were first hand victims of Partition. To overcome her pain she started working as a social worker. Paul Ricoeur talks about the.

"Obsession of Past"which "is related to that of repetition of the memories of the past"(Ricoeur449). He explains "Under the little Obsession – characterizing a period – a phenomenon such as the rebirth of a jewish memory provides a concrete content to the idea that, when we fix a gaze upon an aspect of the past – the Occupation – we blind ourselves to another – the extermination of the jews"(Ricoeur 452).

The Partition is the Indian holocaust which leads to "obsession of the past"as the jewish holocaust. The victims of Partition whom Butalia interviewed, engage themselves into some alternatives works so that they could forget their gruesome past. "Seeing one thing is not Seeing another. Recounting one drama is forgetting another"(Ricoeur 452).

Most of the families who were victims of Partition chooses to be silent. They don't want to speak about the event and this made Butalia surprise : "Why had they made no mention of the

rape and abduction of women ? Were these deliberate erasures or could it be that I had asked the wrong questions ?"(Butalia 133).

Butalia was shocked to know the reason behind their silence. They were silent because either they were the abductors or their daughters or sisters were the victims of rape and abduction and by revealing their names they don't want any type of disgrace to their respective families. It was a matter of shame for them to talk about this.

Partition was not only the division of Indian subcontinent but it created a wall of enmity and ferocity between the people of India and Pakistan. The result of this enmity is the many wars between the two countries at different times and a continuous hatred among the people for each other."Mas scale migration, death destruction, loss – no matter how inevitable partition seemed, no one could have foreseen the scale and ferocity of bloodshed and enmity it unleashed"(Butalia 188).

People who were not first hand victims of Partition can also feel the horror of Partition in the works of such writers as Amrita Pritam, Khushwant Singh, Bhisam Sahni and Chaman Bahal of India and Bapsi Sidhwa and Sadat Hasan Manto of Pakistan.

Butalia not only talks about women, but also she talks about men and children who were deeply affected by Partition. There is a instance of Bir Bahadur Singh who told about his family. He speaks about the killings of twenty five girls along with his sisters by his own father to retain their purity from abductors. "A father who kills his daughters, how much of a victim, how helpless he must be"(Butalia 243). An another instance Butalia talks about Trilok Singh, another victim of Partition who was only nine years old during the killings. Trilok told about a brutal decision of his father and uncles who killed the women and children of their family as they considered them more vulnerable. "They took a decision to do what had by now become common in Hindu and Sikh families: kill thode who were seen to be vulnerable – women, children, the old and infirm"(Butalia 252).

Although Trilok Singh saved himself but he and his uncle, Mangal Singh always had a feeling

of guilt with many layers of silence. "..... both (Trilok and Mangal, Trilok 's uncle) were tied to each other in a sort of 'conspiracy' of silence : the death hung around them like constant pressure. But they were never referred to"(Butalia 253).

Partition filled the hatred in people's mind not only for other communities but also for the authorities and Governments. Just before and after the Partition people were confused and in anger. Many people wrote uncountable letters to authorities to ask the possible dislocation. They want to about their own village. Most of them were not in the favour of Partition. They were in atmost hatred towards Congress and Muslim league. One of such letters show the amount of hatred: "We don't want to be butchers for your magnanimity or elevation. If the Congress is impotent to protect us then dissolve Congress Organization in the Punjab and let the Hindus have their own course"(Butalia 71). *The Other Side of Silence* mentions about many people who out of anger and hatred killed others during riot but suffered for the whole life because of the guilt of their doings. A Professor who is retired from Patiala told about his guilt of ignoring a women's cries when being gang raped by his community. Now many years later he confesses his feelings of coward and his hatred for other religions in that period of Partition. He felt ashamed on his inhuman behaviour, "Fifty years later, he wept, tears of mourning for the woman, and for his own indifference"(Butalia 74). Common people were scapegoats for the political parties for their own selfish Benefit. Many prohibitions were imposed on the migrants by the authorities and their prohibitions shows the purpose of Government.

Inter- Dominion Treaty of December 6, 1947, to recover the abducted women from both sides of the border. This operation of recovery came to be known as *The Central Recovery Operation*. There was a question before the Treaty that what was the meaning of Independence to those women who suffered it's most violent consequences ? What was Nation, freedom and Religion to them ? The exchange of women came after the exchange of population. There was an agreement signed between India and Pakistan during November, 1948, for the exchange of women from both sides of the

border. This operation was filled with difficulties and tension from the beginning. In the beginning Pakistan protested because of the involvement of the Military Evacuation Organisation (MEO) and suggested that their duties should be limited to the camp (where the recovered women were awaiting being sent to their homeland). Pakistan advised that the actual work of rescue of victims should be given to the Police but Indian Government was hesitant about this. As in many cases Police was involved in abduction of women or sometimes the Police themselves was the abductors. Abduction of women by the authorities were very common those days. Even there is a recorded instance where the woman was abducted and in the house of a Tahsildar of Dipalpur for eight months. In an another case a woman was raped by two sub- inspectors while they went there to recover her. There was a major difference between the efforts of both the Governments as India gave the free access to the Pakistan's social workers, on the other side Pakistan had selfishly decided to close off some certain areas. The Recovery Operation for women who were abducted and married to their abductors continued for nine years. Some thirty thousand women were recovered about eight thousand Hindu and Sikh women from India and twenty two thousand Muslim women from India.

Women in the camp who don't even know about their own identities, as they were so young to remember when they came in the camp. There is a woman who have been brought Ashram (the refugee camp) when she was just few months old. As it was unknown that from which community she belongs and also there was no idea who her parents were. So Urvashi Butalia used the term "Child of History, without a History". Most of them were deeply affected by the violence imposed on them.

National honour that was imposed on Mother India and on the body of all the women forcefully. The violence that women faced during the Partition was in many layers and each layers was full of blood. Women were not just abducted or raped during the Partition but they faced horrific mutilation of their bodies. Women were treated as a object on whom they were satisfying their ego and hate. Women were as a shield to other communities.

Women were forced to parade naked in religious places. Their sexual organs were tattooed by the religious symbols. But there is no mention of this kind of violence in any record book. Even these incidents are not even told by anyone like – neither by the state, nor by the families, even nor by the historians.

Many male head decide to kill the vulnerable one in their families like women, child and old. Particularly women were more weak to convert. Partition was not just infused in elders, even this mass killing also frightened the children very badly. They were affected so deeply that many of them were not able to forget the screams and crying of people till their last breath. There is a instance of a girl named Sita- Hasina in *The Other side of Silence* that her family named her this so that she could save herself from the attackers.

In each story of woman victim Urvashi Butalia found a different Partition – partition of honour, partition of mutual love and bond between two communities. Partition was the dark and horrors side of Independence. It was a wound came with the joy and happiness of Independence after 200 years of slavery. It seems as Partition was accepted as the cost of freedom.

After the recovery of women from both countries now there was a major issue that the families of most the victims were not ready to accept them as they were either pregnant or with children from their abductors.

In this situation mostly Muslim women were more easily accepted in their families as there was no issue of shallow honour. And in Hindu it was easy to accept those women who were alone. If she was pregnant or carrying a child than it was a matter of shame for their families. The child born by the union with their abductors was a constant reminder of the crime against them. So women were given a choice by their families: keep your children with you and live wherever you want or leave the children in orphanage and go back to your old families. Now social workers confirmed that pregnant women would be sent for “cleansing”(Safaya, it was called) in other words for mass abortion. Mass abortion was financed by the state. Although abortion was illegal

but a separate budget set aside for this particular purpose.

There were many Ashrams for the women who were in transit until their families took them back. Most of the women were not taken back on the name of shallow pride and honour of families. And after that Ashram were the permanent place (Home) for them. Where they all lived with their bitter memories. First of all they were abducted during Partition and lost their first home(Vatan). And now on the name of Recovery and Rehabilitation Program they were forcefully taken back by the authorities. This was double dislocation of women. They were forced to live a life in camps or Ashram without the acceptance of their families. They lost their families three times in a life. Many of them lost their infant. Approximately fifty thousand mass abortion taken place at once. Many Doctors and Hospitals were working on this illegal project.

Two types of violence was imposed on women. First type of violence by the people of other communities and second type of violence by their own community and family. Women were like a shield and their abduction and rape was a recognition of victory of one community over the others. Women were forced to kill themselves by jumping into the well and by poison. After their death they were called martyrs. Their forced suicide became a celebration of martyrdom for their families. Even this so called forced martyrdom was celebrated for many years by their family members as it was a moment of proud for then. Many of women were not ready for suicide but they don't have any choice as male head, who were called their protectors, were not ready to take the risk of their abduction during traveling. There is a famous instance of Thoa Khalsa where approximately ninety nine women jump into the well to kill themselves.

Urvashi Butalia writes about them who were either silent because of their pain and honour or were not able to face the doings of their own. Therefore Kabir has opined that activists and ambassadors like Butalia, “...strive to create the spaces of dialogue across conflicted and natural resources so as to overcome the burden of divisive memories and amnesias”(Kabir 28).

### Conclusion

It is not easy to feel the actual pain of the dislocation of people during this upheaval for any Writer, Politician, Artist or Historian as they can just try to feel it. This memoir of Butalia gives an authentic account of the lives of women, men, children particularly on the marginalised and forgotten history.

“The oral history narratives in Urvashi Butalia’s collection *The Other Side of Silence* reflect what she calls “the layers of silence” of survivors and their anguish as a result of keeping their stories secret for decades” (Stewart and Kumar XVIII).

Many writers talk about memories, nostalgia, remembering, dislocation, exile and pain of Partition’s victims, but Butalia completed a difficult task of meeting as many as Partition survivors-

“If people of my generation grew up in what could broadly be defined as a secular India. Today the division power of religious majoritarianism is all around us and pressing inwards, hemming us into identities we have never wished to own” (Butalia 11).

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