

The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India

By Urvashi Butalia

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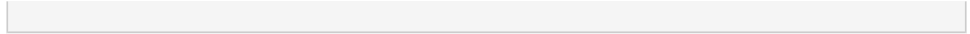
The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India By Urvashi Butalia

The partition of India into two countries, India and Pakistan, caused one of the most massive human convulsions in history. Within the space of two months in 1947 more than twelve million people were displaced. A million died. More than seventy-five thousand women were abducted and raped. Countless children disappeared. Homes, villages, communities, families, and relationships were destroyed. Yet, more than half a century later, little is known of the human dimensions of this event. In *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia fills this gap by placing people—their individual experiences, their private pain—at the center of this epochal event.

Through interviews conducted over a ten-year period and an examination of diaries, letters, memoirs, and parliamentary documents, Butalia asks how people on the margins of history—children, women, ordinary people, the lower castes, the untouchables—have been affected by this upheaval. To understand how and why certain events become shrouded in silence, she traces facets of her own poignant and partition-scarred family history before investigating the stories of other people and their experiences of the effects of this violent disruption. Those whom she interviews reveal that, at least in private, the voices of partition have not been stilled and the bitterness remains. Throughout, Butalia reflects on difficult questions: what did community, caste, and gender have to do with the violence that accompanied partition? What was partition meant to achieve and what did it actually achieve? How, through unspeakable horrors, did the survivors go on? Believing that only by remembering and telling their stories can those affected begin the process of healing and forgetting, Butalia presents a sensitive and moving account of her quest to hear the painful truth behind the silence.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1947, British-ruled India was split into predominantly Hindu India and predominantly Muslim Pakistan, in what Butalia calls "one of the great human convulsions of history." Within a few months of this division, one million people had died, 12 million had migrated and 75,000 women were abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own. Although these facts are recorded in history, Butalia points out that the particular experiences of individuals are harder to discover. To fill the gap, Butalia, the cofounder of India's first feminist press, has spent 10 years gathering oral histories from those whose voices were often obscured by politics: women, lower castes and children who were separated from their families. She particularly focuses on the "double dislocation" endured by women, whose fates were often decided by the men of their religious communities. For example, many women were "rescued" from interfaith marriages and forced to return to their families; many had to leave children behind or were forced to have abortions. Others committed suicide to avoid forced conversions or rape; one woman describes her attempt to participate in a mass suicide of 90 women who drowned themselves in a well. By including official documents along with personal stories, Butalia shows that in political circles the need to protect women's religious "purity" gave legitimacy to Partition. Although women suffered much violence at the hands of their own communities. Butalia's book is remarkable for the author's critical analysis of her own experiences as well as of the existing literature, and for her skillful demonstration of how the memory of Partition continues to affect India today. (June)

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Review

"*The Other Side of Silence* is without a doubt one of the most important books ever to be written about the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. More than a history, more than a memoir, it is also an extended reflection on narrative form. Official history has always flinched from acknowledging the full extent of the human cost of Partition. Urvashi Butalia shows us why we cannot afford to forget the suffering, the grief, the pain, and the bewilderment that resulted from the division of the subcontinent. [This] is an extraordinary achievement."—Amitav Ghosh

"Selective amnesia and memory are at the root of the relationship between human beings and their history. This book pierces that amnesia, elicits buried memories, and lays the foundations for a more evolved relationship between human beings on this subcontinent and their histories of gendered and communal violence."—Kavita Punjabi, *Telegraph* (Calcutta)

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

"[L]ays bare the passions of fear and hatred that too often drive the India-Pakistan relationship. . . . The raw horror of it all is mitigated by the author's skillful prose, which draws the reader into the Indian story." (Foreign Affairs)

“Butalia has collected some fascinating material.”
(Akash Kapur *The New York Times Book Review*)

“Butalia is a pioneer in feminist publishing in India. She is especially alert to the presence—and absence—of marginal voices. . . . [T]he study of popular interpretations of violence as well as the persistence of memory makes this book a critical, self-reflective work. It may seem paradoxical, but the book’s freshness comes also from the fact that it examines wounds that have festered for more than fifty years.”
(Amitava Kumar *The Nation*)

“Butalia’s book is remarkable for the author’s critical analysis of her own experiences as well as of the existing literature, and for her skillful demonstration of how the memory of Partition continues to affect India today.”
(Publishers Weekly)

“Butalia’s narratives shed light upon the role of religion in shaping identities of families and communities.”
(Chandra S. Mallampalli *Books & Culture*)

“Libraries collecting on genocide, migrations, and freedom struggles definitely need this work.”
(Library Journal)

From the Publisher

“This is a magnificent and necessary book, rigorous and compassionate, thought-provoking and moving. Oral history at its best.”—Salman Rushdie

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Cecil Hardin:

Now a day folks who Living in the era where everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources inside can be true or not demand people to be aware of each facts they get. How people have to be smart in getting any information nowadays? Of course the solution is reading a book. Studying a book can help men and women out of this uncertainty Information mainly this *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* book since this book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the info in this book hundred % guarantees there is no doubt in it as you know.

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Ronald Cleary:

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