LIFE WRITING: MONOGRAPH SERIES
SERIES EDITOR: **G.S. JAYASREE**

EN-LIVENING 1947: WOMEN'S LIFE NARRATIVES ON THE PARTITION

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Funded by UGC New Research Activity - Innovative Project
"Autobiographies in Malayalam: Writing Lives, Writing History"

Institute of English
University of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram

En-livening 1947:
Women's Life Narratives on the Partition

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Enlivening 1947: Women's Life Narratives on the Partition, offers a distinctive gendered perspective on the diverse manifestations of Indian nationalism around the time of the Partition of India. Partition is employed as a template to explicate how nationalism redefined individual and collective identities through social contexts that were mostly violent and always already gendered. Specifically, the focus is on the ways in which female experiences of the great divide of 1947 were written out of sanctioned histories of the nation, and an effort is made to address this disenfranchisement through a critical reading of women's life narratives related to the Partition. It is contended that the contemporary literature on the Partition demands contemplation on gender/femininity in ways disavowed by official narratives of the nation. In doing so, this study takes its cue from recent feminist scholarship on the Partition initiated by Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia and Veena Das among others, since the late 1990s. The study encourages questions such as how do women's life narratives negotiate collective and individual trauma, memories, identities, notions of nationalism and delineations of violence engendered by specific moments in history—like the Partition—that are replete with socio-political tensions. Feminist scholarship has also interrogated memory as a gendered category and explored how this gendering contributes to the marginality of women's experiences in history. All through the analysis, significant attention has been paid to the configurations and reconfigurations of female identity as many women found themselves implicated in a Partition-engendered vicious cycle within which they had to persistently negotiate multiple identities.

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Published by
Institute of English, University of Kerala
Palayam, Thiruvananthapuram
Kerala, India 695034

First Impression 2017

ISBN 978-93-5279-727-1

Design: *Godfrey's Graphics*

Through the prism of life...

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Sulfia Santhosh

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R. K. Jayasree

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Seetha Vijayakumar

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Swetha Chandran

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Bini B S

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Colonial Travancore
Meera M Bhagavathy

Of Mothers Among Other Things: Lived Texts, Texted Lives
Priya V

Life Writing Studies: A Bibliography
Rajesh Nair

Even as India and Pakistan engage and battle with numerous issues in the national and international arenas, it is ironic, if not paradoxical that what has come to be called "*batwara*/ partition" in the history of the subcontinent still continues to be the one over-arching episode in the national narratives the two South Asian neighbours continue to create for themselves. The vice-like grip of the Partition on the average Indian psyche is not one without adequate reasons. In fact, the term reverberates with the disillusionment, dislocation, anguish, pain, suffering, trauma, violence and bloodshed that the much awaited midnight hour "when clock-hands joined palms in respectful greeting" (Rushdie 9) had brought to millions of people across the newly created "international" borders. As Ian Talbot and Darshan Singh Tatla write in their "Introduction" to a collection of Partition memories from Amritsar, "The magnitude of the events which accompanied the end of the British Raj, together with their contemporary significance for the subcontinent, makes them compelling"(1). It is these feelings of immediacy and remoteness that the Partition simultaneously evokes which make it a symptom of our time as much as a sign of the past.

In fact, the Partition remains an event defined by multiple moments; one word sated with many meanings—moments of territorial demarcation and transnational migration, of "Tryst

with Destiny" speeches, of the unheard whimpers of the victims of violence, of miles long *kafilas* of the walking dead and the ghastliness of the ghost trains of the murdered dead, of hushed memories and resonant speech. The dynamic yet confounding nature of the Partition, as evident from the multifarious significations the term evokes, however, has begun to be addressed only of late. As with the Holocaust, the immediate response to the trauma of Partition was one of a benumbing silence and whatever feeble evocations the violent horror of the event invoked was lost in the state-driven triumphant euphoria of Independence. If official discourses are culpable of muffling stories of individual trauma and pain directly ensuing from both intimate and communal violence, secular academic discourse has also been—to a big extent—a failure in addressing this in its richly researched narratives, perhaps because violence in its very viscerality demands a totally different treatment.

Most mainstream academic histories testify to the insidious inclination of the historian to enforce a singular, monolithic perspective in the inscription of modern Indian history.[1] Hence, in the most discernible and academically appreciated research on the Partition, the event is sanitised, denuding it of its essential rituals of blood. They efface or negate the violence that it was, treating it as a historical aberration—this is "not *our* history at all." Thus, Partition/Independence becomes merely a moment of "nationalising the nation"—a moment against which new national and international identities are articulated (Pandey, *Remembering* 48). In other words, official/academic/national histories of India and Pakistan have sought to impound the narrative of the Partition as a mere appendix to the master narrative of anti-British struggle and the genesis narratives of independent nation states. It was in turn reiterated as a rationalisation of decolonisation and the accomplishment of the most vital political goal of all, nationhood.

In the 1980s, as a reaction against this elitism, the high politics of nationalist historiography, Subaltern Studies which sought to examine "histories from below" (Sarkar xv) by studying the masses, took shape in India. However, Subaltern Studies also eventually evolved into a nationalist historiography. Its goal

became "to acknowledge the contribution made by the people on their own to the making and development of this nationalism," and its central problem turned out to be "the historic failure of the nation to come into its own" (Guha 7).[2] Even history apparently perceptive to the concerns of Subaltern Studies, focusing upon the ordinary masses, failed to capture the meaning of violence, pain and trauma the Partition engendered. Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India: 1885-1947,* for instance, charts the shady contours of the fluctuating economic and political landscape of the time and hardly ever delves into the inner consciousness of the common people.

This lop-sided analysis of the Partition has recently been critiqued by a number of scholars, like the Subaltern historian Gyanendra Pandey, and feminist oral historians like Urvashi Butalia in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a trend that holds sway even today in Partition studies. In fact, compelling contemporary developments had warranted an immediate return to Partition. This unrelenting recall and re-imagination of the Partition by the academic community and in the public discourses, especially in India, was inspired by the moral urgency to negotiate the resurgent phantom of communalism and its potential to vitiate the public sphere, and the armed secessionist movements in regional states.[3] With dirges being written over the sure demise of the so-called Nehruvian consensus, the final decades of the bygone century exposed the faultlines of institutions, both political and civil, to cope with schismatical struggles. It reiterated, as Ayesha Jalal observed, "the return of the twin dialectics of centralism and region; as well as nationalism and religious communalism" (6).

Challenging historical circumstances thus, have warranted the recent return to the Partition in history, anthropology, fiction, autobiography, memoirs, theatre, cinema and even *dastangoi*. The 1980s marked a clear beginning in renegotiating the incomplete legacy of the Partition in South Asia. However, it was the 1990s, coinciding with the commemoration of five decades of independence/Partition, which brought about a template shift in the way the event was studied, in terms of both content and methodology. Thus, the last two decades or so have witnessed a burgeoning of revisionist, personal,

historical, autobiographical, anthropological, sociological and literary material that critically engages with the Partition from contemporary perspectives. These overdue narratives include many commemorative issues of regular magazines and academic journals; a deluge of subcontinental English fictions around the Partition; English translations of vernacular Partition narratives written post independence; recently published or resuscitated memoirs of women soçial workers; films like Deepa Mehta's *Earth*, and two daring narratives of oral histories of survivors (*Borders and Boundaries* by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, and *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia).

A significant aspect of this new turn in Partition studies was the advent of a new set of feminist oral historians from the 1990s who have consequently revolutionised our understanding of the Partition by gendering its history. In fact, they successfully threw down the gauntlet by introducing feminist historiography of the Partition as the latest conundrum in modern Indian historiography. Although this feminist historical return to the Partition forms a part of the recent secular interest, there are some perceptible differences in perspective. Primarily, feminist scholarship on the Partition, apart from shared secular concerns about religious communities and the nation, primarily foregrounds the contradictory relations among gender, community and nationalism in the subcontinent. Nighat Said Khan and Rubina Saigol in Pakistan, and their counterparts in India, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin and Urvashi Butalia have attempted to unearth women's gender-differentiated experiences of the Partition by exploring the methodology of oral narratives, corroborating memory with documentary evidence and agreement. In *Locating the Self: Perspectives on Women and Multiple Identities* (1994), Khan *et al* give life to the voice of women, in seeking to understand the construction of identity and nation, and women as embodied signifiers of these constructions and the target-victims of aggression. In *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (1995), Veena Das draws on the critical methods of anthropology so as to analyse through women's experiences, the allied discourses of community, nation and state.

Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin and Urvashi Butalia recover the narratives of "abducted" and "martyred" women and explore the centrality of sexual violence against women in demarcating community and state boundaries in the context of identity conflicts. In *Borders and Boundaries* (1998) and *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), these feminist scholars track the inhumanity of the official programmes of the two patriarchal states to recover abducted women as the states' "property." It was a particular conception of religious communities that informed the recovery programme and it raises serious questions about gendered citizenship and the claims of a secular and rational state. These abducted women, as the target-victims of peculiar modes of sexual violence and as victims of rape, dislocation and homelessness constitute the most tangible and the most suppressed index of the familial, religious, and national disintegration that made up the Partition, observes Suvir Kaul (11).

While discussing Partition literature, Kavita Daiya observes that the recent revisionist intervention re-orients the focus on the Partition in two ways. First of all, it encourages the translation of Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, and Bengali literature about the Partition into English. This has resulted in a range of new novels and edited collections of short stories and poetry. Second, oral narratives of Partition survivors and witnesses come to hold the spotlight, especially in feminist and subaltern studies. These narratives have become an important addition to the history, which now make "audible the silences in the histories and memories of Partition" (Daiya 10). This latter category of works is significant, arguably, as they put forth a gendered critique of not only nationalist historiography but also the very project of nationalism which at the same time promotes and is reproduced by such historiography.

Most of these works explore the gendered nature of violence among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs in the 1940s when women became contested sites of rape, mutilation, abduction and religious conversion. Inspired by the contemporary theories of trauma and testimony within Holocaust studies, this latest feminist scholarship on the Partition of India banks on interviews with victims and witnesses of violence. A corpus of such interviews becomes its primary archive and object of study.

In fact, it was this feminist scholarship that refashioned India's Partition in the 1990s inspired by Ranajith Guha's proposition to "examine a constituency in colonial India whose lives did not directly interface with those of elite political readers" (Guha 3). Thus, it may be argued that the subaltern project finds its genuine voice in feminist/cultural historians of the Partition like Urvashi Butalia and Meenakshie Verma. In *The Other Side of Silence*, Butalia explores how the subaltern groups like Dalits, women and children experienced the Partition of India. In a similar vein, Meenakshie Verma's *Aftermath*, interestingly, presents the ways in which the "third sex" (*Hijras*) of Northern India negotiated the Partition.

This new feminist scholarship marks a break with the conventional historical archive as it proliferates testimonies unfolding appalling incidents of violence/trauma during the Partition of India. As Butalia notes in her introduction, such testimony provides a way to compensate for the historical erasure of questions about how families were divided, how friendships endured across borders, how people coped with trauma and how they rebuilt their lives (*Other* 7). Circumspective of a political history of the Partition that focuses on towering political figures such as Gandhi, Jinnah and Nehru, her work deliberately focuses on narratives and testimonies of trauma and violence that finds "little reflection in written history" (7).

Not surprisingly, this new mode of excavating traumatic memories of a repressed past has generated resistance and criticism from both conservative and nationalist historians of all hues. For instance, in a dynamic conversation on the new trends in Partition historiography entitled "Remembering Partition," two conservative, nationalist thinkers of repute, Javed Alam and Suresh Sharma severely indict the life narratives approach of feminist historiography. They contend that the new oral-historical enterprise around the Partition, which seeks to enhance the domain of conventional history by digging up the memories of the victims of violence, has opened up a Pandora's box of disturbing ethical issues. Foregrounding veteran writer Krishna Sobti's statement that "the Partition is difficult to forget, but dangerous to remember," Alam argues that these recent attempts

at memorialisation are "morally not sustainable" (100) because oral historians make victims recreate their hurtful and harrowing pasts in order to fill in the cracks in the historical archive without taking into consideration the impact on the victims themselves. He draws a comparison with psychotherapy and argues that unlike the therapeutic situation where the survivor lays herself/himself bare before the psychoanalyst, these new ethnographic/oral historical projects "chase the victim" and push him back into a forgotten memory (101).

Further, Alam contends that for the contemporary generation, the Partition is a far-off historical event, a faded memory relegated to a long-gone past. In his view, such a forgetting is crucial to our national and international politics, to the stability of everyday life and to peaceful social interaction among different communities in the days to come. He also insists that since the Partition, unlike the Holocaust, does not warrant a clear distinction between perpetrator and victim, it does not deserve the kind of institutional memorialisation that the Holocaust merits. In this way, he concludes that such projects of memorialisation and recovery could well lead to a resuscitation of "communal consciousness and give strength to communal politics," and thus undermine the nationalist project of secularism in India (103).

Suresh Sharma, the fellow discussant disagrees to Alam's injunction that the memory of the Partition should be forgotten absolutely. Instead, he believes that "memory itself subsumes both forgetting and remembrance" (100). Hence, he argues that everything need not be remembered all the time. The enthusiasm of the oral history project to complete the historical record, he warns, might lead to "eroding equations of sanity" (102). Sharma thus comes to the circumspective conclusion that the Partition's memory "has to be recovered with a sense of deep responsibility and compassion because the very people who indulged in this killing have subsequently worked out equations of co-living, certain norms of more or less sane interaction" (101).

Alam's and Sharma's concerns about memory raise many crucial questions about the politics of remembering and forgetting in the context of the Partition. The idea that people

have arrived at formulae for co-existence post-Partition seems to be preposterous in the context of contemporary religious politics in India, especially after the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, the Gujarat pogrom and the repeated instances of atrocities against Dalits across the country. Alam also rejects the memories of the partition as he thinks they are "greatly misplaced and dangerous in India" (Alam and Sharma 100) and wishes them to be buried in the "collective amnesia" (Pandey, *In Defense* 33) or repression about the Partition in India. The staunch nationalist he is, Alam's words are haunted by a fear of a possible Indian balkanisation and he demands the national trauma be forgotten so that the national narrative may progress.

However, Alam's view that trauma can be forgotten/repressed seems to be misplaced in the light of current theories of trauma. Cathy Caruth, a leading trauma theorist points out the latent nature of trauma, its uncanny capacity to re-appear with a vengeance over a period of time, especially when actuated by a similar event (6). Writing in the context of the Partition, Ashis Nandy makes a similar point that the trauma of the Partition, "disowned and carefully banished, regularly return to haunt the political culture of South Asian societies. The past can be historicised or anaesthetised. But that is no guarantee that it will not return, like Sigmund Freud's unconscious, unless the new generations of South Asians are willing to painfully work through it" (*Death* 13). Thus, negotiating the trauma of the Partition becomes critical in coming to terms with the communally charged political environment in India today. As Mrinal Pandey has suggested in the context of the mass migrations of the Partition:

> Do we wish to allow the wounds of Partition to fester within increasingly inadequate walls on both sides and plan to destroy each other continually; or do we open up and remember our beginnings as modern nations, understand the great migration collectively and come to terms without grief and shame? The choice is ours. (123)

Apart from the problematisation of the feminist/oral evocation of memory, another contention raised against the recent oral/feminist scholarship—among many others—is that it attempts to

de-historicise both Partition Studies and the larger area of South Asian studies by focussing on individual memories/testimonies of trauma and violence.

As Javed Alam has put it:

> There are larger historical forces behind the little events that happen. The breach between Hindus and Muslims in the nineteenth century, it becoming politicised, leading through a tortuous course to Partition. I think of the role of British state and its policy of systematic divide and rule, of playing one community against the other. How does one capture that? The use of memory as a way of building the collective past seems inadequate to capture these larger forces as important factors in the lives of these societies. (103)

Alam denies outright any possibility of feminist oral history being of any use in the historical discourse as it focusses on the "limited" gendered/subaltern experiences of the Partition. To the contrary, "gender" may be productively employed as a more than "useful category of historical analysis" (Scott, *Gender: A Useful Category* 1053) in the study of nationalism and Partition in the subcontinental context. The main intervention of the new spurt of feminist scholarship on the Partition of India was to introduce the category of "gender" into an analysis of life in colonial/postcolonial India to a degree hitherto unknown in scholarship on the Partition available up to the 1990s. Taking a cue from this fresh body of scholarship, gender is foregrounded here as a critical category of analysis in the study of turbulent events like the Partition.

This analysis of Partition narratives entitled, *En-livening 1947: Women's Life Narratives on the Partition,* proposes to offer a gendered perspective on Indian nationalism in the context of the catastrophic and bloody Partition in 1947. Partition is employed as a template to explicate how nationalism redefined individual and collective identities through social contexts that were mostly violent and always already gendered. Specifically, the focus is on the ways in which female experiences of the great divide of 1947 were written out of sanctioned histories of the nation, and

an effort is made to address this disenfranchisement through a critical reading of women's life narratives[4] related to the Partition.

It is contended that the contemporary literature on the Partition demands contemplation on gender/femininity in ways disavowed by official narratives of the nation. In doing so, this study takes its cue from recent feminist scholarship on the Partition initiated by Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia and Veena Das among others, since the late 1990s. Drawing from the contemporary feminist critiques of nation and nationalism pioneered by a wide range of scholars, it analyses how implicit and explicit notions about sexual/gender identities are complicit in contouring the public spheres of national/communal politics as well as the more private/intimate spheres of family and kinship. More specifically, we shall address questions such as how do women's life narratives negotiate collective and individual trauma, memories, identities, notions of nationalism and delineations of violence engendered by specific moments in history—like the Partition—that are replete with socio-political tensions.

As already indicated, the focus is on recently published women's life narratives in English, in order to analyse the troubled relationship nationalism forged with gender at the vital historical (dis)juncture called the Partition. Apart from compilations of oral narratives like Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* and Meenakshie Verma's *The Aftermath*, published collections of interviews with survivors like *Borders and Boundaries* (by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin) and *Epicentre of Violence: Partition Voices and Memories from Amritsar* (by Ian Talbot and Darshan Singh Tatla), and memoirs written by social workers like Anis Kidwai and Kamla Patel which have been recently translated into English are taken up for analysis. Nonica Datta's *Violence, Martyrdom and Partition: A Daughter's Testimony* is also explored as a fragment of individual memory that subverts the national imaginary. It is maintained that life narratives of women mark an ingenious archive, a genuine template to explore the relationships and intersections of gender, citizenship and nation in the subcontinental context.

The life narratives approach has today been widely received by revisionist historians, anthropologists and feminist scholars—both in India and abroad. This approach has particularly been useful in the case of women as their lives are generally inaccessible by other means, and their individual subversive messages may readily be muted and get submerged in the more visible, officially deployed narratives of the state, religion or the dominant gender. In the context of Partition studies, such a feminist approach combined with a larger anthropological approach, as adapted by a number of scholars like Butalia, Das, Menon and Bhasin becomes critical as it enables us to historicise, unsettle and critique the gendered and ethnicised identities that mark the contemporary subcontinental nationalist discourse.[5]

However, most of the oral narratives taken up for analysis are far from unmediated, and instead reflect interactive, reflexive processes of mutual collaboration through which both researcher and narrator generate a text together, often through an utterly asymmetrical relationship. Feminist oral historians of the Partition seem to recognise this inherent methodological limitation and Butalia, in her "Preface" to a special number of *Seminar* on Partition narratives, goes on to sketch the problems with oral narratives—undependable nature of memory and subtleties getting lost in transcription—and then poses the question: "how then does the interviewer ensure an honest interview?" (14). By raising such a question, Butalia locates herself in the quandary of the inevitability of representations even as she recognises the preposterousness of such an enterprise. Hence, a focus on the issues of representation and the impracticability of any authoritative recovery of past experience remains imperative to feminist oral historiography of the Partition. And significantly, as it illuminates the processes that constitute the writing of history, it strives to keep away from totalising universalisms, monolithic identities and narrative closures that malign much official history writing.

In one sense, this endeavour is all about stories and the trauma of telling and retelling stories. Literacy has historically been a primarily western phenomenon and even today, a good percentage of rural Indian women remain illiterate. In fact, orality

remains the favoured means by which most of the partitioned selves remember their individual and collective suffering. As one octogenarian survivor testified to Urvashi Butalia: "Now I sit at home and my children are out working and I keep telling them these stories . . . they are stories after all . . . and you tell them and tell them until you lose consciousness . . ." (qtd. in Butalia, *The Other* 15). However, this mode of remembering/articulation of the past has long been relegated because of the statist fixation with the linearity of archival histories. As evident from the narratives chosen for this study, orality foregrounds the complexities of the act of subjective remembering that cannot be encapsulated in written documents and hence accentuates an aspect missing in the normative narrative(s) of the nation engendered by the state.[6]

However, creating a written narrative from oral sources has often been a troubling endeavour, for as Singer notes, oral narratives "are intended to be communicated by word of mouth" (ix). Therefore, writing them down, submitting them to academic analysis and "committing them to paper surely violates them in a way that retelling them does not . . . They are designed to be transient, changing with each retelling. Recording them fixes them in time like a written text" (ix), which they are not. However, many renowned anthropologists like Nancy Scheper-Hughes argue that not to do so constitutes an "act of indifference," a "hostile act." This is because, argues Scheper-Hughes, oral narratives may become "'sites of resistance,' 'acts of solidarity,' or a way to 'write against terror,' and anthropology itself employed as an 'agent of social change'" (qtd. in Green 230). In a similar vein, feminist scholars argue that women's oral history contributes to social history because it explores the experiences of the less visible, less vocal, less public, more common lives of ordinary people—of whom women constitute a major share. For them, women's life narratives are critical as they invite the readers to "listen on the margins of discourse and give voice to muted groups in our society" (Langellier 243), augmenting the potential of this approach to accomplish change in the position of marginalised groups. Further, trauma theorists like Anne Whitehead (91) and Suzette Henke (xvi) posit that

acts of testimony are the surest way to cope with traumatic events of the past even if they are open ended, vulnerable to repetition or even, perhaps, incapable of completion.

A feminist historical/anthropological analysis with an exclusive emphasis on life narratives by women, it is argued, foregrounds the experiential dimension of traumatic events like the Partition, puts both the community and state narratives under erasure and demonstrates how modernist regimes of power and knowledge mediate the position of woman in the nation. The focus on women's life stories, apart from introducing women as participants into the discourse, endorses a methodological choice that foregrounds their lived experiences to the centre, as against their secondary status in sanctioned histories as passive objects of the discourse. Such a methodological emphasis, hopefully, opens up the dynamics of personal experiences moulding history and memory, facilitating the figure of the woman to surface as a political agency crucial to the Partition. All through the analysis, significant attention has been paid to the configurations and reconfigurations of female identity as many women found themselves implicated in a Partition engendered vicious cycle within which they had to persistently manage multiple identities.

In what follows, this study attempts to unscramble the genealogies of the dilemma of secular nationalism and gendered kinship/citizenship in India by addressing the inter-articulation of sexual violence, nationalism, gendered memory and citizenship issues through an analysis of life narratives of women centred on the Partition of India. By focusing on the socio-spatial tropes that constitute the discursive geography of the Partition—family, community and nation—an attempt is made to demonstrate how the figure of the woman is critical to the nation's narrative yet ironically remains a marginal object, to the extent of being expendable. Further, it is contended that the historic/discursive moment of the Partition was inevitably gendered as the major spatial tropes that define that discourse— the domestic/familial, the communal/religious and national/citizenship had already been gendered ones. Hence, it is argued, the gendered nature of the violence that the Partition engendered.

Part 1, "In the Name of Honour," attempts to address the silences that mark women's self narratives on the Partition, especially in the domains of the familial and the intimate. More specifically, a diachronic look is offered at the way women's bodies came to be construed as the "sovereign" sites where religious/communal "honour" was preserved or lost; as the symbol of defilement of communal identity, in the context of the cadastral technologies of the colonial state. This way, a critique of cultural-historical readings of gendered violence—that merely tender redefinitions of the figure of the woman without invoking the actual political/historical structures and conditions that engender such silence—is offered. Subsequently, analysing narratives on violence during the Partition, it is demonstrated how, far from discounting gender, self-narratives on intimate violence often serve to reproduce gendered hierarchies as they fail to overcome the culturally sanctioned silences ensuing from misconstrued notions of bodily purity and "honour."

Part 2, "Recovering Selves(?)" problematises the post Partition recovery operation which betrays the deadly collusion the nation state entered into with families in the wake of the Partition. The recovery programme testifies to the gendering of national citizenship and political will and an analysis of the same reveals how the state borrows on and builds upon the domestication of gender power within the family, begging the question of gendered reproduction of women and the nation. Accordingly, the problematic identity of the "abducted woman" is foregrounded as central to any understanding of Indian nationalism post Partition. Further, a close reading of two memoirs written by social workers associated with the recovery of abducted women—Kamla Patel's *Torn from the Roots* (2006) and Anis Kidwai's *In Freedom's Shade*—is undertaken to show how these narratives ironically rehearse and reinscribe the discriminatory nationalist political imperatives of the period.

Part 3, "A Daughter's Testimony" interrogates memory as a gendered category and explores how this gendering contributes to the marginality of women's experiences in history, focussing on the Jat community of Haryana. By undertaking a critical

reading of Subhashini's testimony as presented in Nonica Datta's *Violence, Martyrdom, Partition: A Daughter's Testimony*, the individual female subject's differential experience of the Partition is investigated, demonstrating how personal memory undercuts the national imaginary. It is argued that Subhashini's narrative puts under question many of the received notions regarding Partition's bloodiness as it participates in a nearly genocidal, carnivalesque manifestation of violence in a locality. More significantly—through a reading that concentrates on the omissions and elisions in her narrative—the gendered national imaginaries implicated within the cyclicality of her memory and especially the conception of the "Aryamahila" that underpins her narrative is explored.

In short, the significance of traumatic life narratives as a productive intervention for a possible redefinition of women's status as active citizens within the contemporary articulations of nationality is highlighted. Throughout, the emphasis is on exploring the potentially significant intersections of feminist historiography and life writings on the Partition by foregrounding the "split" as well as multiple identities engendered by such narratives. It is argued that a gendered analysis of women's life narratives on the Partition completely shatters the myth of the coherent universal (masculine) subject, opening up significant possibilities for feminist oral historians who are concerned with contextualising the "truth" offered by these narratives; opening up spaces from which a differential experience/history of the Partition may emerge.

In the Name of Honour

As with the Holocaust, the initial response the Partition engendered in the public sphere was one of impregnable silence. In the years following the Partition and the concomitant violence it generated, the nation was all too wary to encounter the ghastly tales from a not too distant past. What Primo Levi wrote of his now classic work of testimony, *If this is a Man* is perhaps equally applicable to many works on the Partition of India:

> So this first book of mine fell into oblivion for many years: perhaps also because in all of Europe those were difficult times of mourning and reconstruction and the public did not want to return in memory to the painful years of the war that had just ended. (381)

Levi, not surprisingly, finds an echo in another continent in Aniz Kidwai who also encountered resistance to the attempt to share with the world the experience of those caught up in the vortex of the extremely disturbing violence of the Partition. Delineating the difficulties she faced in getting her now acclaimed Partition memoir — *In Freedom's Shade* — published, she recollects the disapprobation her work attracted from a family member: ". . . although such books are often written, they should not be published so soon after the events are recorded" (Kidwai xxii). Further, she confides in the reader: "I'm a woman and I find it difficult to put down on paper for my readers all the obscenities committed upon women in both the halves of Punjab and the princely states" (282).

Thus, the early obscurity of memories of violence was not just the result of a subconscious resistance to unbearable knowledge of recent events; it was also the result of active repression from various quarters. Gyanendra Pandey has analysed the multiple mechanisms that those who lived through the Partition use to process their experiences. He reminds us that one common response, "widely enforced by individuals and communities" was to "silence or suppress" the impact of the Partition in their lives (*Remembering* 175).

For many men and women in the modern nation states of India and Pakistan, the Partition entailed the loss of their everyday world. Property, lives, "honour," and even the elemental belief in humanity and God were all lost. Most significantly, so lost was "memory," at least in the years immediately following the Partition.[7] After almost six decades since 1947, many oral historians/anthropologists still confront silence from victims and their families while attempting to "excavate" memories of the event. Many a scholar has written of the stoic silences[8] (and often the sense of disgrace) with which the Partition victims

encountered or shied away from the mournful memories of 1947. As the veteran writer Krishna Sobti puts it, the Partition still remains "difficult to forget but dangerous to remember" (qtd. in Butalia, *The Other* 269).

In presenting the Partition as a case of sheer violence (as opposed to a political process that was "accompanied" or "overtaken by" violence), Gyan Pandey submits the possibility of 1947 being India's historical "limit case" (*Remembering* 45). Thus, suggests Pandey, Partition has been analysed in India as an event which had its "causes," "factors," "origins," "reasons" and "effects" but not as a set of actual actions, a paradigm of traumatic memory itself. In a way, writes Pandey, this technique of re-moulding recollection enables survivors to come to terms with the event and to transcend it (*Remembering* 175). On the other hand, the highly individualised aspects of the carnage of the Partition make it bizarre, forcing people averse to remember their role and experiences of the same, turning it into a strange cataclysm which defies too much detail of all its ghastliness. What often compounds the difficulty in articulation is the location of such gruesome violence in the realms of the intimate and the familial. As Menon and Bhasin assert:

> Partition, almost uniquely, is the one event in our recent history in which familial recall and its encoding are a significant factor in any general reconstruction of it. In a sense, it is the collective memory of thousands of displaced families on both sides of the border that have imbued a rather innocuous word—Partition—with its dreadful meaning: a people violently displaced, a country divided. Partition: a metaphor for irreplaceable loss. (*Borders* xi)

In this context, one may purport that Partition's memory takes on two hues. The first is internal memory, the most intimate/sensitive memories of the trauma, violence and the disgrace of 1947. These are the ones associated with the physical body and its debasement, the obliteration of one's own "honour" as a human being, a gendered person and a kin member. These memories are held mostly to oneself and shared at most with close family members (who also understand the need to keep these well-

shrouded under silence) under specific circumstances. Then, there is the external memory which is not as perturbing (and perhaps not as individual or traumatic), which can be disclosed to the oral historian and incorporated into the existing archive. Such memory works by othering episodes of violence in terms of "they" and "them," "us" and "we," but seldom as "I" or "me." It is conceivable that many Partition survivors and refugees organised their memories in such a way, choosing to recall one set of "safe" memories and repressing the other set of "dangerous" memories.

From the Pakistani side of the great divide, Nighat Said Khan, in "Identity, Violence and Women: A Reflection on the Partition of India, 1947," points out that women themselves gave voice to the violence that they had heard of/witnessed, but not that they had personally experienced or that had been inflicted by someone they knew (162). However, not all women were reticent about their partitioned past, and as Menon and Bhasin posit, "for most of the women remembering was important, but as important was remembering to others, having someone listen to their stories and feel that their experiences was of value" (*Borders* 18). Butalia also quotes Basant Kaur, one of the few Sikh women who survived the mass suicide of 90 odd Sikh women in the village well of the now infamous Thoa Khalsa, Rawalpindi, in March, 1947: "Now I sit at home and my children are out working and I keep telling them these stories . . . they are stories after all . . . and you tell them and tell them until you lose consciousness . . ." (202).

As evidenced by the words of Kaur, oral histories of the female survivors of Partition violence attests to the doggedness of memories in the face of impressive injunctions to forget and the trauma of the past experiences haunts their present existence in diverse but real ways. However, even when these women testify to their intimate experiences of gendered violence, they tend to gloss over experiences that invoke individual and familial "honour;" their remembrances often avoid the discordant/disturbing shreds of their internal memories.

In what follows, an attempt is made to address the silences that mark women's experiences of the Partition, especially in the realms of the familial and the intimate. More specifically, a

diachronic view is offered on the way women's bodies came to be construed as the "sovereign" sites where religious/communal "honour" was maintained or lost; as the symbol of defilement of communal identity, in the context of the cadastral technologies of the colonial state. A subsequent analysis of narratives on violence during the Partition shows how, far from discounting gender, self-narratives on intimate violence often serve to reproduce gendered hierarchies as they fail to overcome the culturally sanctioned silences ensuing from misconstrued notions of bodily purity and "honour."

As already stated, the final decade of the last century which saw the commemoration of the golden jubilee of independence/ Partition marked a paradigm shift in the study of the Partition, in terms of both content and methodology. Scholars like Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia, Meenakshi Verma and Nighat Said Khan explored the methodology of oral narratives[9] in a bid to recover women's gendered experiences of the Partition, compounding memory with recorded history. Butalia, Verma, Menon and Bhasin, recount the narratives of violated and abducted women, and investigate the import of sexual violence against women in the marking of community and state boundaries in identity conflicts like the Partition (novelists like Bapsi Sidhwa and Shauna Singh Baldwin also share a concern for this feminist historical intervention in the Partition).[10]

Narratives of mass violence against women by male members of their own community in the name of "honour" further underscore the materiality of the female body as a signifier of community and a site of violence. Such narratives, more than any other, were shrouded in the veil of silence as intimate relations of kinship were implicit in many such acts of brutality. Such stories of intra-familial violence live on in family histories particularly in Punjab, where tales of tabooed sexuality and brutality are closely guarded not to escape the "honourable" domain of the familial.

Urvashi Butalia, through her largely unedited transcripts of oral narratives in *The Other Side of Silence*, presents a formidable account of the Partition experience of women, children, and Dalits—the subaltern national citizenry. Moved by the troubled

history of her own family's bitter experience of the Partition, she did fieldwork among the Punjabi migrants in Delhi (especially from the Rawalpindi region) and recorded oral accounts during 1987-1997. Butalia's narratives, like oral testimonies and fictional representations, facilitate us to historicise, problematise and critique the gendered political identities that define contemporary South Asian nationalist discourses—they underscore the gender pathology that underlies the subcontinent's national modernity. As Kavita Daiya opines, Butalia's work enables us to "intercept and interrogate hegemonic nationalist histories through these complex cultural narratives" (*Honourable* 223).

Along with the narratives Butalia presents, other recorded oral histories of sexual violence as presented in Menon and Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries* and Meenakshie Verma's *Aftermath* are taken up for analysis. It is argued that a certain hefty silence lies at the heart of these testimonies, eliding the most painful and traumatic experience of sexual/homicidal violence, especially those concerned with the notion of "honour." Perhaps, excavating the traumatic memory of intimate and intense bodily violence forces the survivor to re-live and re-experience the trauma and pain of the original moment evoking in her/him a sense of unbearable shame.

In the next few pages, a few testimonies by Partition's survivors are explored, specifically looking for the particular kind of silences outlined above. First taken up for analysis is the by now infamous mass suicide (homicide?) of Sikh women in *Thoa Khalsa*, a village in Rawalpindi district.[11] According to a report published in the English language newspaper, *The Statesman* on April 14, 1947, some 90 women of the village jumped themselves into a well, drowning themselves in the process, for fear of Muslim assault on their "honour." In Punjab, women who "committed" suicide during the Partition achieved "martyrdom." Their families appreciate their sacrifice, as they recount their valiant behavior in commemoration. Veena Das comments, "By choosing violent death for themselves rather than submitting to sexual violence by men of other communities, women are enshrined in these narratives as saviours of family honour" (*Critical* 63).

Interestingly, Butalia offers two accounts of the *Thoa Khalsa* episode: one by a female survivor of the incident and the other by a witness who, incidentally, happens to be the survivor's son. There is a marked difference in the way the two narrate their memories of the same event, the gendered perspective being too pronounced to be ignored. Basant Kaur, the survivor is interviewed by Butalia and she recounts that the men of the village decided to kill all the girls. She claims men began killing their kinswomen well before the mass suicide:

> My husband, he killed his daughter, his niece, his sister, and a grandson. He killed them with a kirpan [sword worn by Sikh men]. My jeth's [brother-in-law] son killed his mother, his wife, his daughter, and a grandson and granddaughter, all with a pistol. And then, my jeth, he doused himself with kerosene and jumped into a fire. (qtd. in Butalia, *The Other* 158)

In the course of her testimony, Basant Kaur acknowledges that she was terrorised. The Muslim mob was closing in and there seemed little chance of survival with her "honour" intact. At this point, the Sikh kinsmen distributed opium among the traumatised women, and then pointed out the village well. The blueprint for "appropriate" behaviour was thus provided by the men and it became critical for the women to demonstrate their conformity with the exigencies of their community. Mata Lajjawanti, one of the female elders in the village, took the cue and led the procession of women to the ignominious well.

She was the first who jumped into the well and the rest followed suit:

> Many girls were killed. Then Mata Lajjawanti, she had a well near her house, in a sort of garden. Then all of us jumped into that, some hundred . . . eighty-four . . . girls and boys. All of us. Even boys, not only children, but grown-up boys. I also went in, I took my two children and then we jumped in—I had some jewelry on me, things in my ears, on my wrists, and I had fourteen rupees on me. I took all that and threw it in the well, and then I jumped in, but . . . it's like when you put goyas, rotis into a tandoor,

> and if it is too full, the ones near the top, they do not cook, they have to be taken out. So the well filled up and we could not drown. (qtd. in Butalia, *The Other* 200)

Basant Kaur was one of the last women to jump into the well. Since there had been too many bodies in the well, the ones who took the plunge late survived, as there was simply not enough water to drown them all. Basant Kaur's narration of the story betrays an apologetic tone, the shame of someone who failed to martyr herself to safeguard the "honour" of the community. Her, status in the local Sikh community as a survivor of violence is obviously below that of those women who successfully drowned themselves in the well. This nuanced identity she enjoys in the community becomes evident as one listens to her own son Bir Bahadur Singh, a witness to the event, narrating it:

> I was sitting with my mother, this incident of the twenty five women had taken place . . . so sitting at the well, Mata Lajjwanti , who was also called, Sardarni Gulab Kaur, she said two words, she jumped into the well and some 80 women followed her . . . they all jumped in. The well filled up completely; one woman whose name is Basant Kaur, six children born of her womb died in that well, but she survived. She jumped in four times, but the well had filled up. (qtd. in Butalia, *The Other* 157)

It is interesting to see that the son's narrative does not identify the woman Basant Kaur as his own mother—instead, she becomes "one woman." Apparently, it ensues that such survivor women just do not have a place in the Sikh cultural-national imaginary and hagiography surrounding the Partition. It is significant that it is the dead women who got idealised whereas those who lived on in spite of all they had endured were spurned and made to feel disgraced for not upholding their "honour."[12] During periods of normalcy, it is deemed the duty of the men folk to safeguard the "honour" of the kinswomen/community/nation but during extraordinary times the women themselves are called upon to do so even at the expense of their lives. In fact Bir Bahadur Singh's narrative foregrounds the sacrifice/death of six of his siblings who were the victims of intrafamilial violence in the name of

"honour." That is, national and religious "honour" is located in women's bodies and is theirs to salvage or lose, absolving men of much of the responsibility for the murder, rape, abduction, and mutilation that women suffered. Of particular interest is Bir Bahadur's delineation of his own sister Maan[13] Kaur's death at the hands of her own father, in a language couched in a rhetoric of bravery and martyrdom which translates into a malevolent register of intentional falsification:

> My sister came and sat in front of my father and I stood there right next to him, clutching on to his kurta as children do. I was clinging to him . . . but when my father swung the kirpan . . . perhaps some doubt or fear came in his mind, or perhaps the kirpan got struck in her *duppatta* . . . no one can say . . . it was such a frightening fearful scene. Then my sister, with her own hand she removed the plait and pulled it forward . . and my father with his own hands moved the *duppatta* aside and then he swung the kirpan and then her neck and head rolled off and fell. . . . (qtd. in Butalia, *The Other* 171)

No doubt, Bir Bahadur Singh's testimony shifts the agency to the dead women, highlighting their "voluntary" espousal of homicidal violence. Further, Bir Bahadur's testimony presents "martyred" women as life-givers, those who ensure the continuity of the community. However, in the process of extolling the murdered women as martyrs, the pointlessness of women's martyrdom gets discarded, and the extent of its "usefulness" is limited to the domestic space:

> I think really all honour to those people who killed their own children, who jumped into wells. And they saved us . . . you take any household of martyrs, and you will find it will take root and grow. Blood is such a thing, that as you water a plant, a tree, so also the tree grows, so does the martyr's household. . . . My mother would weep all day when she remembered those incidents. She would cry, almost sing the dukhan about her family. All day long she would cry. But Vahe Guru must have heard her. Now we are three brothers, we all have children, I have five boys, grandchildren, we have a good, large family and now my

> mother complains that she isn't even able to sleep because there is no peace in the family! So you should be happy that fate has turned this miracle for you. (qtd. in Butalia, *The Other* 191)

It must be noted that the usefulness Bir Bahadur's testimony attributes to sacrificial violence is basically of a reproductive nature (firmly validating the stereotypical role ascribed to women as the re-producers of the nation and the community); the sacrifice and martyrdom of a few valiant women ensured the continuity of life for the larger community. The significance of these violent acts performed within the supposedly secure spaces of one's home, thus, is located not in the sphere of the political but rather exclusively within the private. Apparently, such acts get located within the apolitical space of domestic kinship. Subsequently, while the term "martyr" normally evokes political connotations, in the case of Partition and especially with respect to women, the term gets denuded of all its political implications; it is rendered meek. This apolitical rendering of the word "martyr," contributes to the gendering of the Partition discourse, stripping the violent acts themselves of any significant political possibilities. Thus, in the discourse on the Partition, acts of violence perpetrated against women and particularly those committed by women become valourised within the realm of the domestic—they are deemed valiant acts yet ones that are immaterial, both historically and politically.

As it is evident from the above quoted narratives offered by Basant Kaur and Bir Bahadur Singh, both men and women find it hard to voice the trauma of the Partition and this often results in non-cohesive and disjunctured retellings of the events. It is not that men and women always prefer to speak in entirely different registers but—as their narratives themselves testify—the gendered nature of the experience of violence en-genders the retellings in characteristic ways. Veena Das and Ashis Nandy attribute this difference in narration to the fact that the women were not only the objects of violence but also its victims. According to them, because they "retained the memory of loot, rape and plunder" as bodily memories, they remember it differently (Das and Nandy 28).

In the case of male narratives on violence against women—as in the case of Bir Bahadur's—the narration takes a relatively more cohesive, detached and formal mode, though occasionally disjunctured. All through, men's narratives are marked by what Valentine Daniel has called "the protective shadow of a coherent narrative" (336). In other words, the male narratives form a continuum with the master narrative, the patriarchal consensus that subsumes multiple, different voices into a single significant whole. According to Daniel, the conceit of this master-narrative lies in its "claim that it represents the truth or reality. . . . This indeed is the mode of the narrative of modern history" (337).

At this point, let us juxtapose another male narrative on the Thoa Khalsa episode—the one by Sant Gulab Singh, Mata Lajjawanti's husband and leader of the Thoa Khalsa Sikhs:

> Sardarni Lajjawanti asked for permission for the women to go and sit at the well. Water was drawn up and all the assembled washed themselves and the recitation of the scriptures began. They were ninety women in all, all of one lineage . . . they included young married girls, my granddaughters and grandsons, little children and their mothers. . . . taking a five year old granddaughter by the one hand and a grandson by the other, and calling out "Sat Siri Akal," she leapt into the well so that I should not have to witness the dishonouring of any Sikh daughter. Upon this, the young daughters and old women of the clan all followed suit, and the entire well filled up within a minute or two. (qtd. in Pandey, *Remembering* 85).

Gulab Singh goes on to state that, the Muslim marauders felt aghast at this daring act of martyrdom of the Sikh women and dared not attack the men as they grew apprehensive of the Sikh tribe, even the women of which were this valiant.[14] It is perhaps not curious to see that the Sikh patriarch's narrative construction of the event upholds his sense of male "honour," and women as the cost for its maintenance. ("She leapt into the well so that I should not have to witness the dishonouring of any Sikh daughter"). Again, while Basant Kaur's narrative hints at the mood of opium-induced intoxication and the force of

persuasion, Gulab Singh's narrative tactfully shifts the agency to his wife (as did Bir Bahadur's with respect to the death of his sister, Maan Kaur), absolving himself and other men folk of all moral responsibility. In fact, his version unmistakably treads the line offered by the SGPC[15] (Shiromani Prabandhak Gurudwara Committee) report on the Thoa Khalsa incident: "The Sikh ladies in their extremity either committed suicide or entreated their husbands and fathers to kill them. This was done. Thus the ladies saved their honour" (Talib 352).

Women's self-narratives, on the contrary, demonstrate a "recalcitrantly ambiguous character of lived experience" (Daniel 340) and hence complicate and problematise the hegemonic narratives engendered by men. While Bir Bihadur's narrative constantly strives to normalise the deaths of the kinswomen, as voluntary/natural choices made at an abnormal moment in history, Basant Kaur's narrative foregrounds the element of male coercion in encouraging such acts. Her narrative reveals the fault lines in the family/community narratives as it exposes their ennobling of experiences that had been, in many respects, both humiliating and dishonourable. In other words, her voice, though stifled by her own notions of "honour" and the dominant male narrative on suicide and martyrdom, seems to speak up— at least to a certain degree—for the dead women's silence itself as it foregrounds the elements of persuasion and even coercion the women were subjected to.

Charanjit Singh Bhatia, one of the Sikh men Menon and Bhasin interviewed, narrates a similar story of his uncle who had six daughters. Instead of accepting his Muslim neighbours' and friends' offer to get his daughters married to their sons in exchange of his family's safety, he:

> . . . kept listening to them and nodding, seeming to agree. That evening, he got all his family members together and decapitated each one of them with his talwar (sword), killing thirteen people in all. He then lit their chita (pyre), climbed on the roof of his house and cried out: '*Baratan lai ao! Hun lai ao baratan apniyan! Merian theeyan lai jao, taiyaar ne vyah vaste!*' (Bring on the marriage parties! You

> can bring your grooms now. Take my daughters away, they are ready for their marriages!) and so saying, he killed himself too. (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders* 48)

For Bhatia's uncle, as for many others, the infringement of religious boundaries (either by conversion or marriage) implied a loss of "honour" and an implosion of self-identity that was abominable than death itself. Curiously, the narrator of this story does not say whether the daughters in question and other family members agreed with the decision—whether they also preferred death to marriage. Based on other similar narratives of intrafamilial violence, it is highly unlikely that their opinion was even solicited.[16] For the father, his daughter's life would be essentially over at the moment of her marriage/conversion (as both entails "pollution") and thus killing her and possibly salvaging her family's (read father's) "honour" in death became a fully "responsible" way of "caring" for her.[17]

In the context of religious conversion and the shame-ridden silences it imposes on the family and the community, it would be worthwhile, analysing Urvashi Butalia's personal narrative on her uncle, Rana/Abdulla and her maternal grandmother, Dayawanti/Ayesha. During the time of Partition, Rana—a bachelor at that time—had stayed behind in Pakistan while his entire family except his mother moved to India. Despite the repeated entreaties of his sisters, Rana refused to leave the sprawling haveli the family owned in Lahore, nor did he allow his mother to cross the border to India. Later, Rana converted to Islam along with his mother, more out of convenience than out of conviction, it seems: "No one forced me to do anything. But in a sense there wasn't really a choice. The only way I could have stayed on was by converting. And so, well, I did. I married a Muslim girl, changed my religion, and took a Muslim name" (qtd. in Butalia, *The Other* 37). He also discloses that his selfish interest in the family house was the main motivation for his staying behind in Pakistan.

Despite Rana's conversion to Islam, he felt himself in Pakistan like a splintered self. "I am like a stranger, a man haunted in my own house by my own children," he— later on in his life— confided to Subhadra Butalia, his sister and Urvashi Butalia's

mother when Subhadra visited him in Pakistan (65). The source of Rana's frustration partly lies in his combined sense of shame and guilt over his converting his mother to Islam—the same remains the reason for the Butalia family's anguish and alienation with him. His mother had been "a *kattar* Hindu—not a rabid, flame spouting type, but a strong believer who derived comfort from her daily routine of prayer and fasting" (44).

Narratives offered by both Urvashi Butalia and Subhadra Butalia do not shed any light on Damayanti's post-conversion life as Ayesha in Lahore. Upon Urvashi Butalia's insistent enquiries as to whether her dead body was buried or cremated, Rana replies: "I had to make her a convert. She was called Ayesha Bibi. I buried her" (43). However, Rana could never muster up the courage to take Urvashi Butalia to the site of his converted mother's grave. It is pertinent that while Urvashi Butalia presents her mother, Subhadra's testimonial, she prefers to speak on behalf of Rana despite Rana's willingness to let the world know his story: "Of course, write what you could write. My life cannot get any worse" (37). Moreover, both the narratives on Rana family's post-conversion life in Pakistan—though haunted by the imagined spectre of that dead body—are remarkably silent on whatever transpired between her uncle, Rana and his mother, Damayanti during the ten years or so they lived together post-Partition. However, in both these narratives, the grandmother's corpse and questions regarding its mode of final disposal linger as the embodiment of the savagery and shame that lie beneath codes of community "honour." Its corporeality thus serves to make visible the forces of violence at the heart of conceptions of community.

The episode of Damayanti's forced conversion also prompts a consideration of the profound trauma and disruption that religious conversions produce in the social, spiritual, public and private lives of those unwillingly converted. Forced religious conversions, like rape and other modes of bodily violence, powerfully penetrate the borders of communities in an intentional attempt to denigrate them. Damayanti's conversion to another religion, for instance, scripts a violent appropriation of her body through the rhetoric of

the soul. The act of conversion, while laying a claim on her soul, does so through the medium of the body, conferring a spiritual element on the violation of her body.[18]

What is interesting, apart from the corporeality of the dead body and its implications for communal "honour," is Urvashi Butalia's self-imposed censorship in narrating the truth about Ranamama and her grandmother, particularly their conversion to Islam and their subsequent life (and death) as Muslims in Pakistan. She writes: "I did what I had to: silenced those parts that needed to be kept silent. I make no excuses to this except that I could not bring myself to, in the name of a myth called intellectual honesty, expose or mm ake Ranamama so vulnerable" (39). Self-reflexive over her own treatment of Ranamama's life, Butalia further asks: "Could I be irresponsible enough to make everything he said public. . . . Yet was it not wrong to present only a 'partial' picture? To hold back some of the truth and make available another" (357)? Examining the possibility of probable biases or distortions in women's life narratives, Susan and Gieger argue that such personal distortions should be seen as a strength rather than a weakness:

> The issue of subjectivity does not itself constitute reason for disregarding the data available in life history narratives. The alleged weaknesses identified in the usual criticisms of life histories, then, can be viewed as strengths, especially at this stage of feminist research. These documents provide an exceptional resource for studying women's lives at different points in their life cycles in specific cultural and historical settings. The personal contextualization of women's lives found in life histories makes them invaluable for deepening cross-cultural comparisons, preventing facile generalizations, and evaluating theories about women's experience or women's oppression. (338)

Another instance of silence in the representation of intimate violence is perceptible in the testimony given by Shrimati Laj Wanti, a twenty-three year old Khatri woman who was abducted during the anarchy of August, 1947. While fleeing with her family from the violence-ridden Kamoke,[19] a mob of Muslim

men assaulted their refugee train bound for India. Her husband was instantly killed and her infant son was abducted. She testifies her experience:

> The women-folk were not butchered, but taken out and sorted. The elderly women were later butchered while the younger ones were distributed. I saw an old woman who cried for water being caught hold of by her feet by a Muslim and flung twice on the ground and killed. The children were also similarly murdered. All the valuables on the persons of the women were removed and taken away by the mob. Even clothes were torn in the effort to remove valuables. My son was also snatched away in spite of my protests. I cannot say who took him away. I was taken by one Abdul Ghani to his house. He was a tonga driver. I was kept in the house for over a month and badly used. I went to other houses to look for my son. I saw a large number of children but I was unable to find my son. During these visits I also saw a large number of Hindu women in the houses of the Muslim inhabitants of Kamoke. All of them complained that they were being very badly used by their abductors. (qtd. in Talib 261)

Remembering the time she spent with her abductor, Shrimati Laj Wanti discloses that he assailant treated her "badly." However, her statement carefully evades any possibility of an outright sexual violation by placing not only herself but all the abducted women under the category, "badly used." This way, her narrative attempts to disown her personal sense of shame and give it a collective form. In fact, studies on the women survivors of the Holocaust and the Bosnian rape camps reveal that most of them experience a certain kind of shame ensuing from their subjective realisation of their objectionable status of objectification.[20]

Rape and abduction were not the only crimes committed upon women. Apart from these traumatic modes of violence, some men mutilated women of the enemy community. In *The Muslim League's Attack on Hindus and Sikhs, 1947*, the committee reported, "Women's breasts, noses and arms would be lopped off. Sticks and pieces of iron would be thrust into their private parts.

Sometimes the bellies of pregnant women were ripped open and the unformed life in the womb thrown out" (qtd. in Talib 81). The perpetrators often seized control of the "other" women, especially ones of reproductive age. As Veena Das argues:

> The "foundational" event of inaugurating then is itself anchored to the already circulating imaginary of abduction of women that signalled a state of disorder since it dismantled the orderly exchange of women. The state of war [between Muslim and Hindu/Sikh men], akin to the Hobbesian state of nature, comes to be defined as one in which Hindus and Muslims are engaged in mutual warfare over the control of sexually and reproductively active women. (*Violence* 21)

Let us now take up one more survivor testimony of violence to further illustrate the elision of the actual moment/experience of violence in such narratives—a narrative that also lends itself to an analysis of the fragmented notion of the self that lies at the heart of many self-narratives on the Partition. Meenakshi Verma in her *Aftermath*: *An Oral History of Violence* presents the story of Kesar Devi, more popularly known in her community as "Aadha," "the halved." She is nearly 70 years old and almost everyone in the community addresses her "Aadha." In fact, the name is loaded with cultural significations that mark her as a distinct individual in the community—a mutilated woman, a living embodiment of the scars the Partition had inflicted on the social and individual bodies. Aadha had migrated to India during the time of the Partition and the train she had boarded was attacked *en route* by a Muslim mob:

> There were hundreds of people who had got on the train. It was evening and there was hardly any light even in the train. Hundreds of them (Muslims) got into our compartment and started killing the Sardars first. Then they targeted the others. We did not know about this. (She breaks down.) I was injured and lost my consciousness. I do not even remember what happened, who put me in hospital or anything else. (Sobbing, she holds her dupatta to her face.) I was bandaged all over. (93-94)

Aadha's narrative fails to conjure up the horror of the actual act of mutilation of breast she was subjected to. She prefers to use the term "injured" rather than the term "mutilated" and she completely glosses over the actual nature of visceral violence she had to endure. This silence of the narrative is emblematic of all the historical silences imposed on/around women and their experience of the Partition, the silence which results from an all pervasive patriarchal taboo especially in conventional societies where human beings are social roles rather than discrete individuals. The mutilation of the breasts, given their role in the nurturing of future generations, is seen as a significantly potent way of desecrating the enemy community. The social psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar in *Colours of Violence* (1995) explains that the manifestation of mutilated breasts and castrated males during a riot situation incorporates the more or less conscious desire to wipe the hated enemy off the surface of the earth by eliminating the means of its reproduction and the nurturing of its infants (112).

Aadha's profound sense of shame in narrating the actual act of violence is manifested in her unconscious act of lifting her *dupatta* towards her face in the course of the interview, the *dupatta* being a traditional marker of "honour" in South Asian societies. In fact, her narrative seems to be haunted by a deep sense of shame even though she does not indicate it explicitly: the shame of having been mutilated and having survived her husband's death. The censorship her own sons impose on her intimacy with the ethnographer also points to the extent to which the male members of the family relive everyday her sense of shame, sensitised to the social stigma of being known as the men of Aadha's family. Verma quotes her elder son: "My mother is an old woman. She does not keep well and does not even remember her past. She is not the right person if you want to talk about Partition" (91).

Throughout her rather short self-narrative, multiple identities emerge and dissolve as in a kaleidoscope, exposing her exploded self. She begins the narrative by talking about "our home" in a Gujarati village, "my husband" and "our" kind-hearted Muslim

neighbours who had even offered to look after "us," clearly positioning herself as a married homemaker in pre-Partition India (Verma 92). Her narrative seeks to establish a secure and reliable past through a description of life before displacement and widowhood, representing economic security, individual happiness and good social relations—things mostly alien to her in the present. After securing a picture of the past in which her personal identity as wife was central to social well-being, her narrative explains the sudden alteration of this identity—from wife to widow—as the source of her present state of social displacement. "My husband did not want to go to Hindustan. But he was told by his seniors hat he should leave at least for the time being. . . . Later on he could come back. On our way to India, my husband was killed. . . . It is a matter of shame for everyone" (92).

In this way, her story turns around her husband's demise as a rupture point in life, identity and in the narration of life, first disorienting life and identity in reality, and then serving as a temporal marker in narrative, signifying the loss of status and security in economic, social and personal terms. Indeed, for a widow, whose husband had lent her an identity in the society, his death signifies the loss of her own identity, "honour" and dignity in the society. She is overcome by the shame of having survived her husband. As Kotre reminds us, memory often segregates life into two categories, separated by "personal landmarks that come to the forefront of remembrance marking occasions in which we stepped into a new role and became a new person. . . . As a new self emerges, the old one recedes into the past" (109). Clearly, widowhood is one such landmark, significantly impacting self-perception, inducing feelings of "splintered personhood" (Zur 54), and affirming the power of violence to tear apart identity, "hindering attempts to integrate the 'self' of the past with the 'self' of the present" (57).

Writing on the role gender plays in the life histories of women, Arnold and Blackburn suggest that women are "found to use silences and ellipses as a protective strategy" (16). Apart from this, they also use oblique language to displace the actual

moment of violence. This tendency becomes discernible in Aadha's narrative as she breaks down at the point of narrating the mutilation of her breasts. Further, her own sense of shame inhibits her from mentioning the visceral act of violence inscribed on her body; rather eliding the violence by using the more generic word "injured." "I was injured and lost my consciousness. I do not even remember what happened, who put me in hospital or anything else" (93-94). The perceivable elisions and omissions in the narrative reveal the tension between the coeval desire to narrate one's own story and to regulate its content, for cultural reasons as the personal stakes are too high. In addition to revealing the challenging process of identity reconstruction and the reconstitution of selfhood, Aadha's narrative, as Gardner suggests, attests to the ways in which "identities shift and are contested within the same individual" (29).

Thus, although the current feminist historical research has made available a wealth of information about the experiences of women in India's Partition, it is remarkable that there are not many explicit testimonial accounts of women candidly revealing their own personal experiences of sexual violation in the recent collections of oral narratives. Though one can find enough family narratives on female "martyrs" who "voluntarily" sacrificed their lives during the Partition chaos, or those who were murdered by their own men in order to safeguard the "honour" of the community, a veil of silence still masks the experiences of women reclaimed from their violators/abductors and returned to their biological/nuptial families, or others who were forced to change their religion and live their lives with their violators/abductors.

Even though violence perpetrated on the community remains current in collective memory—in fact, it is often emblazoned in contemporary accounts of the trauma—there is very little explicit recognition of victims within the community, particularly of those women who have been the sufferers of sexual violence. Violence can only be consigned to the outside; it is always someone else's story, what Gyanendra Pandey has codified as the "prose of otherness" ("The Prose..." 188). Menon and Bhasin—especially—present a number of extraordinary personal

narratives by women that bear witness to the sexual violation of other women. However, it is pertinent to note that none of these narratives give voice to the violence inflicted on the self, with the odd exemption of one woman in *Borders and Boundaries*, who barely manages to aver: "*'Dafa karo, hun ki yaad karna hai. Main sab bhula ditta hai'* (Let it go, what is the point in remembering aIl this now? I have forgotten everything)" (95).

The dearth of personal testimonies of sexual violation in these new oral histories may ultimately attest to the feminist historians' appreciable efforts to retell these stories with discretion and subtlety, respecting the wishes of their subjects to remain quiet or unidentified in keeping with contemporary notions of anthropological ethics. However, the continual silence women have kept about their own experience of sexual violation (and their circumlocutory, figurative way of articulating violence), even five decades after the event, also confirms the continuing value attached to patriarchal ideas like "honour," female chastity and bodily purity in the subcontinent.

The constrictions around women's vocalisations in a situation where no one refutes the immensity of the violence testifies to the possibility of an almost certain "social death" (Das, *Language* 68)—that is, ostracism and rejection from family and the community. In fact, the narrative of the violated woman has always been a text that is simply disallowed from the culture's self-story. Interestingly, feminist scholars like Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Sharon Marcus have questioned this patriarchal equation of sexual violence with social death, where female sexual existence and the female self are rendered so inextricable that any injury to the former results in the complete annihilation of the latter. Indeed, as Sunder Rajan points out, the conventional rape narrative sanctioned by patriarchy often reifies female victimhood: all that is really left for the raped woman to do after the event is either to fade away or to die.[21]

This widespread sense of stigma concerning women's purity is often socially and psychologically sanctioned by the all-pervasive mythological milieu of the *Ramayana* narrative which offers themes of "genealogical purity and banishment" (Mishra

4-5). The *Ramayana* with its pervasive and consistent tropes of abduction, mutilation, rejection, demonisation and dishonour could be easily invoked to stigmatise women. Most of the women's narratives are informed with this purity plot even as they negotiate and try to downplay the aspect of dishonour in a desperate bid to gain social acceptance as pure members of the community. However, many of the families considered the victimised women polluted by Ravana, who happened in this case to be a Muslim assailant and not the learned scholar-king of Lanka. Particularly at a time when India was "reeling under Partition" (Menon and Bhasin, *Recovery* 232), such overt depiction of bodily purity and banishment testifies to the rejection of thousands of women victimised during the Partition.

The narratives of women discussed above, significantly, bring us to the question of the material and discursive qualities of the human body, especially the female body, which becomes a site of conflict and contestation during periods of crisis like the Partition. Menon and Bhasin assert: "In the context of Partition, it engraved the division of India into India and Pakistan on the women of both religious communities in a way that they *became* the respective countries, indelibly imprinted by the Other" (*Borders* 43). Women's bodies came to be considered by men of the warring communities as a territory to be assaulted, vanquished and occupied, and by the family and community as the symbol of their "honour." This made it inevitable that women became the targets of men not only of the "other" community but also of their own. This precarious circumstance in which the women found themselves entrapped is well-remembered by Durga Rani, a survivor:

> In the villages of Head Junu, Hindus threw their young daughters into wells, dug trenches and buried them alive. Some were burnt to death; some were made to touch electric wires to prevent the Muslims touching them. We heard of such happenings all the time after August 16. We heard all this. (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders* 32)

The construction of the body as an inscriptive surface thus becomes the key to any analysis of Partition violence and its

representations. Poststructuralist commentators on the body have long argued for its discursive construction through the circulation of a broad spectrum of stories. As Elisabeth Groz, in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism,* observes: "In many recent texts, the body has figured as a writing surface on which messages, a text, are inscribed. The metaphorics of body writing posits the body . . . as corporeal surfaces, the blank page on which engraving, graffiti, tattooing, or inscription can take place" (117). She further asserts that "the messages or texts produced by this body writing construct bodies as networks of meaning and social significance, producing them as meaningful and functional 'subjects' within social ensembles" (117). Also, the Partition entailed an annulment of people's historical relation to the land which in turn led to the advancement of the body as a transcendental carrier of religious purity/identity. Land had turned out to be a rickety entity onto which material claims could no longer be made,[22] and hence (female) bodies were assigned the critical role of validating historically maintained claims and identities.

Of the multifarious forces involved in conflating bodies with land and borders, the part played by colonial technologies of knowledge in configuring the borders of the Indian subcontinent needs to be emphasised. As the ultimate manoeuvre of political sovereignty, the demarcation of territory during the colonial period was rigorously articulated as a body language. Not surprisingly, even today identity politics in South Asia continues to mirror the colonial enterprise of mapping the subcontinent. Even though land remained the apparent subject of the cadastral surveys carried out by the colonial administration during the nineteenth century, the constant focus on the physiognomy, ornature and diversity of native bodies in the colonial archives betrays the colonial administration's aspiration to map the body of the native along with the landscape.

This mapping of the body is replete with a plethora of political implications. Elaine Scarry, in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World,* discusses the structure of torture and the conversion of real pain into fiction of power. She explores how the actuality of the corporeal pain of violating people "seems to

confer its quality of 'incontestable reality' on that power that has brought it into being. It is, of course, precisely because the reality of that power is so highly contestable, the regime so unstable, that torture is being used" (27). The sufferer reeling under torture feels the "incontestable reality" of pain. If it hurts one physically, it must then be real, rendering the pain functional, politically. As David Campbell suggests, the body thus becomes a fitting "political metaphor" that facilitates "discourses of discipline and containment" (72). Hence it becomes imperative to "map" the body in order to discipline and contain the people of the territory that is concurrently being mapped.

In a similar vein, Judith Butler—foregrounding the link between the mapping of bodies and borders—argues that the body's boundary, as well as the demarcation between the "inside" and the "outside," is "tenuously maintained" by transformation of elements originally part of identity into a "defiling otherness" (133). In the process, body and gender become established as definite and clear-cut categories, being no longer elastic, split and multiply located. However, Butler stresses the performative nature of the body, so that gender becomes "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts;" an identity "achieved not (through) a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition" (140-41). The branding of bodies—like the manoeuvre of ascertaining territoriality—becomes critical in stabilising identities that are imagined as communal or national identities.

Bernard S. Cohn, an anthropologist and a scholar of British colonialism in India, has analysed how our current appreciation of the subcontinent's body politic grew out of Orientalist knowledge projects. His remarkable study of the census in the essay, "The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia," demonstrates that the nineteenth century colonial censuses not only fashioned the state's understanding of native bodies, but also shaped the idiom of anticolonial political resistance. Thus, politicising the body as a material entity became an integral part of both colonial policies of subjugation and anticolonial modes of resistance.[23]

Taking off from Cohn, Arjun Appadurai has of late suggested that we must re-consider our understanding of the census to understand the peculiar kind of impact the practice of enumeration had on the nature of the "body" in the colonial state. He argues that apart from homogenising bodies into discrete identities, the manoeuvre of "enumeration" also engendered the individual body as the fundamental index for determining political identities. As the colonial imagination confusingly found the land and people as inscrutably varied, enumeration highlighted the requirement to index more and more categories of information as "countable" in order to address the confounding sense of colonial diversity (Appadurai 324). For Appadurai, it is the "pedagogical force of number" that reinforces the connection between the British census and the evolution of modern politico-religious identities in the subcontinent. In the idiom of the census, the native body could imply both a computable abstraction (expressed in terms of numbers) and a signifier of identity (characterised diversely by race, caste or religion). But rather than hardening into a monolithic, circumscribed entity, the body "counted" by the practice of enumeration obdurately remained a signifier as fleeting as the caste or the religious identity ascribed to it. Appadurai further suggests that the practice of the census defined the template for the modern modes of communal or religious identity-based politics in the post colonial state. He outlines in detail the legacy of this administrative and historical business from the colonial period and maintains that in one way or the other, almost all modern democratic nation-states are confronted with the menace of identity-oriented political mobilisations. What makes the colonial situation exceptional was the manner in which the coeval processes of enumeration and identity configuration were interarticulated so that any of these ideas became intelligible only in terms of the other. This confusing mess of representation and enumeration was part of the texture of the subcontinent's identity politics in the final decades of the colonial rule. According to Appadurai, the technologies of knowing and the object of knowledge were reciprocally constitutive but it is the effect of enumeration on the understanding of the "body" that enthuses him most. He consistently refers to "bodies" as units of enumeration and as loci where a certain kind of information

is inscribed, reiterating that the business of counting helped in homogenising "the unruly body of the colonial subject (fasting, feasting, hook-swinging, abluting, burning, and bleeding)" (324).

An investigation of the Partition discourse demonstrates the reciprocally configurative acts of demarcating borders and mapping bodies as both turned out to be unsustainable projects at that moment of crisis. The violence of the Partition is so vital because it explicitly demonstrated the collusion of land/territory with nation and the conflation of the female body with land/territory. Like the practice of drawing national borders, the marking of bodies became important in lending life to identities that were imagined as "national" identities— identities critical to the rationalisation of the existence of the state. Independent India, for instance, used the contentious debate on the recovery of abducted women (following the Partition) to discredit the "savage, communal, bigoted Pakistan"—a steady reminder of duplicity, of breaking up the body politic of India.[24]

Answering the national concern about accommodating the proper inhabitants within the sacred space of Indian nation, India eagerly placed an emphasis on religion determining home and nationality—abducted Hindu and Sikh women had to live in India. Women living with men of the other religion had to be brought back, if necessary by force, to their "own" homes—in other words, the place of their religion. Ascribing a religious identity to women was a particularly potent contrivance for India which was asserting its status as a nascent *secular* nation state. Government officials and nationalist institutions disseminated literature asserting the "honour" of reclaimed women by invoking the *Ramayana,* the Hindu religious epic, in which Sita, Lord Rama's consort remained physically "chaste" in spite of her abduction by the demon king, Ravan. (It is another story that Sita is later called upon to prove her purity by undertaking *agni-pariksha*, ordeal by fire, firmly fixing the responsibility of proving one's "honour" on the recovered woman).

Feminist scholars have consistently argued that female bodies are often mapped, or defined with a peculiar ascription of uncomplicated identity, due to their culturally reified materiality

and their institutionally sanctioned appearances. For instance, Susan Bordo, the feminist philosopher insists that "the body we experience and conceptualize is mediated by constructs, associations, images of a cultural nature" (35). Consequently, male concern about the dismemberment of the body politic gets articulated in the disfiguration of women's bodies, through acts such as rapes, organised abductions and the killing of women who have "dishonoured" the community. Ironically, at the same time, women remain visceral signifiers of societal mores and values, guaranteeing the sanctity and survival of the community with the purity of their blood and bodies.

Narratives by Butalia, Verma, Menon and Bhasin are characterised by an attempt to reckon the body as a process rather than an object—a fleeting movement, an engendering of identity that is dictated by the expediencies of the context which the moment of rupture, *batwara*, stands to obliterate. These oral historians consistently intervene by attempting to disengage the relationship between the body and religious identity—a bequest of imperialist enumerative practices that was reinforced as the biopolitics[25] of the region in the epochal moment of crisis commonly called *batwara* (Partition). However, it is evident from the survivor testimonies that bodily notions of "honour" and the body itself—as a "transcendental signifier"—continue to haunt and shape the experience and life-narratives of the Partition's survivors/victims so much so that the elusive "other side of silence" lingers largely unexplored.

Recovering Selves(?)

> *Even if the girl has been forced into marriage by a Muslim, even if she had been violated, I would still take her back with respect. I do not want that a single Hindu or Sikh should take up the attitude that if a girl has been abducted by a Muslim she is no longer acceptable to society.*
>
> Mahatma Gandhi, *CWMG 98* (117-18)

In the preceding pages, the lens had been trained on the sacrificial homicide of one's own kinswomen in the name of

"honour" and the romanticisation of intimate violence in the context of the Partition. However, veiled under this false facade of valour and martyrdom, rests the latent, potentially disconcerting self of the "abducted woman." One oft-iterated feeling that frequently resurfaces in the Partition discourse relating to communal violence is: "Not a girl of ours was taken away, not a single Sikh gave up his (her) religion" (Pandey, *Remembering* 193). Claims such as these reify the idealisation of those that perpetrated and those that underwent Partition's violence. However, this process of romanticisation becomes viable only through the problematic identity of the abducted women.[26]

Scholarship on the Partition alludes to abducted women as those that were "lost" or simply "vanished" during that time of turbulence and violence around 1947. Of course, their life stories and personal histories too became imperceptible in the domain of Partition studies. As Kamla Patel recalls: "Parents would say that they had left their daughters with one or other of their aunts—they could not openly say that their daughters have been abducted" (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders* 77). In *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia narrates her similar experience of interaction with two siblings from Rawalpindi who survived the holocaust of Partition but had lost two sisters in the bargain:

> But they'd made no direct mention of their sisters, two of them, who had 'disappeared' at the time. Everyone around them, *knew* this story, they'd been part of the same community, the same village, and they spoke about it in whispers. 'Speak to them,' a neighbour told me, 'two of their sisters disappeared at the time.' The way he said it, it sounded as if this were something to be ashamed of. So I didn't ask. But it was when I went back over our conversation that it struck me that that awkward silence, that hesitant phrase was perhaps where the disappearance of the two sisters lay hidden: in a small crack, covered by silence. (*Other* 101)

Veena Das, in her *Life and Words,* presents a similar story about a woman who was "lost" during Partition. No one in the family really knew whether this woman had been killed during

the violence of the Partition, or had been abducted. The family members, when inquired, just referred to her in one voice as "dead." Das writes:

> In all the narratives about Lahore that I heard in this family, there was a blanking out of this period. For instance, I have seen photographs of the whole family in which, this woman—now dead appears in various happy contexts. These occasions usually evoked narratives of the event portrayed in the photograph, but no reference was ever made to her present absence. A question such as 'What happened to her?' was met with a cursory answer—"She died in that time." (64)

In what follows in the next few pages, it is argued that such "deaths," "losses" and "disappearances" are engendered by the narratives of nation that the contingencies of the Partition discourse give rise to. It is contended that a gendered as well as moral hierarchy of relations, mimetically extended from family to nation, coalesces with rigid religious interpretations to negotiate concerns—in the wake of the Partition—about socio-political change and continuity through the control of women. Joan Scott, in her work, *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988) *posits* that gender analysis might problematise customary views of historic periods through their re-evaluation (42). Significantly, she argues that "changes in gender relations can be set off by views of the needs of the state" (46). In the context of post-Partition India, what were these statist needs and how did the establishment of gender hierarchies/boundaries address these exigencies? How did the women understand what it meant to be identified as Indian/Pakistani during and after the Partition? How were the different categories of belonging constructed? These are some of the critical concerns addressed here, apart from a problematisation of the memoirs on the recovery of abducted women authored by the "social workers" like Kamla Patel and Anis Kidwai. It is argued that the space of "recovery" must be viewed as a fleeting and whimsical space of identity formation, where often confusing and even contradictory identities contest one another, shattering any fixed notion of a fictitious unified self for the women in Partition.

While intra-familial violence against women becomes idealised as a sacrifice undertaken on behalf of the nation, the persona of the abducted woman comes to represent a letdown—a debacle not only of the individual (male) political subjects but also of the nation itself to preserve its purity, integrity and morality. Subsequently, while the sacrificed woman could be extolled as martyrs and exalted on a national stage, the abducted woman is rendered invisible in the vaunted discourses of the nation and its progress. These acutely discriminatory and differential modes in which the figure of the woman is perceived reiterate the secondary and therefore expendable position of women in the Partition. By examining the socio-spatial tropes like family (home) and community (religion) that embody the Indian nationalising discourse, we can analyse how the figure of the woman is critical to the national narrative yet ironically remains marginal, sans any agency. Taken up for analysis are specific cases of abduction and the governmental responses to them that problematised the legitimacy of the Indian nation state in its very days of infancy as they appear in memoirs by female "social workers" like Kamla Patel (*Torn from the Roots*) and Anis Kidwai (*In Freedom's Shade*) who were very actively associated with the recovery operation carried out by the Indian state in the wake of Partition. Furthermore, it is posited that their memory narratives, despite their professed feminine sensibilities, often serve to reproduce the rampant contemporaneous nationalist discourse that smacks of gender subjugation.

In *Remembering Partition,* Gyanendra Pandey describes Partition as the moment which made possible the project of "nationalising the nation" (17). Elaborating on the purpose of his project, he claims:

> I seek to recover the moment of Partition and Independence in India as a moment of nationalisation, and a moment of contest regarding the different conditions of nationalisation. On what terms would Muslims, Dalits ('Untouchables') and women be granted the rights of citizenship? Could they become citizens at all? I wish to try and recover the history of Partition, therefore, as a renegotiation and a re-ordering, as a resolution of old oppositions and the construction of new ones. (17)

With respect to the question of gender, feminist scholars like Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia and Veena Das posit that this process of nationalisation made women political objects of a secondary status—at the most—or even more damagingly, women were forbidden from entering the discourse.[27]

The foremost argument for considering the Partition as a nationalising moment is that it led to the creation of two nation states. Thus, one of the most overarching subjectivities to materialise out of the Partition was that of the (national) citizen subject. Subsequently, it was interpreted that the Indian nation-state was made up of the "natural nation"—Hindus and all other non-Muslims—and the "non-natural," those Muslims, and only those, who pledged to "defend it against anybody to the last drop of their blood" (Pandey 160-62).

The concern with national citizenship, however, was far more composite as it was implicated within a problematic discourse of gender. Although, apparently, communally articulated, the idea of citizenship was fundamentally gendered. And, as feminist scholars like Veena Das and Urvashi Butalia have pointed out, critical to the constitution of citizenship was the idea of "national purity," a concept that had to be immediately realised through the establishment of the heteronormative patriarchal family as the elementary unit of nationhood. Eventually, in the immediate post-independence period all eyes zoomed in on the control of female sexuality (Das, *Life* 35).

It may be argued that the major hegemonic enterprise of the modern world is the project of the "nation state" and that the post-Partition recovery operation provides a paradigm to consider the ways in which the hegemonic projects of the state endorse, engender and call for gendered violence.[28] Eric Hobsbawm, in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, foregrounds the criticality of the idea of "nation" to modern political imagination. To Hobsbawm, "The last two centuries of the human history of planet earth are incomprehensible without some understanding of the term 'nation' and the vocabulary derived from it" (1). Still, as a potent ideological configuration of such immense ramifications, the "nation" has remained a particularly inscrutable

onto-epistemological conundrum, a political entity notoriously hard to define. In sociological/anthropological parlance, the nation has often been defined as a complex cultural artefact. Within the larger framework of culture, it is defined alternatively as a potpourri of peoples based on a camaraderie of language, ethnicity, race, religion, region or geopolitical and economic interests. As Homi K. Bhabha argues in *Nation and Narration,* "In each of these 'foundational fictions' (i.e. race, religion, etc.), the origins of national traditions turn out to be as much of acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation"(4). The nation emerges as a politically contested space through such acts of differential affiliation.

Crucially, the moment of the 1947 Partition engendered female bodies as the site of political struggle and contention and added the decisive aspects of gendered displacement and disavowal to the "foundational fictions" (Bhabha 4) of the (Indian) nation. The pioneering work done in this regard by Veena Das, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, makes it amply clear that Partition violence can no longer be seen as merely violence against women but as gendered violence. Their work, especially with regard to the recovery operation launched by the Indian and Pakistani states to reclaim and restore the women abducted during Partition chaos to their "original" families and communities, has brought the aspect of gendered violence sponsored by the state agencies to the limelight. Subsequently, Partition has come to be recognised as "a gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession and widespread communal violence" (Menon and Bhasin, *Borders* 9). Veena Das astutely observes:

> The woman's body became a sign through which men communicated with each other. The lives of women were framed by the notion that they were to bear permanent witness to the violence of Partition. Thus, the political programme of creating the two nations of India and Pakistan was inscribed upon the bodies of women. (56)

Of all the diverse modes of gendered violence inscribed upon female bodies during the Partition, the problem of abduction

was the thorniest one. The social appropriation of sexuality was principally established through the articulation of the identity of the abducted woman. Immediately after Partition, the state agencies had been flooded with complaints from the aggrieved refugees about the missing/lost women of their families, seeking their recovery by the government.[29] Alarmed by the disturbing extent of these abductions, an agreement known as the Inter-Dominion Treaty was signed by the Indian and Pakistani governments on December 6th 1947, to recover and return any abducted women and children found on the "other" side of the newly demarcated international border. As Anis Kidwai, a social worker and the author of the Partition memoir, *In Freedom's Shade* puts it:

> Since the very beginning of my work in the camps, I'd heard the sanctuary seekers at Purana Qila and Humayun's Tomb weeping over their missing daughters and wives, either snatched from them or separated in their flight from violence. Although I maintained a meticulous record of these names, barring one or two, I hadn't been able to recover any of them. Weeks passed and I made acquaintance with the police. I gave the officers the names of the abducted women I had recorded in my notebook. More girls were recovered but our successes were insignificant in the light of the enormity of the problem. Mridula Sarabhai was one of the few alive to the urgency of this problem. . . . Mridula wanted to immediately implement a programme for the rescue of abducted women in Pakistan and India. . . . Meeting officials in Lahore, Karachi and other places, she managed to quickly bring the two countries to an agreement that this brutality must not be condoned in any circumstances and that all abducted women must be restored to their relatives. . . . Very quickly, the Central Recovery Operation was constituted under the leadership of Lady Mountbatten and both governments began to rescue abducted women. (141-45)

Later, on December 19, 1947, the Indian Constituent Assembly, after much heated argument, passed a more comprehensive Bill on the issue, clearly defining an abducted

person. It is obvious that the Bill was to be used as an excellent ruse for restoring Hindu and Sikh women to the Hindu and Sikh communities, and the Muslim women to the Muslim community. Despite their public display of mutual antagonism, the two tetchy neighbour states shared no confusion about the recovery programme and often collaborated with each other in this regard. Even the self-declared secular state like India would define the national identity of women on the basis of their religious identity. It is interesting to note that missing/lost men did not come under the compass of the Bill under question. This state-sponsored programme, later known as the Central Recovery Operation, was ostensibly "humanitarian" in nature (as evident in the tone of Kidwai), aimed at "condoning" the wrongs, or the violence and trauma, wreaked upon naive women.

However, hidden behind the veil of humanitarianism, the recovery programme had a far greater political implication. First, the nascent Indian state munched on this opportunity to position itself as the more "sophisticated" and "secular" state in comparison to Pakistan. The ongoing debates in the Indian Constituent Assembly also furnished Indian political leaders with the prospect of using the question of recovery of abducted women to enunciate on something rather curious: shameless and the demonic countenance of Pakistan.[30] At the bottom of this demonisation logic lies a deep sense of perfidy that the creation of Pakistan evoked in many of the Indian nationalist elites who deemed themselves, and India, as secular, and forbearing entities.

Many speakers in the Assembly condemned what they reckoned as Pakistan's natural insolence in adhering to the conditions of the mutual agreement. Such insolence, they argued, was totally inappropriate for a modern national government. It was, rather, construed as a reflection of a couple of issues: the typical loutish demeanour of Pakistan, a "communal" state peopled by those who are "communal" by nature, and the much refined, humane and lenient approach of the Indian state (Butalia, *Other* 140). And even while the differentiation was being made between India and Pakistan, it flawlessly facilitated the reification of communal borders within India. The Muslim

(male) subject got congealed as the perpetual "intimate enemy," for whom the sole possible "password to citizenship" (Butalia, *Other* 162) became the oath of steadfast commitment to the Indian nation-state.

Menon and Bhasin further argue that elementary to the articulation of difference between India and Pakistan was the branding of the Pakistani nation as the "abductor country" as against India's "parent-protector" role, "safe-guarding not only her women, but by extension, the inviolate family, the sanctity of community and ultimately, the integrity of the whole nation" (*Borders* 107). In fact, the unflinching commitment shown by the Indian state in implementing the recovery—especially in the context of supposed coldness or nonconformity to the agreement from the Pakistani side—was expressed by some Indian leaders in a conspicuously gendered idiom that stirred up religious ideas of "honour" and "purity." For instance, Urvashi Butalia reproduces the words of one of the members of the Constituent Assembly who drew a comparison between recovery operation and the Ramayana narrative: "We can forget all the properties, we can forget every other thing, but this cannot be forgotten. . . . As descendants of Ram, we have to bring back every Sita that is alive" (qtd. in Butalia, *The Other* 141).

Veena Das observes that this sort of political rhetoric was intended at not only foregrounding the ideals of "honour" and "purity" with regard to community and nation, but also "to attribute all kinds of 'passions' such as panic, incredulity or barbarity to the populace," in order to attribute a sense of inevitability and moral respectability to the recovery programme. In this process, the state also emerges as the definitive "guarantor of order" (Das, *Life* 19). Undeniably, this moment of apparent emergency and chaos was dexterously manipulated by the Indian state in its attempt to "nationalise" the nation, a task that was realised through the domain of the heteropatriarchal family. The nuclear family, for the Indian state, became the crucial location for the articulation of gendered notions of "public" and "private" that were so critical to the production of the nation. Subsequently, the persona of the

abducted woman became integral to the configuration of family (home) and by mimetic extension, the nation state.

Significantly, by configuring the image of the abducted (Hindu/Sikh) woman as reeling under the ruthless tyranny of "wicked" (Muslim) men, the state could realise two important objectives—it could present abducted women as helpless victims to be rescued by the "benevolent" (Hindu, male) state and it could also call upon all Hindu (gentle) men to remain morally upright and responsible citizens by limiting their own immodest designs and forging family ties with the "right" woman. A social cum sexual contract was thus forged between the state and its male citizenry who were deemed as the chiefs of families and assigned with the job of safeguarding their women against violence from the "other." More significantly, this social cum sexual contract also guaranteed the "purity/integrity" of the nation. As Veena Das observes:

> The involvement of the state in the process of recovery of women shows that if men were to become ineffective in the control they exercise as heads of family, thus producing children from "wrong" sexual unions, then the state itself would become deprived of life. The figure of the abducted woman acquires salience because it posits the origin of the state not in the mythic state of nature, but in the "correct" relations between communities. (*Life* 33)

Interestingly, the male head of the heteropatriarchal family grows in public stature through his status as a state agent assigned with the consolidation of "purity." However, the agency of the woman remains "public," only to the extent that she motivates man "to renounce his attachment to her in order to give life to the political community" (Das, *Critical* 35).

In her incisive analysis of the situation, Butalia explains the reasons that prompted the patriarchal state to take up the recovery and restoration project. The loss of women to the members of the other community meant the loss of "honour" for the men of a particular community and their inability to enact their role as protectors of women amounted to their loss of identity/virility —"emasculation." As the men could not take up this Herculean

task themselves, they called upon the state—the new omnipotent patriarch, the guarantor of the newly imagined national family—to exercise its agency on their behalf.

> For the post-colonial, deeply contested, fragile and vulnerable state, this was an exercise in restoring its legitimacy. Indeed, I would even suggest that the legitimacy of the state at this time depended very much on this venture of the recovery of what had been lost: prestige, women and perhaps property. Thus the state acted on its own behalf and on behalf of those communities who appealed to it and invested it with agency on their behalf. The situation was an extraordinary one: in a sense male authority within the family had collapsed, families had been unable to protect their own women, so they appealed to the state. And for the self legitimation of the state and the community, the question of gender became crucial. (*Community* WS 20)

Veena Das, in a similar vein, further elaborates that restoring women to their biological families was, "a matter of national honour" (*Critical* 66). However, the "honour" indicated here corresponded to the sexual purity/worth of the women each masculine state desperately tried to redomesticate. Das proposes that "this interest in women was not premised upon their definition as citizens, but as sexual and reproductive beings" (68). Thus, the statist efforts at recovery did little to mitigate the sexual degradation that the women had undergone during abduction. On the contrary, it cemented their position as mere sexual beings, wanton objects of the discourse. Further, it deprived them of any individual choice/identity by making their recovery a matter of legislative procedure.

However, though the state was acting on behalf of its men, it had to involve the agency of a number of women (social workers) for the successful execution of its recovery mission. Of course, the chief responsibility in the recovery operation fell on the shoulders of the police, assisted by the military, whenever needed. But, the social workers were also expected to actively participate in the operation—they were expected to look after the camp

arrangements, to gather information regarding the abducted women and to assist in their recovery by communicating the information to the local police. Mridula Sarabhai, appointed as the Chief All India Officer, was given the overall responsibility of the operation.[31] It was to be carried out under the aegis of the women's section of the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, headed by Rameshwari Nehru. Assisting Mridula Sarabhai in the mission were a number of female social workers like Kamla Patel, Begum Anis Kidwai, Premawati Thapar and Damyanti Sahgal.

In entrusting the women social workers with the subtle task of recovering abducted women and rehabilitating them, the nascent state subtly accomplished a number of objectives. For one thing, it could camouflage its male bias by engaging women themselves in the process of recovery. Also, it was believed that women could easily step into a terrain not easily accessible to the police and the military, and then better "convince" the reluctant abductees about their "need" to return to the national-patriarchal family. It must be noted here that all women associated with the recovery project did not share the same opinion about its *modus operandi*. Mridula Sarabhai firmly believed that no woman could be happy with her abductor and strongly favoured coercive recoveries but Rameshwari Nehru stood against forceful recoveries. The latter believed that woman's will was not taken into consideration and she was "once again reduced to goods and chattel status without having the right to decide her own future or mould her own life" (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders* 102).

Thus the most significant and problematic issue the recovery operation engendered was the question of women's agency, their status as self-actualising, independent citizen-subjects of the modern nation state. Abducted women were deprived of their right to choose their destiny, because the Recovery Act did not permit women to remain with their new families in the "other" country. Regarding the recovery work done by the state in collusion with the so-called social workers of the time, Veena Das argues: "An alliance was forged between social work as a profession and the state as *parens patriae*, making official kinship norms of purity and honour much more rigid by transforming

them into the law of the state" (*Critical* 67). In other words, abducted women became "the flotsam and jetsam of history" (Menon, *No Woman's* 3) as they were no longer afforded the guarantee of citizenship; the state dictated their lives.

It must also be taken into account that in many cases women did not—apparently—want to return to their original, native families. As Anis Kidwai puts it in her memoir:

> As recovery work went on, the greatest difficulty was not to facilitate acceptance. Instead we found that most abducted girls didn't want to return. Muslims seethed at these refusals, young men flushing at this ignominious disgrace of their community honour. Fathers would rant, 'shame on such daughters! This is why a father prays so hard for a son. At least the son will be a support to his father in his lifetime, and after his father's death, guard the family's honour!' (149)

However, the reluctant women were forced to return to their "natural" countries, in spite of their different individual choices. While male citizen-subjects of the newly unfurled national patriarchy could choose which country to live in, abducted women were not given that alternative. In fact, they were dispossessed of many rights of citizenship. Their natal countries believed they knew what was right for women, and then forced them to acquiesce to the states' resolve. Butalia argues, ". . . the woman as a *person* did not count, her wishes were of little consequences, she had no right to resist, defy nor even to appeal, for the Act denied even that basic freedom" (*The Other* 151). They were deprived of even *habeus corpus*. (Das, *Critical* 71)

There were numerous reasons why women wanted to remain with their new families. For example, their abductors often lied to women about the conditions in the other country. After her repatriation to India, an abducted woman, Shrimati Laj Wanti, testified:

> During the period of a month, that I stayed in the house of Abdul Ghani, the members of his family and he always said that there was no food in India, the relations of all

> Hindu women had been killed and no one was prepared to have them back into their homes and that even Mahatma Gandhi said that there was no food in India and therefore, no women or men who had been kept in Pakistan should return to India. We were also told that all the girls who would go to India would be made to stand in line and shot dead by the Indian Military because they were not fit for being returned to Hindu society. (qtd. in Talib 261-62)

Originally, Laj Wanti wanted to keep staying with her abductor family in Pakistan. She assumed that her biological family no longer existed and that she might starve to death in an impoverished India. Also, her abductor had maintained that the army would pounce upon her as soon as she entered the Indian territory. Kamla Patel confirms that many women were indeed scared of returning to India:

> There was a great deal of propaganda to ensure that the Hindu women who had remained behind in Pakistan, were not sent back to India. They were told that their relations were all dead. Even if they happened to be alive, they would not be accepted by their families; that there was not enough food in India and a bucket of water cost five rupees. They were being sent to India only to be handed over to the Sikhs in the army. It was but natural that after hearing such propaganda, women were scared and not ready to return to India. (139)

The propaganda was very successful. It was agonising to believe that their families would refuse them and Hindu as well as Sikh women did not want to go home because they believed they were "polluted" (Patel 173; Kidwai 149-50). Therefore, they feared their families would not accept them. Kidwai writes:

> They wondered how they could, tainted by infidelity and scandal as they were, ever face men as proud as them? Would their husbands tolerate such treachery? Would their gazes invest in them the same respect as before? These feelings would shackle their feet and they would say, 'What was written as our fate has come to pass. Leave us where we are to live out the rest of our days.' (150)

Patel recalls that in order to address this fear, Mahatma Gandhi spoke of the situation after his evening prayers on December 26, 1947:

> Thousands of Hindu and Sikh girls have been abducted by the Muslims, and Muslim women have been abducted by Hindus and Sikhs. I have received a long list of Muslim women who have been abducted from Kashmir and the State of Patiala. If these women are recovered, there should be no problem in their being accepted by their families. However, it is very doubtful if our Hindus and Sikhs will accept their abducted women and treat them with respect. They may have been forced to marry someone, and may have even converted to Islam, despite this, in my opinion they should not be regarded as Muslims at all. Society must gracefully accept them. And if people are not prepared to accept them back into their families, then why take all this trouble to recover them at all? (qtd. in Patel xix-xx)

Gandhi claimed abducted women were not polluted, after all. Of course, they were sexually violated and they were forced to marry their abductors and violators. They mothered children with their abductors and they were even forced to forsake their religion and convert. However, these women did not willingly choose to be abducted by malevolent men. Rather than condemning them, Gandhi called upon Hindus and Sikhs to show compassion towards the abducted women. He argued these women were not polluted, because they were at heart, pure. As such, their families should be glad their daughters returned home.[32]

In several other cases, women were happy with their new situation. They did not want to return, because they liked their new life. Kidwai describes the attitude of such women:

> There were also some girls whose eyes had opened in homes of great poverty, who had never eaten a full meal or clothed their bodies in anything but rags. But now, they were in the keep of such generous men, who brought them silken shalwars and duppattas, introduced them to the delectable taste of hot coffee and cold ice-cream, took

> them to see two shows at the movie in a single day. Why would such a girl want to leave such fine men to return to . . . a life of rags and scraps to conceal her burgeoning youth . . . she wanted to be happy in the present that was hers. (150)

In cases of abducted women like the one described above, social workers used force to "recover" these women. Social worker Krishna Thapar recounts:

> Sometime in 1950 I was required to escort 21 Muslim women who had been recovered to Pakistan. They did not want to return, but the Tribunal had decided that they had to go. They were young, beautiful girls and had been taken by Sardars. They were determined to stay back because they were very happy. We had to use real force to compel them to go back. I was very unhappy with this duty—they had already suffered so much and now we were forcing them to return when they just didn't want to go. (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders* 91)

Thapar, obviously, was not in favour of the idea of forcing women to leave a comfortable situation.

One of the twenty-one women was so steadfast to stay with her new husband that she brazenly confronted Mridula Sarabhai, the moving spirit behind the recovery operation:

> You say that abduction is immoral and so you are trying to save us. Well, now it is too late. One marries only once—willingly or by force. We are now married—what are you going to do with us? Ask us to get married again? Is that not immoral? What happened to our relatives when we were abducted? Where were they? . . . You may do your worst if you insist, but remember, you can kill us, but we will not go. (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders* 97)

This woman's contesting voice brings us to the question of the "immorality" of abduction vis-à-vis the "morality" of the nation. In his article, "What Is a Nation?," Ernest Renan defines nation as:

> A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, (which) creates a kind of moral conscience. . . . So long as this moral consciousness gives proof of its strength by the sacrifices which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of community, it is legitimate and has the right to exist. (11)

This notion of morality as the constitutive "essence" of nation becomes explicit in the legislative discourse on abducted women and children. In this regard, Veena Das has analysed the nature of parliamentary debates on the topic of recovery and repatriation. She analyses the contributions to these debates made by legislators like Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava and Sri N. Gopalaswamy Iyyengar and concludes that their statements betray an alliance between the mutually constitutive categories of moral order and individual "honour" (Das, *Life* 26-27). In the course of these legislative debates, a culturally configured religious-national masculine subject—i.e. the Hindu (male) subject—emerges as the sole ethical agent entitled for membership in the Indian nation; the Muslim "other" is represented as "immoral" and "demonic" and hence not to be accommodated within the Indian nation. It is against such a background of binary othering that the persona of the abducted woman comes to life in post-Partition nationalist discourses. However, these women emerge only as expendable objects of the discourse through whose visceral tangibility, notions of morality and hence the prospect of maintaining the "nation" can be articulated.

In her conversation with Mridula Sarabhai, the recalcitrant woman quoted above challenges the nation's morality/state's law itself, making her participation within the newly defined nation untenable. She—pertinently—asks why pushing a woman into deserting her husband was not "immoral" and disputes her family's right to decide on her future, as it had primarily failed in preventing her abduction. She asks where the state had been when she needed its safeguard the most. In her final words—"you can kill us but we will not go"—she deems death more preferable to restoration to the national (moral) order.

Many people agreed with the social worker, Krishna Thapar that coercing women to return to their biological family was wrong. Another social worker, Anis Kidwai remembers in her memoir:

> Many readers would cry out in disgust, 'Is there no end to the cruelty you women committed?' In 1949 this question was thrown at us everywhere, there was much propaganda against us. People asked, 'Why is all this being done to all these girls? They have found their place in society, why uproot them? Making them homeless again is madness! To make a woman who is now a respected wife and mother of children return to her parents is not a favour but a sin!
>
> After this propaganda, came the accusations—by the newspapers and the public—that recovered girls and women were being bundled off to their relatives without their consent, and despite the fact that they had liked their new milieu. They charged that families of the general public were being shattered just to please women activists in India and Pakistan. (289-90)

These public critics also wanted women to have an exercisable choice, an independent agency. After being victimised, they argued, the state was torturing these women. Sure, some women may wish to return home. However, women should choose to return to their families on their own—state simply had no right to compel women to abandon contented circumstances. Callously, women were not given the right to choose their future as per the new legislation which categorised them as "abducted persons;" therefore, they would be returned to their "own" home/country, by hook or by crook, if necessary. The individual stories of abducted women thus returned and resettled reveal insidious myths within contemporary conceptualisations of "home" and "return." They force us to question the plethora of assumptions which underlie both governmental treatment of, as well as the social work responses to the abduction of women.

Many such stories of "re-abduction" of the women by the state were popular in those times.[33] Kidwai, for instance, narrates the story of Akhtari Bi, a beautiful girl, a victim of violence, who

was rescued by an elderly villager. He took great care of her, tended to her wounds, nursed her back to health and later got her married to his own son. They "became partners for life. Their love grew more profound by the day, until seven months later such was their devotion that they could not bear to spend even a moment apart" (288). But their relationship was severed by the intervention of the state. Akhtari Bi was arrested/recovered and taken to the camp set up for abducted women. But unlike most other women, she, apparently, went on a near hunger strike in the camp. When coaxed to explain why she was not eating anything, the girl produced a ball of ghee her weeping husband had given her at the time of their forced parting. He had told her: "When you get hungry eat this. And never forget me" (288). Kidwai states that recovering this girl created considerable mental anguish for her. "I was in a terrible state. . . . But it was my fate to trample it, efface it, to wrench apart two love filled hearts. My sense of duty amputated my hands and feet and good sense and thoughts of the hereafter rendered me powerless to act otherwise" (288).

Patel narrates a slightly different but equally poignant story in her memoir, that of Jithu and Ismat (renamed Neena). Their inter-religious love relationship had begun much before the Partition when their families used to spend their vacation together in the same hotel in Kashmir valley. However, after the Partition, Ismat realised that the two families would not be spending their vacation together in Kashmir anymore (trouble had already begun in Kashmir). Weighed down by her feelings for Jithu, she decided to cross over from Rawalpindi to Amritsar where she knew Jithu lived. She went to the refugee camp for Hindus and reported that she had been separated from her family which now lived in Amritsar. This way, Ismat reached India and met Jithu. His family acceded to their wedding proposal and the two were married in the Golden Temple according to Sikh rites.

They were "living happily ever after" their wedding when fate intervened in the form of the nation-state. Ismat's influential Pathan family demanded her restoration to their family, claiming her to be an "abductee." It was amply clear that it was not justifiable to call Ismat's case one of abduction. Here was a girl, who voluntarily fought against all odds to be united

with her yearned one. She even declined the offer to meet her parents at the Wagah border in the presence of Mridula Sarabahi herself. However, for the Pakistani government, this became a special case of salvaging its prestige and they were reluctant to sign an agreement with India on recovering women in the north western region as long as this issue remained unsettled. Put under considerable pressure by the two governments, the recovery agents were forced to recover Ismat by hook or by crook. Meanwhile, anticipating a forceful recovery, Ismat and Jithu had moved to Calcutta. At this point of time, the social workers involved in the operation spread the rumour that Ismat's case had been closed and Pakistan had reached an agreement in this matter. Patel recalls: "Our aim was that Jithu and Ismat should hear of this rumour and believe it. We did succeed in this and both of them returned to Amritsar" (42).

Once in Amritsar, the girl was "recovered" and sent back to Pakistan on the condition that after living with her parents for a week, she could decide on her future—whether to keep staying back in Pakistan or return to India. With great difficulty, Ismat agreed, on condition that Jithu would accompany her. However, when Patel and other women met her after the stipulated one week's time, she reacted strangely: "Abba, that lady with short hair, she is the one who prevented me from coming here. Time and again, I requested her to send me here, but she always avoided my request" (qtd. in Patel 45). And on hearing the name of Jithu, she lost her temper: "I do not want to see the face of that son of a Kafir. If I had my way, I would cut him into pieces, and give the pieces to a dog" (qtd. in Patel 45). It is not difficult to see why the poor girl reacted so harshly in the presence of her father and other family members. Could she survive had she reacted otherwise? Moreover, did she really have a choice, when the state had already made its choice on behalf of her, in the form of the recovery Act?

The involvement of women social workers as agents of the state in the recovery programme raises many pertinent questions about their agency. On whose behalf did they exercise their agency? How did they engage themselves with the metanarratives of community, religion and nation, both simultaneously resisting

and sustaining the hegemonic projects of the state? The sense of fragmented agency of these agent women is nowhere more perceptible than in the memoirs left behind by them, as illustrated by the two stories related above. The attempt here is to undertake a close reading of memoirs by "social workers," looking for specific discursive shifts, revealing their ambivalent responses to the "reality" of women's experiences during the course of the recovery project. The intention is not to discount the valiant service offered by the female social workers like Patel and Kidwai who even risked their own lives at a time of huge human crisis; the contention being that these women, knowingly or unknowingly, became the guilty partners in a tactical collusion the state forged with the category of social workers and their narratives serve to reproduce the same gendered discourse of female subjugation that was at work during the time of the Partition. In fact, Patel herself has narrated several instances in which she acted on behalf of the women rather than in the interest of the state and the chapter of her book devoted to the sad plight of undesirable children born out of forced sexual unions is particularly poignant, fully revealing her feminine sensibility (144-48). Similarly, Kidwai states in her memoir: "On our parts too, there were times when the interests of the government were at odds with that of the public and we felt duty-bound to take the people's side. So, we often set out to do one thing, but ended up doing another" (264).

However, though these agent-women themselves are aware of the contradictions that plagued the recovery project and at times freely express their ensuing mental turmoil, they seem unperturbed by any such considerations in the disposal of their "duty" as agents of the state. Here, they seem to act as the modern citizens of the state with clearly defined civil and domestic concerns. Kamla Patel, for example, exhibits a split identity as she "speaks sometimes as an 'Indian,' other times as a 'Hindu,' sometimes as a 'social worker,' as a 'nationalist' and sometimes, by her own definition, as a 'woman,' this last category subsuming, often, all others" (Butalia, *Community* WS-20). At one point in her narrative, she says: "But in all these formalities no importance was given to the wishes of those women while taking decisions about them, and we, the so-called social workers

were sending women and children from one country to another as if they were some inanimate objects. We also took satisfaction in doing some noble work" (Patel 72). It is interesting to see that she is able to mention in the same breath, both her displeasure with the negation of the rights of the abducted women and her satisfaction in "abducting" them again as part of a "noble work." The translator of her memoir, Uma Randeria remarks: "In an introspective mood Kamlaben asked whether what she did was all that 'noble.' At times she felt that the women rescued from both sides of the borders were looked upon as 'objects' rather than human beings" (ix).

Kamla Patel's characteristic ambivalence comes to the fore as she describes the difficulties the social workers faced in running the camps. After listing out a number of practical hitches, she adds: "And above all they had to be vigilant enough to prevent some rebellious rescued women from polluting the atmosphere of the camp" (xxii). Obviously, the reference is to the abusive animosity exhibited by some women "rescued" by the state against their wish. By describing the rebellious women as "polluted," she fails to see through the categories of the "pure woman" and the "polluted woman" created by the state, falling prey to the official line that transgressive marriages and conversions are illegal. It is another thing that in the same memoir she relates the story of a woman called Sudarshan whom she gives the choice to stay back with her "other," Muslim husband if she so wishes (49-54). A similar contempt is voiced by Kidwai when she narrates the case of modern, educated women, who—as part of their ideology—had married men of other religions and resisted their recovery on that ground. For Kidwai, these women are "sophisticated sinners" (150) as they defy the feminine moral code of sexual conduct dictated by the state.

Patel's blind commitment to the Indian nation state comes through in her description of two incidents involving the Indian personnel. She whole-heartedly praises the valour and courage exhibited by the Indian army in fighting a set of marauders who ambushed a refugee train carrying passengers from Rawalpindi to Amritsar. She writes: "The Indian army is well known for its bravery; it had been trained under the strict discipline by the

British, and had a sense of pride in the newly gained independence of the country. In the gun-battle that followed, 58 of the 60 military men were killed, and the other two were seriously injured. It was only after this that the crowd could lay their hands on the passengers" (62). However, such a keen eye for description is evidently missing while she mentions the rape of recovered Hindu girls by Indian personnel. Her narrative attempts to hush up the story, just like the other women involved in the recovery project did immediately after this unfortunate event had taken place: "We were aghast when they told us that while bringing them to Lahore, Indian men had raped them. We tried our best to prevent the news from reaching the Pakistani authorities" (19). This tendency to silence the unpalatable experiences—especially those of women—is characteristic of traumatic events like the Partition. Their silence, socially structured and enforced by the (patriarchal) family and the nation state, constitutes a metaphor for their loss of social agency. Veena Das astutely observes in her article, "Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain": "When asking women to narrate their experiences of the Partition I found a zone of silence around the event" (84). Metaphoric or oblique language was often used to describe the violence in general, but particular/personal experiences of abduction, sexual violation or forced abortion of pregnancy were never articulated. Das further comments:

> This code of silence protected women who had been brought back to their families or who had been married by stretching norms of kinship and affinity since the violation of their bodies was never made public. Rather than bearing witness to the disorder that they had been subjected to, the metaphor that they used was of a woman drinking the poison and keeping it within her. (84-85)

It is perhaps the collusion with the above discourse of silence which makes Patel's and Kidwai's narratives avoid a number of dark aspects of the recovery project. For instance, though Patel repeatedly mentions the camp for women at Jullundar which offered a three month-long "medical treatment" for the returned women, nowhere in her memoir does she disclose that the

camp was in fact a centre of illegal abortions. Urvashi Butalia corroborates this in a personal interview with another social worker, Damyanti Sahgal (*Community* WS 19). In a later interview with Menon and Bhasin, however, Patel herself acknowledges the complicity of the state in terminating "undesirable" pregnancies resulting from "illegal" unions through the "medical check-up" done at the Jullundar camp (Menon and Bhasin, *Borders* 83). Further, Jogendra Singh, a lady camp commandant at Karnal and Kurukshetra camps confides in an interview:

> A number of abortions were done in the camp also, which we kept a closely guarded secret so that no one could find out about them and they wouldn't have difficulties in the future. Abortion was illegal at that time, but we had a doctor. The circumstances were such that we had to do this, otherwise the women might have committed suicide. All this was done behind the doors. (qtd. in Menon, *No Woman's Land* 190-91)

As Veena Das describes in *Critical Events*, the big political question of the day was: "What happens when women are impregnated by 'other' men and give birth to the 'wrong' children?" (56). The "in-between" status of such "illegitimate" children born out of mixed parentage could seriously challenge the legitimacy and patriarchal authority of a state which defined its citizens in terms of their religious identity and such children had to be done away with! They simply could not be accepted into the male-centred imaginary of the national family that thrived on female "honour." Hence, women who bore children in Pakistan were persuaded to leave them behind in the custody of their fathers, as "war babies." And in case any woman wanted to bring her children to India, they would be separated at the Jullundar camp and the child sent away to rehabilitation centres to be brought up under the guardianship of the government of India.

Patel poignantly points out:

> On reaching the camp at Jullundar, the woman was bound to come across some acquaintances, and would be embarrassed to have a child with her although she was

> unmarried. The poor unmarried mother did not like to be separated from her first child, but at the same time, she could not tell her relations that she had a child. When the time came for this unwed mother to go away with his father or brother, she could not hold the child to her breast and cry to her heart's content, as later she would not even be able to cry. (147)

The recovery operation was at one level an attempt to recover the lost prestige of the masculine state and it would not be complete without making the polluted women respectable once again by ensconcing them again at the centre of the patriarchal family fold—in well-defined gender roles as good daughters, wives and mothers. Intentional interventional termination of pregnancy in the guise of a medical check-up was one way of making these women "respectable"—a kind of a purification rite instituted by the newly constituted nation to ensure the purity of its women. This, in a way, amounted to subjecting them once again to the limitations imposed on their sexuality and individuality. As Anne McClintock posits in her famous essay, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family," woman's relation to the nation is always "indirect, mediated through her social relation to men, her national identity lying in her unpaid services and sacrifices through husband and family to the *volk*" (69).

In this scenario, it is hardly surprising that many of the social workers involved in the recovery operation wanted to see the recovered women get married and "live happily ever after," in the cosy security offered by the (national) patriarchal family. Kamla Patel, Anis Kidwai, Damyanti Sahgal and Krishna Thapar—all believed that a successful marriage was the ultimate goal for all recovered women and took great pains to arrange alliances for the recovered girls.[34] In the course of her narrative, Patel voices her happiness about her accidental meeting with a girl she had rescued during the recovery operation. She writes: "After sometime, Veera's parents found a suitable man and got her married. After many years, I happened to meet her in Delhi. She was then a mother of two children and seemed happy with her life" (143).

The active involvement of women in the recovery operation, thus, raises several questions about the construction of identity and agency of women as victims, witnesses and agents of gendered violence in times of deep ethical crisis like the Partition. Discussing the question of identity with regard to that of the "social workers," Menon and Bhasin describe their position as "betwixt and between" (*Borders*, 198). For them, the role of the women social workers must be seen as "sometimes complicit, other times transgressive but never really passive" (200). They argue:

> Precisely because Partition was such a disruptive moment and a time of great social dislocation, the women social workers found it possible to slip through the cracks and exercise their agency on behalf of the women whenever they could. But it should not surprise us if they often ended reinforcing patriarchal attitudes, for it is characteristic of patriarchies that they implicate women in a consensual relationship even as they create the necessity for their resistance. (201)

In the recent years—as evidenced by the above observation made by Menon and Bhasin—there has been an emerging volume of literature on "social work" as a problematic activity in the aftermath of the Partition of India. In this literature, the recovery programme is often made identical with "social work" that took place amidst contesting nationalist demands, management of demographic dislocation as well as rehabilitation of "defiled" female bodies. However, the moral and ethical dimensions of this social work intervention in the recovery programme have not been fully well defined. One momentous moral imbroglio engendered by the recovery operation was that it presumed hierarchies of citizenship—the category of the "social worker" came to be invested with a superior degree of citizenship, which gave them an agency over and above the wishes of the abducted women to intervene in human lives on behalf of the state. In other words, the abducted women were deemed to occupy a subaltern position in comparison to the social workers.

Moral philosophy purports a number of basic alternative ethical vantage points with regard to the conception and conduct of social work in times of profound moral crisis like the Partition. For instance, Frederick G. Reamer—in his work, *Social Work Values and Ethics*—emphasises the singular significance of normative ethics to social work practice: "Normative ethics consists of attempts to apply ethical theories and practice to actual ethical dilemmas. Such guidance is especially useful when social workers face conflicts among duties they are ordinarily inclined to perform" (65). The framework of ethics Reamer purports is particularly productive in understanding the ethical dilemma and the ensuing moral turmoil voiced by the social workers involved in the recovery operation.

Following Reamer, while locating the practice of social work in moral theory, Roberta Imre foregrounds the criticality of considerate, interpersonal relationships as the framework for making productive interventions (16). To her, in times of appalling personal and social disasters, social workers are required to espouse a compassionate attitude towards survivors in order to be receptive to their needs. They must be capable of evaluating how intervention strategies can best lead to reciprocal, courteous relationships with individuals and their families during the process of social work. However, very often disasters unravel a state of affairs that threaten individual autonomy and self-determination as they inevitably provoke disorder, conflict and uncertainty. Many a time, survivors are forced to make crucial, independent decisions as they seek immediate resolution to their intensely traumatic and emotional state of affairs. But, the fact remains that individual autonomy gets curtailed in a situation when state agencies and social workers implement their post disaster measures as it happened with the post-Partition recovery operation.

In her incisive article, "The Social Worker as Moral Citizen: Ethics in Action," Susan S. Manning defines moral citizenship as "the responsibility to determine rights and good behaviour as part of the rights and privileges social workers have as member of a community that includes clients, colleagues, agencies, and

society" (224). Manning categorically elaborates that moral citizenship deals with "how social workers use awareness, thinking, feeling, and action to enact social work purpose" (224). In conditions of crises, then, social workers' moral responsibility towards survivors is established through connecting with survivors and by actively negotiating institutional and societal resources to safeguard survivors' rights and privileges.

In the context of Partition, it remains debatable whether the "social workers" were competent enough to claim and employ the special privileges bestowed upon them by moral citizenship, keeping in mind the interests and aspirations of the abducted women. In a moment of self-reflection, Anis Kidwai recalls:

> But I am sorry to report that we were all ill-equipped, incompetent. We lacked the right spirit which had to be the order of the Christian missionaries. None of us had any understanding of psychology, nor did we try to gain it. We would just parrot the catchphrases that were habitually used in such circumstances, and when they proved ineffectual (as they often did), we would berate the girls. (152)

Thus, operation of moral citizenship during the recovery programme not only called into question the differential categories of citizenship but also exposed the unsure, flimsy and fleeting ground on which gendered superiorities were constructed. While the social worker, as a moral agent of the patriarchal state was endowed with a priveleged agency ensuing from her moral citizenship within the national imaginary, the abducted woman was rendered invisible, relegated to a subaltern status. The latter's position within the nation itself is problematic as she continues to occupy the outer domains of the nation, to be redomesticated through the benevolent agency of the state/social worker. Thus the process of recovery is also a process reiterative/constitutive of differences within the category of citizenship so much so that the abducted women emerge out of Partition as second-rate or subaltern citizens[35] of the state. Apart from the hierarchies of citizenship, a gendered differentiation of labour is also evident in the employment of women as social workers in the recovery

programme—it is not wholly accidental that "social work" came to be considered as a woman's domain and most of the social workers happened to be women while the laws were legislated mostly by men. Very often, the important political decisions with respect to the recovery operation were taken by the male political leadership but the "social" task of re-domesticating abducted women and management of rehabilitation camps fell upon the shoulders of the female social workers.

In fact, the space of physical recovery must be seen as a problematic space of limitations and possibilities regarding one's self construction. For the abducted women it turned out to be a limited space of identity formation where the "defiled" subjects were being purified into the "proper" citizens of the nascent state through the agency of the social workers. The social workers in turn found it a confusing space where often contradictory and conflicting identities were to be performed—many of these women confide that sometimes they acted as a "woman" and sometimes as an "officer." These complementing and competing aspects of their self raise difficult questions about their identity and agency during the recovery operation, shattering any notion of the fictitious unity of being a woman.[36]

In this context, the performative space of social work becomes a space of metamorphosis. It becomes a site of resignification of one's own identity. In other words, the process of recovery and rehabilitation turned out to be a process of self-articulation and self-discovery for the social workers. Very often, the female social workers found themselves asserting against their own bureaucracies, locating their own positionality vis-a-vis the newly instituted bureaucratic hierarchies of the nation. Involvement in the recovery programme brought them into contact with many institutions like the police and the judiciary which would have otherwise remained outside their normal lives. Anis Kidwai in her memoir, *In Freedom's Shade*, repeatedly recalls instances in which she and her fellow social workers interceded with and prevailed upon even high ranking police officers (87). These women were also brave enough to point out the callousness and insensitiveness of a section of the Indian administration.

They voiced a sometimes implicit and at other times unabashed critique of the governmental actions, post-Partition. Anis Kidwai recalls: "Shanti Dal charged that the administration was intent on frustrating its every move. We warned the government that if the local administration weren't changed, all our activities would come to naught. The peace we desired would remain a pipe dream" (270). It remains ironic that it was through such confrontational interactions with the official machinery that the social workers came to realise their own identities as subjects of the new nation.

The memoirs by Kidwai and Patel—being Partition memoirs located in a specific moment of history—cannot be taken as extended expressions of autobiographical development of the self. These are not grand narratives of a universal subject that reflect the uniqueness of a certain life course. As both reality and referentiality remained shattered during the Partition, the writing self that emerges is a fissured female "I," as shattered and fragmented as the reality around. These memoirs, ostensibly, project the recovery of the abducted women as a humanitarian response to the sad plight of the female victims of the Partition. However, the contradictions ingrained in the recovery process and the discontents of the narratives in question betray the kind of "violence and idealism" that "lies at the heart of the process by which the narratives of citizenship and modernity come to find a natural home in 'history'" (Chakrabarty 22). Though apparently sympathetic to the cause of abducted women, these narratives replicate the false ethics of gender subjugation as they imbricate with the discourse of the nation-state which borrows its onto-epistemologies from the discourse of modernity.

A Daughter's Testimony

> *The memory is a living thing—it too is in transit. But during its moment, all that is remembered joins, and lives—the old and the young, the past and the present, the living and the dead.*
>
> Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings* (104)

Since 1997, the fiftieth anniversary of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, there has been a renaissance of popular as well as scholarly interest to unscramble the event, trying to produce new readings and meanings in the contemporary political context. The Partition, like other major cataclysms in human history, induces its victims, perpetrators and the general community to re-evaluate their motives and the parts they played, and demands intricate answers that require an investigation of individual as well as communal consciousness. This critical event continues to raise bewildering conundrums regarding the moral and ethical crises of mankind and more pertinently, the need for a more sophisticated exploration of tropes such as memory, representation, narration, violence and their re-articulation over the passage of time.

As decades pass by, escalating the distance between our everyday lives and the events of the Partition, many victims, survivors, witnesses and perpetrators of violence have bid us adieu. There seems to be an increasing urgency among many contemporary historians to dig up and make public the experiences and perceptions of an ageing population before their voices are stilled forever. Human memories linger, as well as archives and private histories which have not been fully incorporated into the official discourse of history. The impassioned quest for memory, in its myriad forms, seems to be the most sensible way of connecting to that past which continues to haunt the collective consciousness of both nations. However, excavating the archives of Partition memories is no mean task.[37] As a political commentator on South Asia puts it:

> In some ways, mining memories of Partition is trickier than taking testimony from survivors of the Nazi Holocaust, as American director Steven Spielberg is doing on videotape. No moral apartheid classifies Partition's protagonists into neat categories of victim and villain. The wars—between Hindus and Muslims, Indians and Pakistanis—are not over. Whoever copyrights the memory of Partition owns an important part of the present. (*Old Journeys Revisited*)

Most significantly, over the last decade or so, women's memories have become more copious and conspicuous at every level of the Partition discourse. With the growing consciousness that their experiences matter too, many female survivors are now coming out of the veil of silence with their individual memories and histories, adding further dimensions to the narrative of the Indian Partition.[38] However, most of the recently unearthed histories of women's experience of the Partition present tales of suffering and violation of women in the immediate wake of that grievous event. Also, most of the recent fieldwork in the area of Partition studies has been done by Indian historiographers and anthropologists among Hindu and Sikh survivors in India, so much so that there is a near erasure of the suffering of the Muslims in India and Hindus in Pakistan at the time of the Partition.[39]

Very often, in the available ethnographic literature, the individual and local stories of violence are placed in a universalised/national context of the Partition so much so that the local tenor and flavour of the incidents are lost. These narratives often reify the available stereotypical notions regarding Partition violence—that both the communities competed with each other and were equally culpable in perpetrating heinous violence; that unlike the *Holocaust*, the neat categories of victim and victimiser cannot be applied to the Partition.[40] Nationalist historiography on India's Partition has consistently sidelined highly localised occurrences of violence as "disturbances" and riots, thus assimilating them into the larger fold of the nationalising narratives.[41] However, such behind the scene, highly localised micro-histories of the Partition offer us a cue towards a better understanding of the ghastly communal violence unleashed in 1947. They efface the neatly carved out distinctions among the victim, victimiser and witness, and opens up new possibilities in making sense of the otherwise senseless violence unleashed in 1947.

Let us now look at one such pre-history of the Partition, an elderly woman's life-narrative/oral testimony, a scattered "montage of vignettes, anecdotes and fragments" (Kuhn 190) that calls into question the nation's overarching effacement of the victimiser identity from the carefully crafted narrative

of its seamless, untroubled past. Critically addressing Nonica Datta's narrative on Subhashini's life (*Violence, Nationalism and Partition: A Daughter's Testimony*) as a veritable document on the social history of gender, community, caste and violence, the endeavour here is to show how colluding ideas of colonialism, religious nationalism, sexuality and domesticity shaped, reshaped and problematised women's identities during the run up to the Partition, and how this eventually dictated the modes of Partition violence. Subhashini's life-narrative becomes doubly significant as it corroborates much of the recent work on the Partition which looks at the Partition as a case of ethnic cleansing/"retributive genocide."[42] Moreover, it offers an interesting perspective on the Partition as it reflects on how the "local" interprets the larger broad scale events. It tells the story of a region too that has for long been relegated in Partition scholarship—present-day Haryana, which in 1947 had been a part of the undivided Punjab province.[43]

Nonica Datta's *Violence, Martyrdom and Partition: A Daughter's Testimony* recounts the life-narrative of Subhashini Devi Malik, one of the renowned pioneers of *Gurukul* education for girl students in rural Haryana.[44] Written in the first person narrative and organised into three sections, this work presents individual testimony as history.[45] The first section, *Introducing Subhashini*, positions Subhashini as an individual and attempts to position her individual story against the larger historical context of the Partition. The Second section entitled, *A Daughter's Testimony*, is a jumbled monologue by Subhashini devoted to the theme of Bhagat Phool Singh's murder as martyrdom and the retaliatory violence that followed. This section is further divided into three sub-sections, where she unpacks her set of stories within stories and demonstrates a steady interplay of memory, testimony and history. The final section, *A Letter to Subhashini*, penned three years after Subhashini's demise, may be described as a "supplement" to her testimony where Datta contrasts Subhashini's testimony with the "parallel histories" of her own aunt, Vash and the Punjabi writer, Amrita Pritam both of whom were victims of the Partition.[46]

Subhashini was born Sarti on August 14, 1914 into an obscure and poor Jat family of peasants in Buwana village in Karnal district of present-day Haryana. She was later renamed "Subhashini"—one who speaks auspiciously—by Acharya Vidyavati Seth, her teacher at the *Gurukul* in Dehradun. Astonishingly, for a girl child, Subhashini was hailed by her father as a harbinger of good fortune for the family. She lost her mother when she was hardly one year old and her father, Phool Singh—an *Arya Samaj* preacher who later became beatified as Bhagat Phool Singh—soon remarried his late brother's widow. In this second marriage, he had a daughter, Subhashini's half-sister called Gunvati. Subhashini's childhood days were filled with domestic activities still taken up by many peasant girls of rural Haryana: milking the cows, preparing fodder, grinding grain, tending the fire, cooking food and drawing water from the well. While Subhashini was still a child, Phool Singh declared that he was entering *Sanyasa* (the life-stage of renunciation) and as an initial step, he entered *Vanaprastha*, opting out to live in a jungle. In 1919, young Subhashini was initiated into the *Arya Samaj*—an event that would shape her worldview and determine the remaining course of her life as a *Brahmacharini*. Thereafter, her father sent her to one *Kanya Gurukul* after another—to *Gurukuls* in Delhi, Dehradun and even to Sabarmati where she worked in association with Mahatma Gandhi. Each time she would come back unhappily to her father and was finally married off to Abhimanyu, an ardent *Arya Samaj* activist, and lived the rest of her life as a *rand-lugai* (a married woman living the austere, lustreless life of a widow). On 14 August, 1942, her father Phool Singh—by an act of emotional blackmailing—coerced her into dedicating her life to the *Kanya Vedic Pathshala* he had set up for the education of girl students. The same day, he was shot dead by unknown killers who could neither be recognised nor traced, marking a point of permanent rupture in both Subhashini's life and narrative.

In a broader sense, Nonica Datta's narrative gathers Subhashini's testimony and remembrance to explore a colonial, *Arya Samajist* peasant woman's troubled understanding of the subcontinental Partition in postcolonial times. It seems that the book recounts Subhashini's personal history, but in fact

that history—like in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*—becomes a kaleidoscope to reveal the more delicate, broader shifts in the history of south Asia over almost two centuries.[47] It explores the impact of the death of one towering patriarchal figure in the everyday life of his daughter. Subhashini is presented as the careworn daughter of a martyr, Bhagat Phool Singh who was actively involved in the *Gauraksha* (cow protection), *Shuddhi* (religious reconversion), *Ved Prachar* (proselytisation) and *Sangathan* (religious organisation) movements—the main planks of the *Arya Samaj* which in turn painfully agonised and antagonised the local Muslim community, the pastoralist Rangars. Bhagat Phool Singh, no doubt, had been enthused by the *Arya Samaj's* militant rhetoric on these religious campaigns. More importantly, inspired by the *Arya Samaj's* impetus on the education of women, Bhagatji had dedicated his life to the improvement of the lives of girls in rural southeast Punjab (Haryana).[48]

Nonica Datta constructed the narrative over many years of dialogue with her old, octogenarian subject, Subhashini (during the period of the prolonged interviews with Datta, Subhashini headed the *Kanya Gurukul*, an *Arya Samaj* institution for the education of girls, in village Khanpur in Haryana). Datta scrupulously translated the matriarch's broken utterances averred in a strange Haryanavi-Hindi-Sanskrit idiolect into a life-narrative in English, garnishing it with Subhashini's own vernacular expressions that tend to capture the subtle cadence of her thoughts, feelings and gesticulations in all their ebb and flow. It presents the exceptional story of a daughter who relentlessly follows her father's footsteps in the way of community service;[49] a tale of a daughter's intimate relationship with her father who is also a patriarch of the local (Hindu) Jat community.[50] As Nonica Datta rightly points out in her introductory section, it is apparently 1942—the year of her father's martyrdom—and not 1947, the year of the Partition that occupies the core of Subhashini's memory although her remembrance of 1942 assumes special salience in the context of 1947.

1942 marked the martyrdom of Bhagatji, murdered by the Muslim Rangars (according to Subhashini's version of events)

and for the daughter, it is 1942 rather than 1947 that constitutes the defining moment of her life. He was brutally assassinated on 14 August 1942 by unidentified killers, who orchestrated the murder in the pitch darkness of that disastrous night. It left Subhashini at a very young age with the immense responsibility of running and building the educational institutions her father had founded and envisaged. The conspirators and assassins behind the murderous act were never brought to justice but Bhagatji's death was hailed as a sublime act of martyrdom within the larger community.[51] It inspired the desire for revenge that took place on a huge, horrible scale—as Subhashini describes it in her narrative—only during the disastrous Partition in 1947. Hence her reading of Partition violence is an account that dates back to or begins from 1942; for Subhashini, 1942 becomes the key focal point in her history. She sees the massacres of Muslims during the Partition in 1947 as a divine retribution provoked by her father's annihilation because she imagines Muslim Rangars to be the murderers even though there is no tangible evidence substantiating her conviction (The court itself had dismissed the case on grounds of lack of evidence). This "imagination" of the murderers and the "re-imagination" of 1947 take place in a convoluted psychological matrix where the personal and the public interlace in Subhashini's perplexed memory.

However, it is pertinent that we locate and foreground another spectacular yet sidelined event in the narrative—the "honour killing" of two Jat women named Shiriya Devi, a widowed *nambardarni*[52] and her daughter, Chalti rather than the murder of Subhashini's father—as critical to the events that unfold in Subhashini's narrative. Such a discursive shift in the focus of the narrative from 1942/1947 to the wanton slaughter of two unrelenting women, arguably, helps us reconstruct an awfully gendered pre-history of Partition violence within a local community. Subhashini calls the whole episode in question, the *Kanhi-Puthi-Wala-Kissa*. Kanhi was a village in Gohana *tehsil* and there lived the widowed Jat mother and her daughter who owned 300 *bighas* of arable land. Puthi was a nearby village of Mussalmans and was home to Karamat, a rich Zamindar. Karamat got himself involved in a relationship with both the widowed

mother and her young daughter, much to the embarrassment of the local Jat villagers. In spite of much pressure from the Jats and their Panchayat, neither the man nor the women pulled out of this longstanding, acutely scandalous licentious liaison. Bhagat Phool Singh, Subhashini's father had personally intervened to persuade both the "*badmash* women" (Datta, *Violence* 62) to give up their relationship with Karamat but only in vain:

> Mai, let the village live; *gaon ko basne de*. Let the village survive and settle. *Anachar badh raha hai*; immorality is on the rise. He and the villagers begged her to arrange her daughter's marriage with a suitable Jat, and said they were ready to find one. He also told her that if she wanted, they could find a rich *Zamindar* husband for her also. But she would not agree. (63)

Bhagatji had also implored Karamat, the Muslim Zamindar-lover not to let the women enter his house but, to Bhagatji's utter chagrin, Karamat made fun of Bhagatji: "I never invite them. They come on their own. If they want to come, then what can I do? You try and stop them" (64). Finally, Bhagatji went on an indefinite fast to put moral pressure on the village elders to immediately intervene in the issue. However, Shiriya (the widowed mother in question) remained unrelenting despite all persuasions. This was a moment of deep insult to Bhagatji because by discarding the *Panchayat's* decision, Shiriya had insulted him and the whole tradition of the Jat community.[53] Subhashini recounts that naturally, Bhagatji considered all this the result of the hideous connivance of the evil Mussalman, Karamat.

The whole episode needs to be seen in the context of the *Arya Samaj* propaganda which foregrounded the figure of the "innocent" Hindu woman who could easily be deceived by the "lustful Muslim."[54] The figure of the Muslim as the highly lecherous, sexually debauched and voluptuously licentious "other" was often invoked not only to ascertain a defensive and rancorous role for the Hindu men, but also to safeguard the Hindu women from Muslim men. The Hindu women, in fact, were not only to be "safeguarded" but also "disciplined," "domesticated" and "controlled" by the Hindu men—her potential as a symbol of

the purity and continuity of the Hindus, her mobility and her sexuality had to be synchronised with the needs of the larger Hindu community. Swami Shraddhanand, in his influential work, *Hindu Sangathan,* therefore instructed the Hindus that the ideal way to forestall conflict with Muslims was to ensure the proper protection of their "own" (Hindu) women and children (138). Evocation of these fears—which also forms a staple part of Subhashini's narrative—provided an emotive basis for arguments in favour of "Hindu homogeneity and patriarchy" (Gupta 267). Madan Mohan Malavya, one of the stalwarts of the *Arya Samaj,* voiced similar concerns in a public speech in 1923:

> Hardly a day passes without our noticing a case or two of kidnapping of Hindu women and children by not only Muslim *badmashes and goondas*, but also by men of standing and means, who are supposed to be very highly connected. The worst feature of this evil is that Hindus do not stir themselves over the daylight robbery of national stock. . . . We must do away with this mischievous Muslim propaganda of kidnapping women and children. (qtd. in Gupta 248)

The Hindu anxiety and fear voiced by both Shraddhanand and Malavya were particularly explicit in the case of Hindu widows, as evidenced by the treatment meted out to the widowed Shiriya Devi and her daughter, Chalti. What escalated the anxiety regarding widows was also the fact that very often they were past the legal age of maturity, and hence their voluntary relationships with Muslim men could not be easily challenged in the courts of law. This anxiety about the sexual life of widows can be read together with an obsession with numbers, i.e., the communally articulated fear of a waning Hindu population and *Shuddhi*, as a potential antidote to it. With the increasing popularity of the colonial body counts which revealed a drastic expansion in the number of Muslims and Christians vis-à-vis the Hindus, there arose a shift in the traditional Hindu views on widow remarriage.[55] One of the causes for the exponential increase in Muslim population was considered to be their licentious liaisons with Hindu widows.

In this context, even those who initially opposed the idea began articulating it vehemently because it was deemed better to get widows remarried than to have them elope with Muslim males, thereby increasing the Muslim population. Located outside the safe domain of domestic female purity/identity, the widow came to concurrently represent both a sexual solicitation and a risky moral hazard. Hence, her sexuality had to be regimented through "appropriate" channels and her prized reproductive potential to breed children was to be streamlined to produce a Hindu child. Furthermore, it was argued that the loss of a Hindu widow was not just the loss of one person, but (potentially) of many more because of her capacity to breed. Moreover, the Hindus losing numbers also meant a proportionate increase in the Muslim population, making it a double depletion for the Hindus. Very often, the callousness of the prevailing Hindu proscriptions against widows was also evoked by the supporters of widow remarriage to explicate why Hindu women fell into the "traps" laid by the sexually dissipated Muslim.[56]

In Subhashini's village, the whole Jat community kept fuming over the debauched relationship forged between Shiriya Devi and Karamat:

> The Jats got angry and agitated but could do nothing. How could somebody make love to the mother as well as to the daughter? In the village, a woman or a daughter going astray is considered inauspicious. If a Hindu woman chooses to stay in a Mussalman's house, what can be worse? This made life impossible for the Jats. *Jatom keliye jeena haraam ho raha tha*. People would say what use is your life when *bahu-beti* is abducted right in front of you? *Tera bhi kya jeena?* (61)

The villagers from the other village would taunt: "'Your *bahu-beti* have been abducted right in front of you by *dusre admi*. By other men?' Jats could not live in peace. *Jaton ka jeena dubhar ho gaya tha*." (66) In the Jat communal psychology as well as the *Arya Samaj* discourse on women, *Shuddhi* had to be undertaken simultaneously with the prevention of possible conversions of widows from one's own group. The figure of the converted widow

was considered an anathema, something that could jeopardise the jingoism of the emergent Hindu nation. She posed the danger of destabilising the standard strategy of configuring Hindu identity itself—i.e., the disavowal of both difference and the right to difference.

However, for Karamat, simultaneously keeping a woman and her daughter born of a previous marriage together as wives was something theologically sanctioned to a Muslim male (*The Holy Qur'an* 4:23). Finally, the issue was settled with the murder of the two "*badmash* women" (62) at the hands of Baru Ram, a distant relative of theirs, who, after trying to persuade the mother and daughter to give up "immorality," suddenly fell into a rage of anger and wielded his farm implements to instantly finish off the two. Murder communicates a message to all women, Hindu or Mussalman, about the "dangers" of independent agency, liberty and unbounded sexuality. And for Subhashini, as for the rest of the community of Jats, it became an acceptable, justifiable act of "honour killing."

However, even death could not end the scandal as the dead bodies of these women were taken over by Karamat and given an Islamic burial, further infuriating the already peeved Jats: "He had lifted their headless bodies, carrying them to his village. After burying them, he built their graves" (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 65). Subhashini recounts that these "graves may have been razed to the ground" (65). She also claims that Karamat's real intention in carrying out an Islamic burial was to get hold of the 300 *bighas* of land the women owned.

Soon after, the Mussalamans filed a grievance against Baru Ram, the murderer. Subsequently, the court found him guilty and sentenced him to death. However, this put the whole "honour" of the Jats under stake. Baru Ram was their real-life hero who had just restored their communal "honour" by killing the erring women. To save him from the scaffold, Bhagatji contacted Sir Chottu Ram,[57] an influential politician sympathetic to the Jats:

> Pitaji told Chhotu Ram, 'Listen, hanging Baru Ram will be a *julam.* Moreover, can a mother and a daughter share the same man as a husband? *Ma-beti ne ek hi khasam kar*

> *liya*. It is immoral. The honour of the village is at stake. If the village and the country have to be saved from this sort of immorality, then the boy must be rescued from the scaffold. To save the boy, Pitaji made strenuous efforts, used all his influence and was finally able to bring him back from the hangman's noose. Chhotu Ram came to the boy's rescue. This is how the honour of the village was saved. (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 65)

Baru Ram naturally became the local saviour of communal honour and Bhagatji honoured him with a cash reward of Rupees 10,000 in a public gathering attended by thousands of Jats. His act of courage was valourised within the local community and he was given the halo of a *vir* (hero)—his spirit and courage were compared to those of Banda Bairagi, one of the supreme martyrs in the Punjabi cultural pantheon.[58] But most importantly, Baru Ram's act of killing converted Muslim women had finally strengthened the Jat confidence and helped in forging a stronger community/identity. As for the errant women, they were shown the doors of the community and history, and more interestingly, they do not figure often in Subhashini's story despite its cyclical, repetitive nature nor does she mention the exact year of their murder.[59] She recalls:

> Nobody now remembers those women. Everybody abuses them. People still say that if any woman commits any immoral act, she would meet Shiriya's and Chalti's fate. Such women were despised by one and all. Such women are actually randis. Actually people consider randis to be much better than Shiriya and Chalti. A randi at least does her business in a different manner and she has some rules of her own. *Par inne gaon ki ijjat luta di*; but these women put the village to shame. (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 66)

Later, Phool Singh—on behalf of the Jat community—dismantled their graves and reclaimed the 300 *bighas* of land owned by these women. Subhashini recalls: "Though dead bodies turn into mire and nothing remains, those graves were torn down. That's because the names of those women were boldly engraved on the graves" (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 69). The act of desecrating the

graves, however, added a new chapter of communal consolidation to the Jat identity narrative; a stronger community was built upon the edifice of these murdered women's desecrated graves.

Subhashini firmly believed Karamat was instrumental behind Bhagatji's murder: "Karamat and his companions nursed a longstanding grievance against Pitaji, who was worshipped as a saviour of Hindus and an opponent of the Muslims" (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 67). "Everybody knew who the killers were. Pitaji was killed by Mussalmans. One of them was Karamat" (68). In revenge, Karamat was killed soon thereafter, although the account of his death—like Subhashini's other accounts of the decisive events leading to her father's murder—differ subtly in their various recountings. His brother, children and the whole family too was brutally put to death in the violence of 1947.

Apart from the spiteful scuffle with Karamat, there could have been a few other reasons behind the murder of Subhashini's father. She gradually reveals why her father earned the ire of the Mussalmans—he had dedicated himself to the *Arya Samaj* cause and was involved in its *Shuddhi* programme. This programme of reconversion earned him many enemies, especially within groups such as the Rangars, Muslim groups which opposed such moves.[60] Subhashini remembers: "He performed *Shuddhi* in Hodal and Palwal before '44-'45. Perhaps in '37-'38. Mussalmans got furious. They hatched many conspiracies to kill Pitaji" (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 139).

Shuddhi (re-conversion) and *Sangathan* (organisation) movements were the main planks of the *Arya Samaj* which tormented and alienated the local Muslim community, the pastoralist Rangars. These were, in fact, attempts to convert the traditional religious identities into modern political ones and in the process, gender turned out to be a decisive factor. In a conducive rhetoric, *Arya Samaj* promoted the image of the physically agile "masculine" Hindu male as against that of the emasculated or "effeminate" Hindu male. This was done as a mode of resistance to the discourses of both the colonialists and the Muslims which supposedly gave currency to the image of the "effeminate" Hindu male. Moreover, these apparently apolitical movements (*Shuddhi*

and *Sangathan*) reified the imagined phantom of the Muslim rapist, clearly identifying him as the dangerous "other" from whom the Hindu women needed protection. This also facilitated an obsession with Hindu female "purity" which in turn provided the *raison d'* ê*tre* for these movements.

Similarly, the *Gauraksha* campaign had significant impact as it helped the *Arya Samaj* to mythically reinterpret and reinforce the gender relations within the community. In fact, the premier registered organisation for the protection of the cow (*Goraksini Sabha*) was founded in 1882 by Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), who also founded the *Arya Samaj*, the "Society of *Aryas*." The preceding year, he had published a pamphlet entitled *Gokarunanidhi* (*The Ocean of Mercy*) in which he advocated the idea that the slaughter of cows was anti-Hindu. He initiated an aggressive propaganda to propagate this message throughout India, using modern modes of conveyance and communication technology. Within the ambit of his reform advocating an elixir for the resuscitation of the ancient Vedic civilisation throughout the territory of the *Aryavarta*—the abode of the Aryas; the (mythical) first land to have surfaced from the ocean—his intention was to re-integrate the Hindu family into the bodily image of the cow. It was—he argued—by the protection accorded to the cow that one could identify a *dharmic* kingdom in good health and flourishing, the kingdom of God.[61]

In fact, the degenerative role played by the *Arya Samaj*—particularly its vituperative press mostly located in Lahore—in worsening the communal imbroglio in Punjab has been underrated in Partition histories.[62] For instance, the role of the *Samaj* finds little mention in Ishtiaq Ahmed's recently published work, *The Punjab: Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed* (2011), an otherwise comprehensive study of the Punjab Partition. However, this is one mistake the survivors rarely make. For example, in an interview with Ian Talbot published in *The Epicentre of Violence*, Sardar Aridaman Singh Dhillon, a survivor alludes to the *Arya Samaj's* role in precipitating the Punjab quandary:

> Another thing not remembered these days is that in Punjab the communal divide was brought about by a very

> strange thing, the *Arya Samaj*. Swami Dayanand was not a Punjabi, he was a Gujarati. He had been going all o\ver India to attract followers, but failed everywhere, in Kashi, in Calcutta, in Bombay. But he succeeded in Punjab, it is very strange, he succeeded in Punjab because his way of preaching Hinduism was the same kind of reformation as of Guru Nanak movement. (qtd. in Talbot and Tatla 45)

The *Arya Samaj,* with its *Shuddhi* rhetoric, antagonised not only the Muslims but also the Sikhs, claiming that the Sikhs ought to convert to Hinduism. Apart from promoting religious antagonism, the *Samaj* also supported the idea of Pakistan mooted by some Muslim intellectuals. As early as in 1924, the *Arya Samaj* leader Lala Lajpat Rai wrote a number of articles in *The Tribune* published from Lahore, espousing cultural nationalism and championing the division of Punjab along religious lines: "My suggestion is that the Punjab should be partitioned into two provinces, the western Punjab with a large Muslim majority to be a Muslim governed province; the eastern Punjab with a large Hindu-Sikh majority to be a non-Muslim governed province (qtd. in Aziz 145).

If the *Shuddhi* movement aimed at purifying the "other" by bringing it back into the fold of the Vedic *Hindutva* prescribed in *Satyarth Prakash* (*The Light of Truth*), Swami Dayanand's text that informs the core of the teachings of the *Arya Samaj*, a parallel movement could be perceptible within the community to preserve its internal purity and "honour." This was done primarily through the construction of the ideal of the *Arya Mahila*, the perfect, pure, docile Hindu woman who could be the preserver, carrier and reproducer of a chaste community identity. Bhagatji's insistence on running strict schools for girls domesticating them into perfect *Brahmacharinis* must be understood in this context. As Subhashini confides:

> Our principal aim was to make them learn the alphabet—*akshargyan*—and to train them as *sadgrihanis*. We would teach our girls how to write, read and perform their household duties. My aim was to make them self-reliant, and to train them to be ideal housewives. *Aryabhavinaya* is

> the book on *Shishtachar*. This book was prescribed in every Gurukul. (qtd. in Datta, *Violence*, 170)

Thus, reformists like Bhagatji, even when articulating their views on improving their women's lives, also reaffirmed patriarchal notions of female chastity and domesticity. Very often, in the colonial context, bourgeois Victorian ideas on women's domesticity and sexual restraint reinforced traditional Indian views. Thus, while these male reformers successfully challenged unjust customs, such as girls' illiteracy, child marriages, and widow abuse, their paradigms of "modern" womanhood inhibited the full realisation of gender equality within the community. As Nonica Datta observes:

> The *Gurukul* provided salience to the concept of *Arya mahila*. This was designed to challenge the superiority of the upper castes, and to underscore women's purity, respectability and superiority vis-à-vis Muslims and lower castes. By doing so, Jat men flaunted their seemingly enhanced sense of identity within their immediate social landscape. They exuded their masculinity and power in both private and public spaces. This was a new way of challenging their presumed *Shudra* status. Ironically, this reformism deepened women's subordination. (*Violence* 16)

Subhashini's account also reveals a successful patriarchal manoeuvre to police and contain female sexuality or encourage its self-restraint under the overarching claims of social reformation. The *Gurukul* promoted a strict code of controlled heteronormative sexuality, even forbidding minimal physical contact between the inmates. Subhashini wistfully recalls a poignant episode from her childhood:

> Sparsh was prohibited in Kanya Gurukul Dehradun. The *Brahmacharinis* could not touch each other's hand just like that, for it was likely to arouse *uttejana*. Once while walking towards kitchen I happened to touch a girl's hand asking her to 'come over here.' An Acharyaji standing nearby saw us. Both of us were beaten up with sticks. (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 130)

Ironically, the same rigorous rule of sexual regimentation is enforced by Subhashini in her capacity as the head of *Kanya Gurukul*, Khanpur. The moral police consciousness within Subhashini speaks incriminatingly of same-sex camaraderie among the *Gurukul* girls:

> At 11 at night, I would lift their sheets to check if everything was okay. They were instructed not to lock their rooms from the inside. . . . I would inspect again at 2.30 in the morning. If ever a girl was caught, she was severely punished. . . . We were always worried about *samlaingik* relationships in the Gurukul, and did our best to prevent them. (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 187)

Here, Subhashini's rhetoric sexualises and genders notions of cultural authenticity. It projects ideas of cultural purity onto a virtuous, heteronormative sexuality that is supposedly embodied by women—other performances of cultural identity, especially queer (lesbian) identities, are seen as wanton and harmfully inauthentic. Besides, such proscriptions amount to a dangerous gendering of friendship and camaraderie.

In fact, Subhashini herself remains a victim of such questionable sexual codes as she is called upon to live the austere life of a *rand-lugai* even in the physical presence of her husband. Datta comments: "She never wore any jewelry, silk or coloured saris. She never used soap. Nor did she look at herself in the mirror" (*Violence* 4). Moreover, in her narrative which remains tyrannically silent on sexuality (except the odd case of Shiriya and Chalti), Subhashini emerges as a woman who self-consciously negates her own sexuality. Significantly, her father's initial plan was to keep Subhashini and her half-sister, Gunvati as *Brahmacharinis* (celibates) who could become the role model for younger girls. Phool Singh simply refused to train any girl for domestic life or matrimony. He used to say:

> "Unless you have a Brahmacharini staying here, no girl would feel inspired to study and acquire knowledge here." A Brahmacharini literally means a virgin, a girl who does not marry all her life . . . a girl who is chaste and pure.

> Actually marriage distracts the mind. Pitaji had kept Gargi, Kunti and Gunvati as Brahmacharinis for life. But then the fear of the Mussalmans was such that he gave the girls the freedom to marry. (171)

This fear of the Mussalman is complementary to the construction of a pure Jat female identity derived from the current image of the *Arya Mahila*, ever at the danger of being profaned by the touch of "cruel" Mussalmans. In fact, this acute sense of insecurity haunts Subhashini's narrative all along. As aptly explained by Nonica Datta elsewhere, "The imaginary suspicion of a Muslim as an aggressor and a sexual predator continues to haunt the Hindu nationalist's psyche" (Datta, *On the Anti-Muslim* 408). In fact, such a fear was not completely out of place, given the context of colonial Punjab where interfamilial and intercommunity feuds were very often settled through the abduction of (re)productive women.[63] Subhashini's narrative itself attests to such crimes against women perpetrated by both the communities before and during the Partition: "After San '47, Mridula *bhen*, along with three-four other women, went from house to house looking for those Hindu girls who were abducted by the Mussalman and those Mussalman girls who were now living with the Hindus" (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 81). In a smart use of narrative strategy, interestingly, it is made to appear as though the Muslims were the only "abductors" and all the Muslim girls were living with Hindu men on their own accord. Such quirks of narration suggest how intricately the communal, political and the psychoanalytical are mutually imbricated in Subhashini's narrative. Both the communities were equally culpable in undertaking such acts and transferring the guilt entirely on to the Muslim community can only be a part of a larger communal strategy aimed at the demonisation of the other. It is not strange in this context that Subhashini's narrative invokes the *Ramayana*—at its core, a purity narrative—many a time. She compares the Mussalmans with the demon-king, Ravan: "They used to think themselves to be all too powerful. Like Ravan" (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 80).

In fact, Subhashini's telling of her story shows how much embedded she remains in the *Arya Samaj* tenets, even many years

after the *Samaj* had lost its sway in rural Haryana (she served as the state vice president of the *Arya Samaj* in Haryana during the course of the interviews with Nonica Datta). She is in full agreement with the *Samaj's* major ideologues like Dayanand who painstakingly managed to standardise and stereotype such categories as "Hindu" and "Muslim." As Satish Saberwal comments on the *Arya Samaj's* mobilisation of Hindu identity vis-à-vis Muslim identity, "Overriding their shared humanity the groups were being reified—represented as if their differences were intrinsic, "natural" rather than being the results of historical, and ongoing social processes" (125). For Subhashini, "*Mussalman dil ke kale hote hain*." "Mussalmans are black at heart." She says: "Actually Mussalmans were *kathor*. They troubled everybody. They were master thieves. They were thakedars who indulged in shady business. They would barge into anybody's house, untie a buffalo, steal a bullock or abduct a girl" (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 80). She adds:

> Hindus would never do anything like this. They are kind at heart, but Mussalmans are not. They are violent by nature. *Hinsa ki pravrittti thi*. Hindus are cow-worshippers but Mussalmans are meat-eaters. How can they be together? Or imagine what can they might have in common? (80)

Interestingly, Subhashini's narrative remains silent on the colonial state and its oppressive apparatuses of violence, transferring the agency to the Mussalmans and the Hindu Jats. However, as Nonica Datta notes, the role of the cadastral technologies of the colonial state in often reinforcing the Jats' perception of the Rangars and the other Muslim tribes as "evil" cannot be discounted. Datta writes:

> The perception of the Muslim as the other came to constitute a key element of Jat identity, and Muslims came to be perceived as a threat to women's 'modesty' and sexuality. Drawing on and in turn, strengthening the colonial stereotypes, the *Arya Samaj* discourse in Haryana presented Muslim pastoralists, especially the Rangars, as 'cattle thieves,' 'immoral', 'abductors,' 'dangerous' and 'scoundrels.' The Rangars, along with Meos, Bhattis,

> Pathans and other Muslim pastoralists, were conflated into an essentialised evil 'Mussalman.' (*Violence* 16)

Further, Datta presents Subhashini's life-narrative as ingrained within the social and economic history of Haryana, identified as southeast Punjab before 1966. Exploring the socio-economic side of the tussle between the Jats and the Rangars, Datta argues that at its base lies a conflicting interest over land rights engendered by the colonial administration. The Jats were primarily peasant cultivators and the Rangars, a pastoralist tribe. The colonial state's transformation of pastoral land into arable land with its system of newly built canals naturally subordinated the Jats to the designs of the administration. At the other end, this land policy antagonised the Rangars who now found themselves denied of their traditional means of livelihood—leading to a dialectic of spatial contestation. "For long the Rangar pastoralists hankered, in vain, after their lost rights in the prairie." (Datta, *Violence* 8). "There was thus a clash of two cultures, one old and the other new" (8). And gradually, upon losing their political, cultural, grazing and land rights, the Muslim pastoralists entered into conflict with Hindu Jat peasants. For their resistance, especially their refusal to be easily converted from pastoralists to peasants, the Rangars came to be stigmatised in the colonial ethnographic and administrative narratives as "objects of contempt" (8).

The newly created agrarian, social and political economy brought the Jats into conflict with the Banias also. Thriving on the advantages of an agricultural economy, the Banias as traders and money-lenders assumed the power and status of big traders as they controlled most of the commerce in the region. Thus, while the Jats took control of the rural hinterland, the Banias controlled the urban economy. This naturally brought the two castes into conflict. The Jats were also aggrieved that the Banias considered them *Shudras*, lower caste.

In *Arya Samaj*—in its texts, principles, organisations and practices—the Jats identified opportunities that they hoped would help them dispute the lowly *Shudra* caste status accorded to them by the Banias and other upper castes like Brahmins. Through their association with the *Arya Samaj* movement, the Jats

clamoured for the *Kshatriya* status which was denied to them by the forward castes as well as the colonial authorities.[64] However, as the Jats internalised the *Arya* ideology, it had a critical side effect: that of souring their rapport with their Muslim Rangar neighbours. Hindu Jats pressed the latter on *Shuddhi*, trying to persuade them to become Hindu and there arose tension and violence between the two groups, especially after the *Khilafat*[65] (Datta, *Forming an Identity* 184-86). The relations continued to deteriorate and the *Aryanised* Jats used the "opportunity" of the Partition to wreak revenge upon their Muslim neighbours with sheer violence marked by a genocidal intent.

However, for Subhashini, it is a different, highly individualised and localised story. Her shifting, cyclical memory contrives of 1947 as a moment of providential intervention, a case of retributive violence. "So *Parameshwar* avenges in this way, *beta*. I believe in this. Providence has its own ways of *nyaya* and *prathisodh*" (72). For her, 1947 occurred—in the first place—because of 1942. At Bhagatji's funeral leaders like Chhotu Ram had declared: "We would avenge blood with blood. *Khoon ka badla ham khoon se lenge*." (96). And while standing beside the funeral pyre, the *Brahmacharis* had taken the pledge:

> We will not sit in peace until we avenge on the Mussalmans; *jab tak unka badla nahin lenge hum chain se nahin baithenge. Ham gaaon ki ujaad lenge*; we will destroy the villages. And in 1947, the Jats of Gumana, Bainswal and Khanpur remembered Bhagatji's sacrifices and, inspired by his *balidan*, took courage in both hands and attacked Puthi. This was remembered as *Puthi par hamla*. Their plan was to destroy all the Muslim homes and abduct their *bahu-beti*. *Bhasan* [*Bhasm*]. Ashes. (71)

Subhashini's testimony becomes one of a rare kind as she herself testifies to a woman's agential and ethical complicity in inciting violence for the sake of avenging her father's death. Her narrative points out the sustained dynamics of the aggression aimed at wiping out every trace of the "other."

> In Puthi, Mussalmans had organised themselves on all four sides to protect themselves against any attack. They

> had collected in a *haveli*, where you know they stored tons of cartridges, small handballs and pistols. Our men surrounded them to mount an attack. But you know our men were their main targets. Our shots misfired. That's why many of our men were killed. One such man was Hardwari Lal. I had given him my loaded gun. He had vowed to kill at least hundred Mussalmans with his own hands. He was martyred in Puthi.
>
> After that, other Jats got really angry, and a *tukdi* of Jats went there to avenge Pitaji's murder and attacked the Mussalman *kothis* with a volley of bullets, but unfortunately their ammunition too ran out. Sadly enough, they were slaughtered by the Mussalmans. After this, another *tukdi* reached Puthi. They also felt since the Puthi Mussalmans had killed Bhagatji, they would not tolerate the existence of even a Mussalman child in the village.
>
> The Jats ruined Puthi. Bhagatji's Bhagats wreaked havoc on Puthi. Nobody was spared. . . . Shall I tell you more? Shall I? (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 71-72)

In what follows, Subhashini narrates an abysmally horrendous account of carnivalesque violence played upon the Musslamans of Puthi. She recalls the specific moment of violence when the angry Jats got hold of Karamat's son who had ventured out to play in the field. This child was "lifted atop a *jeli*, which was shoved into his stomach and shown to everybody" (72). The furious Jats then took into custody Karamat's other infant children as well and ruthlessly put them all to death. "With guns, knives and scythes, they cut them all" (72).

Violence against children and targeting the reproductive potential of women surely spell the genocidal impetus in the brazen violence perpetrated against the Mussalmans of Puthi.

> They forcibly dragged away their women and girls. They raped their *bahu-betis*. They brought some women to their homes or kept them elsewhere. Some were burnt alive with acid. What more could happen after this? I would feel sad seeing all this; *is nazare ko dekhne se dukh hota hai*. We used

> to go from one place to another. . . . Women were cut into small pieces. So were children. (103)

Phool Singh had earlier been betrayed and humiliated by two Jat women who turned Mussalman—a mother-daughter duo—who, inspired by their *rangroop* and *jawani* (beauty and youth), preferred to live with Karamat, a Mussalman Zamindar. Hence, what better sites to perform the revengeful acts than the bodies of Mussalman women themselves? To a certain extent, Subhashini's narrative registers her sense of uneasiness about bearing witness to these gruesome acts of violence but she is simultaneously relieved that the entire Mussalman village was cleaned up.

> Thankfully God destroyed them from their very roots. . . . And do you know what happened to their women? Do you wish to know? . . . Our Jat *bhais* cut off the breasts of Mussalman women, wove them into garlands—like you make with flowers—and wore them around their necks. *Piro kar mala banayi*. . . . We used to hear all kinds of sounds and noises. The crying and wailing of women . . . please don't ask. . . . We used to hear the sound of cutting, chopping. Can still hear the echo of the sound . . . (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 135)

Writing on the 1947 Partition, Gyanendra Pandey has famously argued that narratives of violence are constitutive of communities "through a discourse of violence 'out there'" (188). In other words, to Pandey violence happens at the margins of the community and it marks the community's boundaries. Communities come to be established by a disavowal of violence within them and a displacement of the same to the outside. In most of the narratives on the Partition, it is remarkable to see that violence is always attributed to external elements beyond the control of the immediate community.[66] Pandey quotes the usual refrain of the respondents in this regard: "'Nothing happened in our community.' It was 'outsiders,' 'criminals,' 'politicians,' 'madmen,' the demented and the temporarily crazed who were responsible . . . (qtd. in Pandey, "The Prose..." 199).

Surprisingly, Subhashini's narrative candidly celebrates the violent aggression of "us" against "them" during the Partition,

something that can be attributed to the ideas of sacrifice and revenge that instill her narrative. Pandey argues that such accounts of partisan violence still reconfigure the notions of "us" and "them" and reconstitute the community identity. Further, he makes the point that these narratives that celebrate an absolute annihilation of the helpless "other" community may also be inscribed with a sense of apology and shame:

> This shame too is related in part to the effort to reconstitute the community— to think the 'us' of the story in the fragile moment when a new idea of community collides with the breakdown of earlier senses. Statements of *revenge* are already statements of *defensiveness* . . . (197)

Hence, Subhashini tries to vindicate the revengeful violence against the Muslims by locating it within the realm of her sustained concern with security, the defence of herself and her girls against any possible violation by the Mussalmans. Not surprisingly, even when it presents the Mussalmans as reeling under the Jat onslaught in the wake of Partition, her narrative is haunted by her constant fear of the Mussalman as the abductor/violator of Hindu women:

> We were scared that if we were doing this to them, they might also harm us while escaping . . . When a man realises that he is going to die, do you think he would spare others? He would kill as many would come his way. So in addition to being happy, we feared that Mussalmans would abduct our girls. They may do this while fleeing. We were scared that they might cut us into small pieces. (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 136)

Even while adorning the garb of the aggressor/victmiser, Subhashini perceives herself and her community as potential victims of Muslim aggression. Her buoyant rationalisation of voluntary violence against Muslims is thus implicated in a discourse of security that masquerades violence in the name of counter-violence, annihilation in the name of protection. The desire to secure the "self" has as its upshot the desire to make insecure the "other," and her narrative rationalises violence

against the "other" in the name of personal, communal and national security.

For Subhashini, the Partition thus marked the final resolution of the chronic conflict between her own Jat community and the Muslim Rangars. The Partition ensured that her village was cleansed of the Rangars, obliterating her fears of the evil Muslim—she and her girl students in the *Kanya Gurukul* could finally feel secure and emancipated under their new sense of a liberated Jat identity which fused with an *Arya-Hindu* identity in the moment of India's Partition. However, this new sense of personal/communal/national identity was located primarily within a decimated cultural landscape hitherto inhabited by the Rangars. Right through, Subhashini's life-narrative reveals her complicity in being an active agent of *Arya Samaj's* disruptive communitarian agenda and anti-Muslim sentiments. It was primarily through her complicitious adherence to communitarian and patriarchal conventions that Subhashini could construct a "stable" identity for herself and claim a respectable position within the newly emerging Hindu family, community and nation.[67]

Indeed the Hindu evangelical organisations like the *Arya Samaj* exacerbated women's anxieties about Muslims and integrated their anxieties into the discourse of the broader Hindutva movement which projected a virile, masculine Hindu identity for the new nation. However, the "agency" of women like Subhashini was also critical to the construction of this masculine Hindu identity. Very often, their agency worked at different levels, at times ingeniously, and very often, imperceptibly. Their agency reinforced the dichotomy between Hindus and Muslims by maintaining the Hindu domestic space well beyond the contaminating presence of the Muslims. It operated in such a way that women like Subhashini failed to transgress their family and community boundaries to identify with the agony of their Muslim counterparts. This becomes evident towards the end of Subhashini's narrative where she looks upon the suffering of Muslim women as something divinely ordained: "But the revenge was taken by *Parmeshwar* himself. Women were cut into small pieces. So were children" (103). It is presumably this pretext of

suspicion and piety which prevents her from forging any sense of shared identity with the Muslim women victimised during the Partition though she occasionally expresses her dismay at the dreadful suffering of such women.

It ensues that an important part of Subhashini's construction of her own self in the present temporality, the image that she presents to the narrator/reader, is embedded in her sense of an overarching Hindu national identity. Decades after the Partition, she continues to declare her loyalty to *Arya Samaj* and its ideal of cultural nationalism and she even rues its decline in the present: "Look, I'm the President of Haryana *Arya Samaj*, but people take no interest in its progress. Hardly four or six men attend the annual function" (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 188). She clubs such statements with the memory of exceptionally strong loyalties in the pre-Partition past. In this way, a sense of religious nationalism is woven into the texture of her statements about present identities and memories of past identities.

Subhashni's life-narrative thus attempts to carve for herself a niche in the world and to define her own unique positionality vis-à-vis the events of the past. In her narrative, however, Subhashini's identity comes through as a splintered one despite her best efforts to bask in the glory of a strident *Arya* Hindu identity cast in the crucible of the violent Partition. Even as Subhashini strives to achieve a sense of her own self, the "discontents" (Miller ix) of her narrative betray multiple selves and identities constructed out of fragmented and disjointed personal and collective memories. She emerges as a split self—the categories of the victim, victimiser and witness coalesce in her fragile identity so much so that she seems to speak in different registers—the tenor of her voice constantly shifting from that of the victimiser to that of the victimised or even that of the passive witness.[68]

The "discontents" of the narrative are exemplified in the divided self (the narrating voice) that corresponds to an interrupted narration interspersed with gaps, repetitions and pauses. An infernal cycle of repetitions punctuates the events—killing and violence become leitmotifs. Interestingly, there is no attempt made to fuse the events into a sequential mode. At times,

the pace of the narration comes close to panting. Especially, while bearing witness to the escalation of violence, the testimony becomes highly episodic as in the fragment entitled: *Giddhon ka Raj Tha* (*The Vultures Ruled*) (180-84):

> *Durgandh*! Dead bodies . . . you know, water had stopped flowing in the canals and the drains were choked with dead bodies. Somebody's head was lying somewhere while the body was elsewhere. *Narsamhar*! (qtd. in Datta, *Violence*, 182)

These hyperbolic expressions (*Durgandh, Narsamhar,* canals "choked with dead bodies") are apparently meant to capture the intensity of the difficult situation. In circumstances in which violence becomes a way of life, people fall short of words to describe the more overwhelming, spectacular events and often use a metaphorical language to make sense of a self and reality which have been disturbed by the uncertainties of the situation. However, as Benstock observes, even a well-built linguistic fortress cannot safeguard the conscious, subjective "I" from being fragmented (1044). The narrative renders Subhashini's experience in words without attempting to mend the cracks, either those of reality or the self. The female narrator "I" does not stand any longer at the centre of the narrative discourse. It gives way involuntarily to the unconscious which surfaces in the narrative in the form of psychic memories loaded with sounds and sights: "We used to hear all kinds of sounds and noises. The crying and wailing of women . . . Please don't ask . . . We used to hear the sound of cutting, chopping. Can still hear the echo of the sound . . . *Awaaj aati rahti hai na* . . . Don't ask . . . *Kuchh na poochho* . . . (qtd. in Datta, *Violence* 135).

Towards the end of her work—in a letter addressed to Subhashini, written three years after her death—Nonica Datta contrasts Subhashini's sense of the self with those of the renowned Punjabi writer, Amrita Pritam and Datta's own aunt, Vash. Both these remarkable women suffered in different ways during the Partition and in a sense are its victims. Datta considers the testimonies of these three different women as three parallel histories. For Datta, these testimonies not only reveal the fragility

and fragmentation of female identities during the Partition but also opens up the possibility of engendering differential histories of victims, victimisers, witnesses, survivors and aggressors. Significantly, Subhashini offers us a different perspective on the Partition's carnivalesque violence which is often narrated from the perspective of an already immunised victim; shockingly, she makes us realise that the non-victims of the Partition could wreak near genocidal violence on fellow human beings. To this extent, Subhashini's narrative corroborates much of the recent work that looks at the Partition as a case of genocide/ethnic cleansing.[69] Besides, her life-narrative helps us reconstruct a gendered pre-history of Partition's bloodiness.

The foregoing discussions attempted to unscramble the evolutionary dilemmas of secular nationalism and gendered kinship/citizenship in India by addressing the crossways of gendered violence, religious nationalism, gendered memory and citizenship issues through an analysis of life narratives of women centred on the Partition of India. These unfortunate women and their stories push the art of storytelling and life writing to new frontiers, particularly through the depiction of sexuality, gender, and lived trauma. Through a deft concurrence of words and wounds, they give expression to the most thorny, even traumatic stories as they battle with the whirlpools of memory. Juxtaposing lived experience and politics, these women and their narratives both redefine and reshape the parameters of conventional discourses on the partition.

A feminist historical/anthropological analysis with an exclusive emphasis on life narratives by women has been maintained throughout the course of this discussion. Such an approach foregrounds the experiential dimension of traumatic events like the Partition, puts both the community and state narratives under erasure and demonstrates how modernist regimes of power and knowledge mediate the position of woman in the nation. The focus on women's life stories, besides introducing women as participants into the discourse, upholds a methodological choice that puts their lived experiences at the centre, as against their conventional status in official histories as passive objects

of the discourse. Such a methodological emphasis, positively, opens up the dynamics of personal experiences shaping history and memory, enabling the figure of the woman to emerge as a political agency fundamental to the Partition. All through the analysis, significant attention has been paid to the configurations and reconfigurations of female identity as many women found themselves implicated in a Partition engendered vicious cycle within which they had to persistently manage multiple identities.

Interestingly, when one begins to examine the specific nature of personal experience—which oral history and much of contemporary feminism address—any universal explanation of the unitary "self" shatters. This is where the interplay between life narratives and feminism becomes really productive: the process of telling the story is a process of constructing a self and it is a self which is created in the spatio-temporal moment, constructed in the particular frame of the interview/narrative.[70] Exploding the unitary self thus becomes a way of challenging the notion of "truth" outside of a specific context and this opens up significant possibilities for oral historians who are concerned with contextualising the "truth" offered by their interviewees. Many feminists also consider this instability a liberation—any notion of a subjective identity has to be constructed within a social framework which renders this identity constantly fragile. They consistently insist that masculinity and femininity are "created" by society and can never be complete, and offers a theoretical basis for understanding the social construction of gender identities.[71]

However, this postmodern accent on the deconstructed or decentred subjectivity has incited "palpable feminist panic" (Brown 72) among politically committed feminists as they believe that such an emphasis forecloses the possibility of any female agency for change—in the decentred self, possibility of agency appears rather limited.[72] However, postmodern feminists have attempted to reclaim the concept of agency, redefining and relocating it within the decentred self. Many of them argue that greater possibilities of agency and political action arise from such a decentering of the self. For them, the universal subject shall remain an illusion as the subject can only be "transitory,

contingent and relational to context and power" (McLaughlin 11). The subject is no longer seen as an essence, but rather as the "'subject in process,' never unitary, never complete" (Marshall 108-09).

The Partition of 1947 was for sure a moment of rupture—a moment that extents to the present and the future—and a schism that left millions of survivors/refugees with the notion of an incomplete/partitioned self. Refugees and immigrants engendered by the Partition are still forced to struggle with the reconfigurations and ambiguities of personal and social identities.[73] Such fragmented selves are easily discernible in life narratives in the context of the Partition, as evidenced by the foregoing discussions. Thus, a gendered analysis of women's life narratives on the Partition completely shatters the myth of the coherent universal subject.[74] Further, Partition narratives are predominantly trauma narratives which trigger the destabilisation of traditional life-writing genres like autobiography. As trauma narratives, they attempt to represent the "unrepresentable" and works against any coherent narrative representation of the self. They are the product of the paradoxes resulting from the conflict created when the representation of the self and trauma overlap (Gilmore 19).

After all, these are narratives on the Partition, located in a temporality outside the world of moral responsibility, where everything was tentative and anything was possible. In fact, these women's narratives are as shattered and splintered as the external reality and referentiality. There are very few grand narratives that mirror the uniqueness of a certain life-course and even when there are such narratives, they tend to betray a fragmented "I." Eventually, these narratives often emerge as the story of the fissured female "I" in its relation to the world in a particular moment, the narrative mediating the space between "self" and society. As Martine Burgos suggests, life narratives "never lose sight of the two poles of human reality, the individual and the social. It is not the formation of the private self which is the main goal of the story, but the connection between these two poles" (31).

However, no grand claims as to any comprehensive understanding of the changing contours of female subjectivity during the period of the Partition, are being made here. Even as this discussion illuminates the counterarchives of a differential history by exploring the multiple incommensurable narratives that disorient the official accounts of India's Partition, it is—inevitably—located within a field of many limitations and difficulties. As it is evident from the foregoing discussion, most of the testimonies analysed so far are from Sikh/Hindu survivors of Partition living in northern India, especially Punjab and Delhi. This is because it has extensively drawn on the work by researchers of Indian origin who, for diverse reasons have preferred to do their fieldwork in north India—mostly around Delhi, Punjab and Haryana. Also, given the fact that it was the Punjab province—with more or less equal Sikh and Muslim populations—which bore the major brunt of the Partition enterprise in the northwest, most survivors on the Indian side of the border happen to be Punjabis of Sikh descent. Yet, it may be argued that, in terms of motifs and experiences, these narratives of violence are—to a large extent—symptomatic of the Partition discourse on violence in general.[75]

Also, with respect to gendered violence, the focus has been narrowed down to Partition narratives that address violence against woman since that is the proposed purpose of this work. However, as Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* remarkably demonstrates, the narratives of children and "untouchables" are also glaringly absent in Partition discourses. Another aspect that has been intentionally left out of this discussion is the question of intimate violence visited upon men. Although these elisions do not significantly diminish the critique of gendered nationalism tendered here, it is possible that inclusion of these instances would appreciably augment one's understanding of the significance of gendered violence enacted at dangerous moments in history, vitiated by socio-political conflicts.

The above stated elisions notwithstanding, it is hoped that this discussion of women's life narratives on the dreadful—and inevitably gendered—violence that erupted in the aftermath of

India's Partition does more than tribute the trauma of suffering undergone by individual women.[76] Throughout, the emphasis of the analysis has been on illuminating the ways in which women's individual selves were consistently being fashioned and refashioned in line with the changing contours of familial, communal and national politics. Many of the women emerge out of these narratives as traumatised, split selves who are forced to bear the burden of multiple, fleeting and often conflicting identities. Up to very recent times the dreams and views of these women remained conspicuously absent in most histories exploring the creation of India and Pakistan. This literal abasement, eviction from the national space was made feasible by the subtle yet pervasive strategy of denial of subjectivity. This orchestrated violence against women was made possible by the eviction of women from the powerful domain of language/articulation, the Lacanian "symbolic order." In this context, the enterprising attempt by feminist oral historians to retrieve women's life narratives ultimately validates these women's traumatic lives by foregrounding an additional archive and promoting a differential history of the cataclysmic event. The endeavour here was to build upon these women's hitherto unarticulated differential notions of the nation to configure a rather more tangible challenge to our current understandings of national identity. In the present subcontinental scenario, these daring narratives by women and their undertaking to reintroduce the violent and the gendered into the historical archives is also politically warranted. It marks an imperative intervention into latent political negotiations that will determine the future welfare of the two subcontinental nations as well as women's participatory and active citizenship in them.[77]

End Notes

1. See for instance Sumit Sarkar's *Modern India, 1885-1947* and Bipan Chandra's *Modern India: A History Textbook for Class XII* (NCERT), and *India's Struggle for Independence*, 1857-1947.
2. For instance, women did not initially figure in the category "Subaltern," there was not a great deal of writing on them (except Partha Chatterjee) nor

were they initially members of the collective of Subaltern Studies. In the later issues of the series one finds more women contributors—Spivak, Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana are amongst them. Of late, however, more writing has appeared on women and gender. See Vol. 11 on *Community, Gender and Violence*, for instance. For a critique of the Subaltern studies' reflection on the gender question, see Kamala Visweswaran's essay, "Small Speeches, Subaltern Gender: Nationalist Ideology and Its Historiography" in volume IX as it interrogates Subaltern Studies even while it participates in the collective's ongoing deliberations on subalternity and gender, and Himani Bannerji's "Projects of Hegemony: Towards a Critique of Subaltern Studies' Resolution of the Women's Question" in *Economic and Political Weekly* 35.11 (2000): 902-20.

3. For example, the Khalistan movement in Punjab demanding a separate country for the Sikhs of that state, the Ayodhya imbroglio and the unprecedented emergence of the Hindu nationalist parties on the centrestage of Indian politics reinvigorated an interest in the Partition, secularism, communalism and nationalism in India.

4. A plethora of terms are used by different scholars of life writing to refer to the particular methodological approach adopted in this study. These terms include "life narrative," "testimonio," "oral history," "life history," "life story," "interactive interviewing," "auto/biographical," "memoir" and so on. For the general purposes of this study, feminist oral history, testimonies, interviews and memoirs are all treated as forms of life narrative. While at times these explicit terms may be referred to, the umbrella term, "life narrative" is used to indicate the general methodological approach employed in this study.

5. Even though not all of women's oral history of the Partition has been collected by feminists, feminist theory has made a significant contribution to the ways in which many oral historians conduct their studies and appreciate the narrated memories they recollect.

6. One faces several challenges while using life-narratives/oral testimonies in historical analysis. In the case of Partition narratives, there are a few significant challenges. First, there is no way to verify the veracity of the accounts. In some cases, the accounts directly contradict those sanctioned by conventional history. Second, there is a relatively long—forty or fifty year—gap between the experiences and the retelling. There is no way to know if the women are remembering the experiences or acting out a pre-conceived screenplay. Despite the challenges they present, oral history expands the amount of information to which feminist scholars have access and offers a different and extremely important perspective on history.

7. Memory is a major theme in contemporary cultural studies. Classical works such as Maurice Halbwachs's *The Collective Memory* and Sir Frederick

Bartlett's *Remembering* highlight the social nature of what is usually taken to be individual memory. Sir Frederick Bartlett, *Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1932). Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory.* Trans. Francis and Vida Ditter. New York: Harper, 1980.

8. Jill Didur argues that a certain silence pervades in literature that is supposed to represent the events of the Partition and violated/abducted women's experience of the event. Through an analysis of Jyotirmoyee Devi's novel *The River Churning* (1995), she argues that this silence serves a disciplinary purpose in redefining our attitude towards Partition history. See Didur's *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory* (New Delhi: Pearson, 2007) and "At a Loss for Words: Reading the Silence in South Asian Women's Partition Narratives" (*Topia* 4. 53-71).
9. Despite their inherent limitations, the oral narratives offer a different perspective of looking at history. With their characteristic fluidity in terms of sequential time, they smudge the neat, definitive physical teleologies within which history locates itself and enables us to train the historical lens at a slightly oblique angle, and to see what this point of view offers.
10. Shauna Singh Baldwin, in fact acknowledges Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* as integral to the writing of her novel, *What the Body Remembers*, a work that narrates the development of a sense of "honour" and shame within a pre-Partition Sikh family that provides contextual backdrop to the later enactment of sexual violence. Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Ice-candy Man* anticipates the revisionist perspective on the Partition found in the oral/cultural histories from the 1990s onwards and one is often surprised by the thematic similarities in the treatment of gendered violence these texts together offer.
11. This incident of gruesome violence has achieved an iconic status in the popular narratives of Sikh women's martyrdom, thanks to the popularity of the televised version of Bhisham Sahni's autobiographical fictional narrative, *Tamas* which showed a number of tall, elegant Punjabi women of all ages jumping into a village well one after the other with a certain stoic nonchalance written all over their faces. As early as in the immediate wake of the event, certain signs of hagiography were visible. "The Statesman," an English language newspaper, on April 15, 1947, published an article comparing the act of the women of Thoa Khalsa to that of "the Rajput tradition of self-immolation when their men-folk were no longer able to defend them."
12. Gyanendra Pandey, in *Remembering Partition* has examined how communities and local traditions reconstitute themselves through the language of Partition violence that privileges a particular reconstruction of the past.

13. Interestingly, "Maan" signifies "honour," value or pride in most north Indian languages. Such a linguistic signification perhaps adds to the acceptance of Maan Kaur's status as a valiant women who died to safeguard the honour of the community.
14. Cynthia Keppley-Mahmood, in her article, on martyrdom among the Khalistani Sikhs argues that martyrdom is a tactic used by the weak, a ploy used to make the many, inevitable deaths in their confrontation with the powerful somewhat worthy. In this context, it is not surprising that the Sikhs— a small community limited to a few states in the larger Indian context— have developed a refined philosophical tradition of martyrdom. The celebration of martyrdom among the weak also perturbs the powerful as they realise that each victory over the weak creates more and more martyrs, further animating the passions of the weak. See her article, "Playing the Game of Love: Passion and Martyrdom among Khalistani Sikhs" (134).
15. *Shiromani Prabandhak Gurudwara Committee* (SGPC) is the Sikh religious organisation entrusted with the upkeep of the *gurudwaras* (Sikh centres of worship) in the three Indian states of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana. In the years following the 1947 Partition, the committee had collected accounts of violence against the Sikhs in Punjab and published them in 1950 under the title, *Muslim League Attack on Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab, 1947*.
16. For instance, Gyanendra Pandey presents the story of a young girl from Thoa Khalsa— the site of Maan Kaur's and Mata Lajjawanti's deaths— whose cousin and servant tried to coerce her into joining a group of women who had lined up to drown themselves in the well. However, she and some other women escaped death, she with the timely help of her mother. Pandey quotes her: "Whoever could—escaped. However we could . . . wherever we could" (*Remembering*, 193).
17. However, one cannot surmise that all the women who committed suicide or were murdered by kin members were reluctant victims, since women as much as men internalised and romanticised their role as protectors of their community's honour. For example, Menon and Bhasin present the testimony of Durga Rani, a social worker at the Karnal Mahila Ashram, a refugee camp for abducted/widowed women and their children, who describes the inconsiderate treatment meted out to women and girls who had been raped, mutilated and/or abducted: "Their families said, 'How can we keep them now? Better that they are dead.' Many of them were so young—18, 15, 14 years old—what remained of them now? Their "character" was now spoilt. . . . I saw it all—mothers telling their daughters they were ruined . . ." (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin 32).

18. Michel Foucault, in his *Discipline and Punish*: *The Birth of the Prison,* posits that the discourse of the soul functions as one of the technologies of power over the body. To Foucault, it is a flawed claim to call the soul an illusion; the soul is produced consistently within, on and around the body, rather than being an ideological effect. The soul is a peripheral signification that challenges and puts under erasure the inner/outer dichotomy itself, a kind of interior psychic space etched on the body as a social signification that consistently forsakes itself as such.
19. Kamoke is a *tehsil* in the Gujranwala district of Pakistani Punjab. In the history of Partition, it is infamous for the bloody carnage of hundreds of people who had boarded a train to India on August 8, 1947. For a detailed account of the collective violence and mass migration in Gujranwala, see Ilyas Chattha's *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot, 1947-1961*. Karachi: Oxford UP, 2011.
20. Lynda E. Boose, "Crossing the River Drina: Bosnian Rape Camps, Turkish Impalement, and Serb Cultural Memory." *Signs* 28.1 (2002): 71-96.
21. Feminist narratives of rape, on the contrary, Sunder Rajan posits, resist narrative determinism by "representing a raped woman as one who becomes a subject through rape rather than merely one subjected to its violation; by structuring a post-rape narrative that traces her strategies of survival instead of a rape-centred narrative that privileges chastity . . . and, finally, by counting the cost of rape for its victims in terms more complex than the extinction of female selfhood in death or silence" (77). Sharon Marcus makes a similar point in her essay, "Fighting bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention" in *Feminists Theorise the Political*. Ed. Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott. New York: Routledge, 1992. 385-403.
22. For an interesting fictional, ironic take on this theme, see Saadat Hasan Manto's short story, "Toba Tek Singh" which has almost become synonymous with the Partition of India. In "Toba Tek Singh," an exchange of lunatics is sanctioned in a mental asylum in Lahore. The main character, Bhishan Singh (popularly known as Toba Tek Singh, after the name of his village), tragically fails to understand where his village—Toba Tek Singh—will end up, and when he realises that it will be located in Pakistan, and he is to be sent to India, he 'goes mad' and positions himself in no-man's-land, signifying his sovereignty over both his body and the land. Most literary scholars (Mushirul Hasan, Arjun Mahey) interpret "Toba Tek Singh" as a dark-comic allegory on the transfer of populations over the border. More specifically, perhaps, it is an allegory on the mutual recovery of women that was warranted by the governments of India and Pakistan post Partition, and the politicisation of female bodies. See Saadat Hasan Manto's "Toba Tek

Singh." *India's Partition: Process, Strategy and Mobilisation*. Ed. Mushirul Hasan. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1993. 396-402.

23. Joseph Alter, in his analysis of what he terms "Gandhi's biomorality," elaborates how Gandhi's politics of anticolonial resistance countered the colonial imagination of the native body through its own body politics. See Joseph S. Alter's *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet and the Politics of Nationalism.* Philadephia: Pennsylvania UP, 2000.

24. Jawaharlal Nehru, in one of his speeches on the Partition remarked: "What was broken up which was of the highest importance was something very vital and that was the body of India" (qtd. in Sankaran Krishna's article, "Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India"). Such metaphors and metonymies were popular in current political discourses.

25. The term "biopolitics" is used in the Foucauldian sense to refer to regimes that regulate populations using "biopower" or "the explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations." See Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality. Vol. I: An Introduction.* Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1978, p. 140.

26. Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949 defined the "abducted person" thus:

(*a*)'abducted person' means a male child under the age of sixteen years or a female of whatever age who is, or immediately before the 1st day of March, 1947, was a Muslim (Pakistan's law stated Hindu or Sikh) and who, on or after that day or before the first day of January, 1949, has become separated from his or her family and is found to be living with or under control of any other individual or family, and in the latter case includes a child born to any such female after the said date (qtd. in Menon and Bhasin, *Borders* 261).

27. See Urvashi Butalia's "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition" (*Economic and Political Weekly* 28.17 (1993): WS12-WS21), Veena Das's *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1994) and Menon and Bhasin's "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition" (*Economic and Political Weekly* 28.17 (1993): WS2-WS11).

28. As against violence against women, gendered violence may be defined as the programmatic and institutionally sanctioned violence that works through the constructs of gender and often at the crossways of sexuality, religion and national identity.

29. According to some unofficial records, close to 100,000 women were raped and abducted during the "population exchange." The official estimate stood at 50,000 Muslim women in India and 33,000 Sikh and Hindu women in

Pakistan. However, Mridula Sarabhai believed that the official figures were much less than the actual figures. See Aparna Basu's *Mridula Sarabhai: Rebel with a Cause* (133).

30. Such Pakistan-Jinnah-Muslim League bashing is clearly perceptible throughout the memoirs analysed in this chapter. On the occasion of Jinnah's death, for instance, Kamla Patel observes that she "found that the Muslim refugees who had come from U.P. and Bihar showed hardly any signs of sorrow at Jinnah's death" (119).
31. A Congress nationalist, Mridula Sarabhai participated in the non-cooperation movement and later joined Gandhi at the Sabarmati Ashram. She was General Secretary, All India Congress Committee, 1945-46.
32. However, many recovered women found themselves alienated in their original families which now either deified them or despised them. For key insights into the life of such women, see Rajinder Singh Bedi's short story, *Lajwanti*—which depicts the experience of a local community's involvement with the activities of the central recovery operation after Partition and the ensuing trauma of a woman recovered and restored to her family—in *Stories About the Partition of India.* (Ed. Alok Bhalla. Vol.1. New Delhi: Harper, 1994. 55-66).
33. One such story is that of one Buta Singh who became a martyr of love. He went to Pakistan, in search of his recovered wife and lost his life there. Though he could not win back his wife, he ended his life in Pakistan and was buried there according to his wish, though he was Indian by citizenship. This real story which finds a mere one-paragraph mention in Dominique Lapierre's *Freedom at Midnight* has inspired many popular Indian movies like *Gadar* and *Shaheed Buta Singh.*
34. The purity myth lying at the core of the *Ramayana* which gained wide currency during the period is worth remembering here. Sita, despite there being no general doubt about her chastity, could claim her respectability only when she reclaimed her status as a wife; her mark of "purity" became "visible" only after Ram accepted her back into the family fold. Hence, marriage became one of the premier technologies of redomesticating the dislocated women who signified a "moral danger" to the social order.
35. Gyanendra Pandey, in a recent major intervention in Subaltern Studies has recast the figure of the subaltern subject into the category of the "subaltern citizen," implying varying degrees of subalternity within the singular category of citizenship. See Pandey's "Introduction" to *Subaltern Citizens and their Histories* (London: Routledge, 2010).
36. For these social workers, exercising agency as a "woman" meant asserting one's own independence and acting in the interest of the abducted women,

i.e., against the policies of the state. Obviously, acting as a "social worker" meant implementing the diktats of the state with respect to the recovery operation.

37. Dipesh Chakrabarty, who has worked extensively on the Bengali Partition, has articulated the complexities involved in re-covering the details of victims' experiences: "Memory is a complex phenomenon that reaches out to far beyond what normally constitutes a historian's archives, for memory is much more than what the mind can remember or what objects can help us document about the past. It is also about what we do not always consciously know that we remember until something actually, as the saying goes, jogs our memory. And there remains the question, so much discussed these days in the literature on the Indian Partition, of what people do not even wish to remember, the forgetting that comes to our aid in dealing with pain and unpleasantness in life. Memory, then, is far more complicated than what historians can recover and it poses ethical challenges to the investigator-historian who approaches the past with one injunction: tell me all." See his article, "Remembered Villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition," p. 2143.

38. One need not raise the issue of gender above communalism/racism. The fact remains that many women, particularly young women, remained silent after the Partition. One reason was that they did not deem their story relevant to the larger picture of the event, especially when it evoked elements of sexual violation or gender-related concerns. Thus, they deemed their experiences as women to be trivial in comparison.

39. The limited access to resources owing to strict regulations regarding the issue of visas is one major problem that hampers Partition scholarship. One has to be luckily born a citizen of a third country if s/he wants to do fieldwork in both the countries.

40. Such deliberate balancing acts with regard to the representation of violence are easily discernible in many popular fictional accounts of the Partition, where violence from one side is matched by equally horrendous violence from the other side. See the treatment of violence in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan,* for example.

41. Gyanendra Pandey, in *Remembering Partition*, offers an extended meditation on the place of the Partition in both memory and history. He explores how violence in particular locales has transformed those centres (Delhi) and the ways events in a specific locality (violence at the Garhmukhteshwar *mela* in 1946) have been inserted into the framework of nationalist ideologies and national histories. Most importantly, Pandey traces the divergence between the history of historians and the memories of those who lived through 1947.

42. See Anders Bjorn Hansen's *Partition and Genocide: Manifestation of Violence in Punjab, 1937-1947.* (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2002), Paul R. Brass' "The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946– 47: Means, Methods, and Purposes." (*Journal of Genocide Research* 5.1 (2003): 71–101 and Ishtiaq Ahmed's *Punjab Bloodied, Partitioned and Cleansed* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2011).
43. The Indian state of Haryana was formed in 1965 by partitioning southeastern areas of partitioned Punjab. It gave the Sikhs of Punjab, a Sikh majority state and the Hindus of Haryana, a Hindu-Hindi majority state. Southeast Punjab (Haryana) which hardly figures in Partition histories is the focus of Datta's work.
44. A prominent *Arya Sama*j activist, Subhashini founded the *Kanya Gurukul*, Khanpur which later on developed into the *Bhagat Phool Singh Women's University*, the only women's university in north India offering residential, professional education to more than 2000 girl students. She was awarded the *Padma Sree*, one of the highest civilian honours by the Government of India in 1976, in recognition of her pioneering work in the field of girls' education in northern India.
45. Datta wants her text to be read as "parallel history" rather than as a "factual" or "historical document." However, she does not categorically delineate her conception of "parallel history"—perhaps, espousing an aesthetic whose ingenuity lies in the "gaps," "crevices" and "silences," the plenitude of which not only infuses but also validates a spoken narrative, as opposed to the "archives" with their fastidiousness of "facts."
46. Following Derrida, "supplement" is used here in the dual sense—that which looks like a mere addition, a discretionary extra; but also, that which supplements, or fulfils a lack (see Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology,* 149).
47. Salman Rushdie's postcolonial fiction—*Midnight's Children*—deftly encaptures the stories of children born at the stroke of the midnight of August 15, 1947. These children symbolise the attempts of different peoples to come to terms with the Partition and the individual narrative is fashioned in such a way as to reflect the nation's narrative. As Rushdie's narrator Saleem Sinai informs us: "I mean quite simply that I have begun to crack all over like an old jug—that my poor body, singular, unlovely, buffeted by too much history, subjected to drainage above and drainage below, mutilated by doors, brained by spittoons, has started coming apart at the seams. In short, I am literally disintegrating, slowly for the moment, although there are signs of an acceleration" (37).
48. Southeast Punjab, present-day Haryana was marked by a certain anti-women attitude, making the issue of women empowerment an important one in

social and community development. Even today, Haryana is notorious for its lowest sex ratio among the Indian states. The *Arya Samaj* evinced special interest in girls' education as it wanted to resist both the "civilising mission" of the colonial administration which foregrounded the "backwardness" of Indian women and the evangelical mission of the Christian missionaries who launched schools for girls. See Madhu Kishwar's article, "Arya Samaj and Women's Education: Kanya Mahavidyalaya, Jalandhar." *Economic and Political Weekly* 21.17 (1986): WS9- WS24.

49. Usually, mothering and motherhood figure prominently in the personal narratives of female survivors of traumatic events. However, Subhashini's story is an offbeat one in that it spares little space for her mother or stepmother; nor does she say anything about her own experiences as a mother. Instead, it tells the story of an immortal relationship between a daughter and her father.

50. An agriculturist community of traditionally non-elite tillers in northern India and Pakistan, notified under the category of "Other Backward Classes" by the Government of India. Most of the Jats in Pakistan are Muslim whereas the Jat Population in India is divided into two castes—Sikhs in Punjab and Hindus elsewhere. In the colonial period, Jats emerged as the influential caste. The model of the "dominant caste" in a given region as described by M.N. Srinivas, can be easily applied to the Jats of Haryana—besides being economically and numerically stronger than any other caste, the Jats also occupied a relatively higher position in the ritual hierarchy. See his volume, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays* (Bombay: Asia, 1962).

51. The *Arya Samaj* maintained its own pantheon of martyrs—a tradition inaugurated by the murder of Pandit Lekh Ram in 1897 and consolidated by that of Swami Shraddhanand in 1926. Immediately after his death by murder, Bhagat Phool Singh was also beatified and incorporated into this tradition which could be readily invoked to ossify the Jat communal identity.

52. Wife of a *Nambardar*, a village headman.

53. Panchayat system sanctioned by the principle of *Sangathan*—organisation by democratic principles—was a hallmark of the Jat community for centuries and the Panchayat wielded considerable social power.

54. Exploring material from late 19th century and early 20th century Uttar Pradesh, Charu Gupta argues that Hindu revivalist organisations like the *Arya Samaj* drew upon the image of the Muslim as a threat to Hindu domesticity for the purpose of religio-political mobilisation of the Hindus. See Gupta's *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims and the Hindu Public in Colonial India.* New York: Palgrave, 2002.

55. Hindu patriarchy, derived from the ancient Hindu *Dharma*, often denied identity, sexuality, personhood and social standing to widows, enforcing upon them a life of renunciation, celibacy, piety and asceticism. Institutionalising widows' marginality, Hindu patriarchy often relegated them to a state of liminality, between being physically alive and socially dead.

56. In order to counter the trend, the *Arya Samaj* advocated *Karewa*, a system by which a widow can be remarried to her dead husband's widower brother. Subhashini's father himself was remarried according to this tradition and wanted the Jat widows like Shiriya to follow suit. *Karewa*, also known as *karao*, or *chaddar andazi* was a legacy of the old Rig-Vedic custom of *niyog* (levirate marriage) which was prevalent in the geographical region of Haryana-Punjab during the early Vedic Aryan settlements. This form of remarriage was not accompanied by any kind of religious ceremony and the woman merely resumed wearing her ornaments and coloured clothes which she had abandoned upon her husband's death. Such a tradition, ostensibly empowering for the women, nevertheless limits their mobility within her deceased husband's family and also keeps her property rights limited to that family. For a detailed discussion of *karewa* and some Jat women's resistance to it, see Prem Chowdhry's article, "Socio- Economic Dimensions of Certain Customs and Attitudes: Women of Haryana in the Colonial Period," in *Economic and Political Weekly* 22.48 (1987): 2060-66.

57. Chhotu Ram was a highly influential Jat politician of the Unionist Party in Punjab. Nonica Datta has elsewhere deftly dealt with the intricate theme of identity formation of the complex community of the Jats in the present-day Haryana. According to her, three factors played the most important role in shaping this identity—the *qaumi* (community) narratives, the role of the *Arya Samaj* as a religious reform movement and the politics of Chhotu Ram through the medium of the Unionist Party. See *Nonica Datta's Forming an Identity: A History of the Jats*.

58. Veer Banda Bairagi (Banda Singh Bahadur, 1670-1716) was a Sikh military commander, venerated as one of the most blessed martyrs in the Sikh tradition. He is most renowned for capturing the Mughal provincial capital, Sirhind. On June 9, 1716, Banda was brutally tortured and publicly executed by the Mughals.

59. Annette Kuhn observes that in memory narratives, time rarely comes across as completely sequential or incessant. She writes: "The tenses of the memory text do not fix events to specific moments of time or temporal sequences. Events are repetitive or cyclical ('at one time ...') or seem to be set apart from fixed orders of time ('once upon a time ...')." See Kuhn's article, "A

Journey through Memory" in *Memory and Methodology.* Ed. by Susannah Radstone. Oxford: Berg, 2000, p. 189.

60. In one sense, Phool Singh's tragic death finds a parallel in the death of Swami Shraddhanand. Shraddhanand was the founder of the *Gurukul* where students aged between six and twenty five would lead a life of celibacy learning Vedic literature. He promoted the *Arya Samaj* programme of *Shuddhi* or reconversion of Muslims into Hindus. He reconverted one Muslim girl, Asghari Begum, renamed her Shanti Devi and offered her education in the *Gurukul*. This incited the Muslims and they murdered him.
61. The conflation thus established between family and nation defines even today the tenor of the Right wing politics in India. The figure of the cow, imagined after the female body, becomes the symbol of a rigid patriarchal matrimony built upon the paradigm of the ideal couple, Ram and Sita. Ram is the quintessential husband, benevolent king and guarantor of the social order; Sita is the symbol of dedicated subservience to the husband who safeguards her and whose family she in turn nurtures. Hence, it ensues that to slaughter a cow is to subvert the intricate nexus of marital, familial, patriarchal and national orders.
62. For a perceptive analysis of the role played by the Arya Samaj in worsening the communal imbroglio in Punjab, see the article by Kenneth W. Jones entitled, "Communalism in the Punjab: The Arya Samaj Contribution." *Journal of Asian Studies* 28.1 (1968): 39-54.
63. See Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* (*The Skeleton*) for a graphic description of such objectionable social traditions in the Punjab region.
64. The Hindu Jats began clamouring for *Kshatriya* status following their recognition as a "martial race" and the subsequent large scale induction into the British army. However, in post-Mandalisation India, the Jats seems to be more interested in asserting their OBC status which ensures better allocation of state resources. With the public clamour for reservations assuming urgency, the earlier uproar for *Kshatriya* status has been consigned to the private sphere.
65. The *Khilafat* movement marks an important event in the troubled history if modern India, as it forged a relationship between the otherwise warring groups of Hindus and Muslims in India, in their fight against the British. For some time, the *Khilafat* and the Non-cooperation movements went hand in hand but only to part ways later.
66. See Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan,* for example in which the peace and calmness of an interior village is destroyed by the dreadful orchestration of violence by external elements.

67. As a life-narrative of a woman living under patriarchy in the colonial period, Subhashini's testimony is full of contradictions—she simultaneously promotes and resists patriarchal hegemony. Such a testimony becomes pertinent as much of the available literature on colonial women foregrounds their resistance to the patriarchal structures engendered by orthodox Hinduism. For instance, the works on the lives of Pandita Ramabhai or Tarabai Shinde. See Sudhir Chandra's *Enslaved Daughter's: Colonialism, Law and Women's Rights* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997) and Rosalind O' Hanlon's *A Comparison between Women and Men: Tarabai Shinde and the Critique of Gender Relations in Colonial India* (Madras: Oxford UP, 1994).
68. David Riches, in his famous work, *The Anthropology of Violence* has famously proposed the "triangle of violence" consisting of the victim, victimiser and the witness as essential to the understanding of all violent situations. In Subhashini's case, however, such neat categories stand erased. See David Riches's article, "The Phenemenology of Violence" in *The Anthropology of Violence.* Ed. David Riches. New York: Blackwell, 1986. 1-27.
69. Scholars like Paul R. Brass have argued that Partition violence must be seen as a case of "retributive genocide," a term used by Allen D. Grimshaw, in "Genocide and Democide," (*Encyclopaedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict,* vol. 2. San Diego: Academic Press, 1999, p. 58) to signify mutual violence perpetrated by locally situated communities. See Brass's article, "The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab, 1946–47: Means, Methods, and Purposes." However, in the case of Subhashini's life-narrative, mutual violence at the time of Partition was minimal. It was more a case of one group attacking the other with the intent of ethnic cleansing and she looks at 1947 as a divine retribution for the singular violent episode of her father's murder in 1942.
70. This conception of the fragmented self is in diametrical opposition with the notion of a coherent self that defines the related genres of biography and autobiography. As Liz Stanley has observed, biography proposes that there is a "coherent, essentially unchanging and unitary self which can be referentially captured by its methods" (8). See her work, *The Autobiographical "I."*
71. It is not suggested here, as some postmodernists have, that difference between men and women does not exist or matter to any analysis, but rather it is suggested that difference is constructed within the confines of the social and the political, and can be altered and changed.
72. Many feminists are concerned about the idea of a decentred subject, suggesting that it is a challenge to the very idea of feminism, both in terms of the loss of agency and the capacity for collective political action.

For instance, feminist theorists like Jane Flax argue that postmodern subjectivity cannot "exercise the agency required for liberatory political activity" (92), (*Disputed Subjects: Essays on Psychoanalysis, Politics and Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1993). In fact, most modernist feminists seem to uphold the notion: "no subject means no identity, which means no identity politics, which means no feminism" (72), (Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction*. London: Routledge, 1994).

73. Over the last decade or so, literature regarding identity politics among Partition refugees and immigrants has grown in abundance. See Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar's *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008), Ravinder Kaur's *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among Punjabi Migrants in Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2007), and *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement, and Resettlement* (New Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, 2008) edited by Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia. For a fictional treatment of the same, see Salman Rushdie's *Shame* and Joginder Paul's *Sleepwalkers.*
74. Many feminist theorists have had the occasion to question Descartes' view of the subject. Cartesian subject, many of these feminists argue, is a masculine one, both in its ability to exercise an autonomy and individuality that were only the prerogative of men, and in the values of superiority that were assigned to those terms. For instance, Sidonie Smith, in her work: *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women's Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* has described "the architecture of the universal subject" as "a hard nut of . . . normative (masculine) individuality" (3).
75. Although the focus is on Partition histories that centre on Punjab region and foreground the calamitous violence as the primary experience of the Partition, one should not normalise or essentialise the Punjab case as the definitive Partition experience. Even as violence remained critical to the way Partition impacted upon people's lives, it was not—as current studies have claimed—the only experience. See for example, recent works by scholars like Vazira Zamindar and Ravinder Kaur.
76. Rather than being mere accounts of a distant past, women's life narratives are about using that past as a smithy to forge the present. In doing so, oral historians not only value their association with the participants of oral history but also passionately hold that oral history should empower women who have been marginalised in both history and historiography.
77. Rajeev Bhargava posits a distinction between "active" and "passive" citizenship. A passive citizen seldom plays any role in the public/political sphere but receives a few benefits from the state in order to live and act

freely in private spaces guaranteed by the state. The active citizen, on the other hand, participates in common deliberations on her/his own good and the good of all, has an interest in which policies have been adopted why, and is prepared in the last instance to exercise power herself/himself. See Bhargava's "Introduction" to *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perspectives.* Ed. Rajeev Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld. New Delhi: Sage, 2005. 13-55.

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