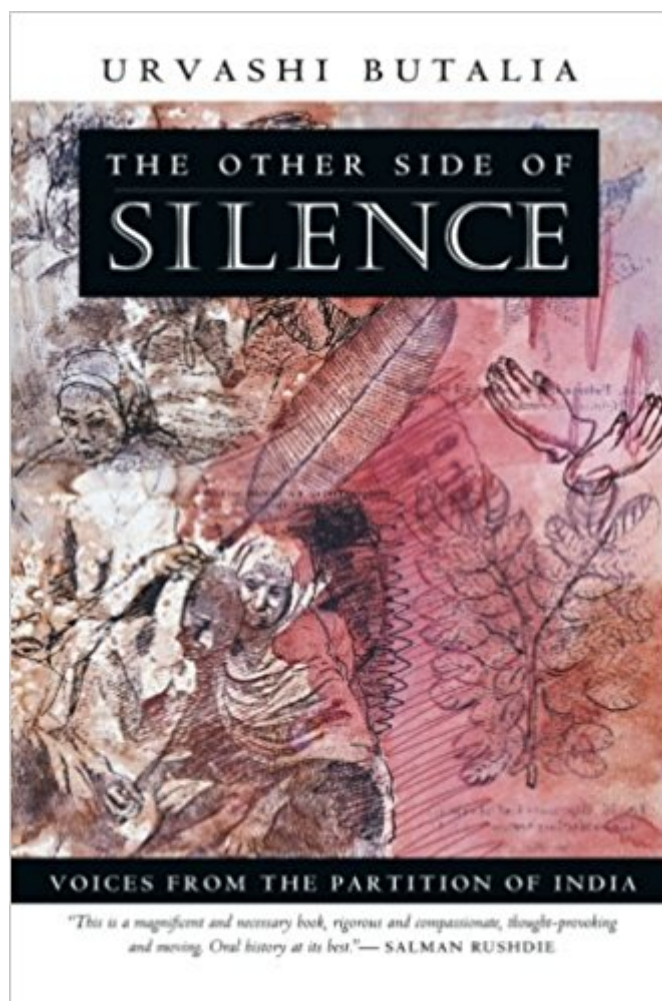


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The Other Side Of Silence: Voices From The Partition Of India



Synopsis

The partition of India into two countries, India and Pakistan, caused one of the most massive human convulsions in history. Within the space of two months in 1947 more than twelve million people were displaced. A million died. More than seventy-five thousand women were abducted and raped. Countless children disappeared. Homes, villages, communities, families, and relationships were destroyed. Yet, more than half a century later, little is known of the human dimensions of this event. In *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia fills this gap by placing peopleâtheir individual experiences, their private painâat the center of this epochal event. Through interviews conducted over a ten-year period and an examination of diaries, letters, memoirs, and parliamentary documents, Butalia asks how people on the margins of historyâchildren, women, ordinary people, the lower castes, the untouchablesâhave been affected by this upheaval. To understand how and why certain events become shrouded in silence, she traces facets of her own poignant and partition-scarred family history before investigating the stories of other people and their experiences of the effects of this violent disruption. Those whom she interviews reveal that, at least in private, the voices of partition have not been stilled and the bitterness remains. Throughout, Butalia reflects on difficult questions: what did community, caste, and gender have to do with the violence that accompanied partition? What was partition meant to achieve and what did it actually achieve? How, through unspeakable horrors, did the survivors go on? Believing that only by remembering and telling their stories can those affected begin the process of healing and forgetting, Butalia presents a sensitive and moving account of her quest to hear the painful truth behind the silence.

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Customer Reviews

In 1947, British-ruled India was split into predominantly Hindu India and predominantly Muslim Pakistan, in what Butalia calls "one of the great human convulsions of history." Within a few months of this division, one million people had died, 12 million had migrated and 75,000 women were abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own. Although these facts are recorded in history, Butalia points out that the particular experiences of individuals are harder to discover. To fill the gap, Butalia, the cofounder of India's first feminist press, has spent 10 years gathering oral histories from those whose voices were often obscured by politics: women, lower castes and children who were separated from their families. She particularly focuses on the "double dislocation" endured by women, whose fates were often decided by the men of their religious communities. For example, many women were "rescued" from interfaith marriages and forced to return to their families; many had to leave children behind or were forced to have abortions. Others committed suicide to avoid forced conversions or rape; one woman describes her attempt to participate in a mass suicide of 90 women who drowned themselves in a well. By including official documents along with personal stories, Butalia shows that in political circles the need to protect women's religious "purity" gave legitimacy to Partition. Although women suffered much violence at the hands of their own communities. Butalia's book is remarkable for the author's critical analysis of her own experiences as well as of the existing literature, and for her skillful demonstration of how the memory of Partition continues to affect India today. (June) Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

â œThe Other Side of Silence is without a doubt one of the most important books ever to be written about the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. More than a history, more than a memoir, it is also an extended reflection on narrative form. Official history has always flinched from acknowledging the full extent of the human cost of Partition. Urvashi Butalia shows us why we cannot afford to forget the suffering, the grief, the pain, and the bewilderment that resulted from the division of the subcontinent. [This] is an extraordinary achievement.â •â "Amitav Ghoshâ œSelective amnesia and memory are at the root of the relationship between human beings and their history. This book pierces that amnesia, elicits buried memories, and lays the foundations for a more evolved relationship between human beings on this subcontinent and their histories of gendered and communal violence.â •â "Kavita Punjabi, Telegraph (Calcutta)“This is a magnificent and necessary book, rigorous and compassionate, thought-provoking and moving. Oral history at its best.”—Salman Rushdieâ œ[This] lays bare the passions of fear and hatred that too often

drive the India-Pakistan relationship. . . . The raw horror of it all is mitigated by the author's skillful prose, which draws the reader into the Indian story. • (Foreign Affairs) Butalia has collected some fascinating material. • (Akash Kapur The New York Times Book Review) Butalia is a pioneer in feminist publishing in India. She is especially alert to the presence and absence of marginal voices. . . . [T]he study of popular interpretations of violence as well as the persistence of memory makes this book a critical, self-reflective work. It may seem paradoxical, but the book's freshness comes also from the fact that it examines wounds that have festered for more than fifty years. • (Amitava Kumar The Nation) Butalia's book is remarkable for the author's critical analysis of her own experiences as well as of the existing literature, and for her skillful demonstration of how the memory of Partition continues to affect India today. • (Publishers Weekly) Butalia's narratives shed light upon the role of religion in shaping identities of families and communities. • (Chandra S. Mallampalli Books & Culture) Libraries collecting on genocide, migrations, and freedom struggles definitely need this work. • (Library Journal)

This is an important book on a subject few have addressed, even marginally. Urvashi Butalia has tackled it head on. Few Indians or Pakistanis, let alone the rest of the world know or even recognize the fundamental ways in which the women and children on both sides of the religious divide paid the price of Partition, literally, with their lives. Sexual violence has always been a weapon of war. Indeed, 'to the victor goes the spoils' has been a war cry for millennia, and women are classed as part of those spoils. This fact is not in and of itself new. However, the scale and magnitude with which the rape, abandonment, and ritual sacrifice of women and children occurred during Partition, and the horrifying extent to which these acts were 'justified' by religious belief and cultural practice, is devastating. The word holocaust, as used in the Biblical sense of 'burnt sacrifice', is actually relevant here. So many women and children were sacrificed, very literally, on the altar of 'honor' as defined by religion and culture during that awful period in our history. The sheer volume of research done by Ms. Butalia's team could easily have allowed the reader to distance themselves, protected by the objectivity of data...an issue that Ms. Butalia addresses at the very outset, at some length. However, she manages to have the voices of those people, the sacrificer as well as the sacrificed, speak out of the silence with aching clarity. She connects the threads of action (and paralyzing inaction) of Governmental agencies British, Indian and of the newly formed Pakistan with an acute historical perception. There are a couple of places where the editors could have had a firmer hand, but in all, a book that needed to be written, and now should be required reading for anyone who wishes to know or understand the events of Partition.

It tells us a heart moving reality of the partition of India. It leaves us with the message that it was not only a partition of two countries but partition of families, ties, friends, and the people themselves. It is an excellent read, a page turner which will not let you put the book down. It is written so beautifully that the readers feel a part of the whole scene

Is a very good read if you have interest in the Partition of India. Related to personal accounts and eye witness stories of the affected people, this book gives a great insight to the unseen brutal reality of the partition of the sub continent experienced by both sides.

needed the book for class.

Needed for school. Came quickly, great price. Would order from company again.

.Somedays I wonder what was in the air the 1940's that made people worldwide so cruel to each other. Having recently read Yasmin Khan's quiet and well-balanced account of the Partition of India, I find Butalia's book adds the human dimension, the pride, the fear, the anguish, and passion that brings the horrors of the Partition alive. Urvashi Butalia's oral histories are extremely important resources for historians, sociologists, and for all who try to understand how the past informs the present. This is a very compelling read. Kim Burdick Stanton, DE

I ordered this book because I am extremely interested in the untold stories of the Partition of India even though the reviews told me not to. I wished I had heeded the advice. The book is incredibly repetitive--to the point of being unreadable. I learned very little. Not worth the time to read or money to purchase.

This book is one of my favorite accounts of partition... I'm surprised by the reviews that say the content is repetitive. I wonder how closely they read it? In that it talks about gendered aspects of partition and oral histories then I suppose it is, but I found it a powerful combination of memoir and history, one that I've turned to again and again over the years. In that it tells multiple tales out of hundreds of thousands of acts of murder, rape and other horrors, I suppose it is repetitious - but that is the stuff of history... and through examining individual narratives Butalia gives insight into the larger forces that shaped and continue to shape modern South Asia.

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