

Research Article

# Feminine Narratives Unveiled: Rebellion and Voices of Women in Urvashi Butalia's Works

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## Abstract

Urvashi Butalia, a distinguished feminist writer and publisher, has played a transformative role in feminist literature by exploring the intricate realities of women's lives, particularly in the context of historical and social upheavals. This article delves into her body of work to examine themes such as feminist history, gender-based violence, the erasure of women's narratives from mainstream history, personal agency, and the pursuit of empowerment. Central to this discussion are her seminal works, including *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, which offers a poignant exploration of women's experiences during the Partition, and *The Weight of Our Sky*, which amplifies lesser-heard voices and stories of resilience. Butalia's writing is characterized by its ability to shed light on marginalized perspectives and to challenge dominant, often patriarchal, historical accounts. By documenting the lives of women who were displaced, silenced, or forgotten in the larger narrative of national history, she offers a nuanced critique of historical amnesia and societal indifference. Her approach is not limited to recounting past injustices; she also emphasizes the importance of agency and empowerment, encouraging women to reclaim their identities and rewrite their histories. This article shows her commitment to social justice and gender equality, highlighting how her works go beyond traditional storytelling to advocate for systemic change. By situating her literary contributions within the larger framework of post-colonial feminism, this article celebrates her efforts to amplify women's voices, foster resilience, and challenge oppressive structures, making her a vital figure in the ongoing struggle for gender equality and justice.

## Keywords

Women, Struggle, Feminine, Urvashi Butalia

## 1. Introduction

With her in-depth examination of women's experiences and challenges, renowned feminist writer and publisher Urvashi Butalia has made a significant impact on the literary world. Her works shed light on feminine stories that are often silenced or ignored, making her a pivotal figure in feminist literature. Scholars have increasingly recognized the im-

portance of revisiting historical narratives through a gendered lens, with recent research exploring the intersection of memory, identity, and trauma in post-colonial contexts. For instance, works by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (*Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*) align closely with Butalia's exploration of Partition, focusing on how na-

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tional and political upheavals affect women's lives in unique and often overlooked ways [1]. Similarly, Chatterjee's analysis of oral histories highlights the importance of capturing lived experiences to counteract historical amnesia. In the broader discourse of gender studies, there has been a growing emphasis on agency and resistance within narratives of trauma, as seen in the works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Judith Butler. This evolving field underscores the need to view women not merely as victims of historical and societal forces but as active participants who resist, adapt, and reclaim their agency. Butalia's writings contribute to this discourse by intertwining personal testimonies with critical reflections on patriarchal systems. This article situates Butalia's work within this broader scholarly context, analyzing how she portrays the complex struggles women endure and the transformative power of amplifying women's voices in public discourse.

## 2. To Create a Feminine Myth

Partition has shaped our fundamental identity and has historically dictated where South Asians are located on the map. An "before Partition" and a "after Partition" are necessary. By reducing the experience of the two countries' separation to its essentials, this view obscures certain aspects of history. It is romanticised to think that Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs lived in peace before Partition, ignoring the complicated religious and sectarian identity divisions that originated with the British colonial rule's "divide-and-conquer" strategy [2].

In India, Hindus and Muslims share commonalities and contrasts in "language, religion, culture, diet and dress." This is stated in Brass 119. Separatism arose at the level of political elites via the construction of symbols for each religious allegiance. Rather than being dictated by abstract political events written down in a textbook, history is shaped by everyday people in this manner. Mythmaking is the process of manipulating symbols in this way. Separatism was also dictated by the fact that Muslims and Hindus found meaning in various symbols [3].

The rivalry between the two groups, stoked by separatist sentiments, erupted in a fiery outburst at the end of the separatist movement, and its influence on nationalist groups only served to fuel the already-growing separatist ideology. One of its fundamental principles was the use of words. Urdu and Hindi brought the Muslims and Hindus of the subcontinent closer together via mutual understanding, thanks to their common similarities. The addition of symbols to each language marked a break from this unity and altered the situation. The educated were said to speak Urdu, while the uneducated peasants were said to speak Hindi, which was characterised as "nothing more than a collection of non-standardized dialects." There was debate about this broad statement. Although Islam was the primary signifier of Muslim identity in North India, Urdu continued to serve as a cultural emblem [4].

The dispute intensified tensions between Muslims and Hindus and paved the way for Muslim secession. Elite Mus-

lims and Hindus started aggressively using language and religion as symbols as their rivalry for administrative and political power intensified. To maintain their privileged status, they sought to use the historical significance of their own faiths while simultaneously making fun of one other and sowing concerns of language extinction. They behaved in a way that betrayed their mutual anxiety of having their cultural icons recognised. The political class in India was responsible for implementing this system, which relied on these symbols to forge national and regional loyalties. These were pushed via government, schools, and popular media like films and publications. They were frequently important from a literary, theological, and political-historical perspective and presented as a particularly unique worldview. Consequently, these symbols were used to denote differences in regions [5].

By delving into the tale, we uncover the connection between the previously described "Muslim" identity and the disjointed identities of Muslims in India, who all have a common past and share common experiences. For a more complete picture of Pakistan's past, we must go beyond the multitude of identities rather than elevating any one of them to the status of a spokesman. The Muslim identity is often emphasised in Partition criticism as a "moral basis for the Pakistan demand." A "symbolic centre to give moral and political meaning to the concept of a united 'Muslim community' in India" was defined as a result of the partition of the two countries, even though the original goal was to bring Muslims together. The symbolic notion of Pakistan was in danger of being shattered when an emphasis on several identities ran counter to this creation [6]. As a result of the strenuous identity politics that were necessary to establish a Muslim (and, up until recently, Hindu and Sikh) political identity, there is a dearth of literature and study focusing on people's own lived experiences. Concurrent with these changes, Muslim nationalism was on the rise and had been for some time, significantly contributing to the reorganisation of Muslim authority and the process of Muslim self-definition in India. Both individuals and the society as a whole came to strongly underline the need of internalising religious authority. Here, the subject of women became one of the most contentious [7].

The paper by Butalia titled "Community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India" delves deeply into the treatment of women both during and after the partition. The author raises pertinent concerns about the fate of women who were uprooted and ill-prepared to cope with the psychological fallout of Partition. Being "left with the task of rebuilding the community" and "at the receiving end of violence as victims," she says that "women remain essentially non-violent" [8].

Communal violence often primarily affects them. As an example, she brings up the events of March 1947, when ninety women from Thoa Khalsa willingly committed suicide by jumping into a well in order to escape the "shame" of conversion. They wanted to keep their town together. Stories of bravery are what we often imagine when we read narratives

like this. As a result of pressure from inside their families, several women have taken their own lives. Butalia explains that the villagers had already established a "atmosphere" that anticipated their behaviour before they died [9].

In order to get to the bottom of this, we need to recognise that discussions about women's roles in society and discussions about moral communities are inseparable. The morality and public perception of Muslims became an important part of their identity and a distinguishing feature of the Pakistani community. In the context of the emerging public arena, where the 'passion' for Muslim symbols by people expanded to build new community structures that transcended concrete interest and status differences, devotionism and reform both had exceptional political importance [10]. Protests centred on "personal sacrifice" in the sake of "moral unity" and were characterised by "public agitations" as extreme ways of showing one's "love." An expression that drew heavily on the gendered language of male honour and evoked the particularistic (and fiercely competitive) loyalty associated with family and other kinship-based identities, it also called for devotion and sacrifice in support of communal symbols, which were popular under patriarchal families. The display of devotionism was also often fleeting since it demanded public activity [11].

Inadvertently giving rise to the two-nation thesis, the movement gave Muslims a platform to organise, which in turn allowed for the development of a national vocabulary. This movement needed a unifying emblem that it could rally behind and readily identify with since it had widespread support, especially among Muslims. The inclusion of women as a symbol paved the way for their participation in the revolutionary, reacting public sphere, which in turn advanced the nationalist agenda. This has had shocking results, increasing the dangers that women face in public places [12].

### 3. Hearing Women Voices in Urvashi Butalia's "the Other Side of Silence"

In *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia discusses the women who are compelled to remember the sad days of Partition so that they can learn about their personal experiences without being swayed by the male members of their families who attempt to control their stories and voices, causing them to become silent. Does the concept of a "gendered telling" of the Partition really exist? The voices of the people telling stories, the voices that emerge from official narratives, the voices that are evident in communal discourses, and the voices that are lost during Partition are all tried to be formed and rebuilt by Butalia through ten years of interviews and the examination of diaries, letters, memoirs, and autobiographies [13].

One new perspective on the past has emerged from the women's tales and testimonials. How, precisely, would the past seem if seen through the eyes of women? How does it

develop in narratives and testimonies when women speak about the missing out history of women? To be more precise, the "telling" was and always will be phallogocentric. Regardless of the historical context, women have always been in a subordinate position in society. A lot of people who are interested in marginalisation talk about the never-ending fight that women have to try to take the lead in patriarchal society. Not only were many of the women abducted, raped, and murdered violently, but they were also coerced into becoming Christians [14]. A woman's body became a primary arena for the "other" males to assert their dominance, masculinity, and authority. Because "polluting" the women of one community meant a desirable and satisfying way to "revenge" over the other, women were relegated to the role of simple platforms or agents where the most vicious manifestations of the communal fury might occur. As a means of evading rape and torture, some women drown themselves in wells, while others' fathers and husbands 'rescue' their daughters and wives from the shameful destiny by beheading them. Things were far worse after Partition, but this was the general picture throughout that time. Even when their families found them, women who had been abducted or kidnapped were not welcome or accepted [15].

Butalia focuses on a group of women who lived through the atrocities of Partition and whose first-hand accounts teach us a great lot about the untold and ignored histories of women worldwide. As she thinks about it, the ladies would have a much harder time opening up about their horrific experiences and reliving the terrible past. It was crucial to ask different questions altogether so that the lost women's voices could be heard, but the most important thing was that they should be allowed to "speak," to express their suppressed pain, untold stories, silences, half-said things, nuances, and repressed anguish. Whether it was social pressure or something else entirely, men often avoided hearing women's experiences, and women frequently buried their true stories as well. None of them ever brought up themselves, and when they did, it was usually to deny that they had anything interesting to say [16]. Butalia recounts the tale of Zainab and Buta Singh, the latter of whom had purchased the girl and wed her. Everyone thought they were head over heels for one other, and now they were a happily married couple with two kids. The brothers of Buta Singh contacted Zainab's relatives to reclaim her because they were afraid of a property divide. Along with one of her children, Zainab was coerced into leaving. Buta Singh, who fell madly in love with her, made the decision to become an Islamist and go to Pakistan in order to win back his wife. While in Pakistan, he discovered that Zainab had been forcibly married to her cousin brother; as a result, Buta Singh took his own life. The tale of Buta Singh's undying devotion grew legendary, but the story's flip side was kept hidden. Since Zainab was considered property that several men staked claims to at various times, no one bothered to find out what her restrictions were. Unexplored was the immense anguish she felt for her late lover and the suffocating "silence" she

engulfed herself in for the remainder of her life [17].

The 'original' family also suffered a loss when their daughters were taken by men of the 'other' faith. The rightful families were these, not any other families the women may have joined, and they were the ones to whom the ladies should be returned. There was no way around it, even if it meant upsetting the relationships they were already in and had accepted for whatever reason. The underlying premise was that women would still be unable to express their independent opinions due to the tyranny they faced, even when solicited for their opinions. Women almost never get the opportunity to openly express themselves or make a decision, even inside their "own" families [18]. Still, these were the families that were considered "legitimate," thus it was necessary to take women from the "other" unsavoury households and place them in the "real" ones. As far as the state was concerned, this was a commendable act. Not only did the Partition crisis provide males the justification they needed to build and rebuild women's identities, but it also gave them the justification they needed to elevate women to the status of national icons [19].

There is a great deal of quiet around the brutality that women endured following Partition. What little information we have concerning violence in general pertains only to 'men' from the 'other' culture, and there is a dearth of reports detailing the kidnapping and rape of women. Everybody had spoken out against the kidnapping, rape, and bodily mutilation of women, as well as the practice of tattooing symbols of the other faith into their sexual organs. However, no one—not the families, nor the state, not even historians—mentioned this kind of brutality. Its scope, however, was not diminutive. Women who were murdered by members of their own family entered the realm of "martyrdom," in contrast to the women who were abducted and forced into silence [20].

The story's overarching goal is to examine the "voices" found in many sources, including first-person accounts, letters, and records. The restoration of one's "voice," meanwhile, is not without its challenges. 'Others' are usually the ones who write these voices' histories; people's self-definitions and the manner in which they are portrayed are distinct. If recovering "voices" isn't already difficult, differentiating the voices just makes things worse [21]. Most people wonder why it's beneficial to force people to recall, bringing back all the bad memories, when they've already dealt with and made peace with their experiences.

There is a strong gender bias in Indian nationalist ideology that has persisted since its foundation. In light of this, the "Woman Question" loses some of its lustre in late-nineteenth-century nationalist rhetoric. Concealed within it is a peculiar type of quiet that may be seen as an intentional national rejection to force the colonial government to negotiate about the status of women [22]. While the colonial state gains control of the "world," Partha Chatterjee argues that the "home" becomes the symbolic location of nationalist triumph. By looking inside, the male nationalist reifies the house and

the role of women within it as a sacred "inner space" that challenges colonial dominance. Consequently, a certain logic may be at play here: because women's subjectivities are situated in the house, and since the family or home is where nationalist silence is most prevalent, it follows that women's agency is also silenced to some extent [23].

Due to the prevalence of third-person narration in women's discourse, the subjectivities and experiences of these individuals are frequently distorted, distorted, or even "double-fangled" in relation to mainstream reality. Even when a woman's comments may be conveyed as direct speech, they appear as fragments. Because of this, middle-class women are often captured as being 'speechless' in the recordings. The way women talked, rather than the words themselves, are given more weight in colonial archives. By claiming that women were coerced into speaking, even within the elite nationalist circle, the records often try to downplay the significance of women's discourse [24].

In this context, the women's bodies were only valuable as things that needed to be found and given back to their rightful owners. The idea of "belonging" as a whole loses all meaning and purpose when nations are divided along imaginary lines, but for women, the concept takes on an even more nebulous quality because of its close association with sexuality, honour, chastity, and other intangibles like family, community, and nation. Because women's bodies were both locations of discourse and patriarchal control and violence, the discursive conceptions surrounding chastity during the colonial and nationalist eras had tangible effects on women and exacerbated nationalist anxiety about colonialism. Nationalist discursive constructs of womanhood provided sufficient justification for brutality, as was dramatically shown by the denial of abducted wives, children, mothers, and sisters [25].

By associating a raped body with the traditional idea of purity, the objectification of female bodies achieves its pinnacle. Because rape is inevitable, a victim may feel pressured to take her own life so that she may be remembered as a valuable and virtuous member of society. Victims of rape are often denied access to their own homes in a new country. As a result, a nation's purity reflects in its families [26].

There is a deliberate attempt to reframe one's perspective towards partition history via the teaching function of the silence that characterises literature when it comes to violence. The practice of documenting the repression of women becomes a political issue in and of itself. As the state manipulates the transmission of histories, questions like historical visibility (or lack thereof), the construction of the political subject via history, and the intentional evasions or perversions of history become crucial [27].

The failure of Partition histories to adequately detail the effects of the partition on everyday life and the meaning it had for ordinary people is a very troubling issue. Is there a reason why historians are so reluctant to investigate the "real" side of this murky Partition history? Has enough been done to bring to light the sentiments, emotions, agony, suffering, trauma,

loss, and silences that concealed the survivors' lives? Was this a case of intentional historical neglect or something more serious? Is it possible to conclude that historians show signs of avoiding this notion of trauma? [28].

Nation building is largely associated with 'male' activities such as war, conquest, destroying the 'other,' acquiring territories, forming governments, establishing the nation state, etc., thus women are sadly excluded from these processes. Losing their women to men of the "other" faith was a failure on the side of the men who were constructing the country to hang on to their own, according to them [29].

Instead of the nation's male-dominated narratives, what can we learn from these stories? Would the stories have turned out differently if told by female characters? Symbols of family and national honour are sometimes the only roles that women play in men's national tales. However, the issues that are often addressed in women's tales vary [30]. In order to start hearing women's narratives of the country, we need to adjust our modes of concern to focus on the unsaid and unheard. When one does that, they are likely to draw new and unexplored conclusions on the serious task of nation building. The so-called "marginalised" women can clearly express themselves when given the chance, respect, and resources to do so; the only problem is finding the right people to listen [31].

#### 4. Women in Print Movement: Urvashi Butalia and the Birth of the Feminist Press in India

Perhaps the most exciting and motivating period for the women's movement in India was in the early 1980s, when it seemed like fresh possibilities and advances were on the corner. When Ritu Menon thinks back to the 1984 London IFBF, a wave of nostalgia washes over her. At this gathering, feminist publishers and writers from across the globe got to know one another and form stronger bonds [32].

While Women's Studies emerged as a new academic field on the global stage, the feminist press was a doomed endeavour supported only by the selfless passion and limited resources of its founders. The conservative media, which feminists call the "malestream," thought this was too niche and too dangerous to publish financially. It was apparent that a profit-driven mainstream press would not care to produce works on women's concerns or those enlightened by a feminist viewpoint [33]. However, "Feminist publishing... came about as a consequence of the women's movement, and in solidarity with it," Menon writes, "Resistance was its *raison d'être*". Historically, most feminist authors have also been activists, penning part-time works in an effort to influence lawmakers and the general public [34].

When the opportunity presented itself in the mid-1980s, Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon founded Kali for men, a publishing house that would provide tremendous aid to the Indian women's movement. There was a shift in preference

towards local concerns and indigenous talent as a consequence of the weakening of the Indian rupee compared to the dollar and the pound, and an increase in indigenous publishing firms [35].

Although India has long been a sizable and economically stable market for imported books, things started to shift a little when the rupee's decline made it more costly to import books, mostly from the United States and the United Kingdom. Several publishers began to consider the prospect of establishing a local publishing sector in response to the growing market opposition to the exorbitant pricing of imported books. This was a golden opportunity for feminist literature! It did not attempt to establish itself firmly. Books and booklets on problems affecting Indian women were the primary focus of Kali for Men, a tiny, independent publishing house [36].

Ritu Menon has highlighted the writers' significant activism in her archiving of the 1980s women's print revolution. These writers were often "drawn into a campaign, say, against widow immolation or the impact of structural adjustment programmes on women; or in organising a march and demonstration genetic engineering; or in drafting a new law on child abuse or rape", which meant that they could only work intermittently on their books. The upshot was the publishing of women's writing in forms that no "mainstream" publisher would have dreamed of: diaries, posters, booklets, fact sheets, campaign materials, academic texts, and artistic works [37]. Among Kali's publications was a diverse range of works, including scholarly works like *Jernen and Media: Analysis, Action, Alternatives* and *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, and more contemporary activist works like *Sharir ki Jankari* (Hindi, Title Knowledge of the Body), written by 75 women from rural areas; and *Truth Tales*, a collection of short stories written by women from various languages. In this approach, the feminist press dismantled the barriers that had hitherto separated activist writing from academic scholarship. Carefully crafted as a whole, the small writings raised consciousness about the plight of Indian women, altered public perception, and eventually prompted new policies [38].

#### 5. Feminist Postcolonialism

Among their shared characteristics, the theoretical frameworks of feminism and postcolonialism centre on "the mutual goal of challenging forms of oppression" (McLeod 199). A definition given by Longhurst et al. is "campaigning against the political and social inequalities between men and women." This is the essence of feminism. The overthrow of patriarchal tyranny is, therefore, central to feminism. While "postcolonialism may well aim to oppose colonialist representations and values", McLeod argues that the term is not easily defined. He stresses that rereading texts written during colonialism and critically engaging with people from colonised countries and their Diasporas are both important parts of postcolonialism, but that the latter should also question the ways in which

colonialism and colonist ideas impacted the former [39].

One branch of postcolonial studies focuses on feminist methods. Here is how Rajan and Park describe the fusion of feminism and postcolonialism: Within the many settings of women's lives, subjectivities, labour, sexuality, and rights, it "investigates and examines the intersections of colonialism and neo-colonialism with gender, nation, class, race, and sexualities" [40].

Although this subfield is most often referred to as "Postcolonial Feminism" (Rajan) or "Postcolonialism and Feminism" (McLeod) in scholarly works, I feel that it encompasses far too many ideas. Hence, "Feminist Postcolonialism" and "Postcolonial Feminism" need to be distinguished. In my opinion, academic debates often confuse these two phrases, which really refer to distinct methods. Although the second method, "Feminist Postcolonialism," will prove to be quite beneficial in analysing certain literary works for this research, it is important to bear in mind that both methods are relevant.

According to McLeod, the first "Postcolonial Feminism" term places heavy emphasis on the differences between "first world woman" and "third world woman" and on the representation of the latter. Women from non-Western nations have rejected the western feminist concept of a "universal woman". They considered it was impossible to equal all women of this planet, since, depending on their origins, histories and cultures, they are busy with various issues. Feminists in the West tend to assume that as a result of their gender, they are uniquely positioned to represent all women on Earth. However, they fail to recognise the importance of cultural and ethnic factors in individual identity formation. This rules out the possibility of a "universal feminism," or a kind of feminism that would work for all women equally. Consequently, it is imperative that formerly colonial women cultivate their own brand of feminism. Some argue that when feminists from the developed world attempt to advocate for and for "third world women," they undermine their agency and undermine their right to self-determination [41].

Within the framework of (post) colonialism, the second term, "Feminist Postcolonialism," focuses on feminist representations and ideas. Postcolonialism and feminism, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, both seek to identify oppressions. Scholars using this second strategy seek to unravel the symbiotic relationships between (post) colonialism and feminism. The exclusion of women's voices from mainstream historical accounts is another point of contention. Additionally, as they were mostly documented by privileged social groups, female (written) narratives are housed in colonial archives and are therefore inaccessible [42].

These are some of the questions that "Feminist Postcolonialism" brings up: Can women be oppressed by (post) colonialism, and if so, how? Are they doubly colonised, meaning they are oppressed on top of being oppressed? Do patriarchal oppression and (post) colonial dominance differ in any way? In this (post-) colonial era, how can women progress in their own lives? Do they work with an agency 20? Is their opinion

heard? An influential article in postcolonialism and feminism is referenced in the final question. An important Indian-American postcolonial thinker, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, casts doubt on the capacity of marginalised people to express themselves in an article titled "Can the Subaltern Speak?" published in 1988. Antonio Gramsci coined the word "subaltern" to describe politically disorganised rural peasant communities in Mussolini's fascist Italy, and Spivak has expanded on this idea. The term "subaltern" is used to describe those who do not belong to the dominant social class [43]. Ranajit Guha established the "Subaltern Studies Group" in 1982 with the goal of reclaiming and rewriting (Indian) history from a non-elitist, or subaltern, viewpoint. Gayatri Spivak was a part of this group along with other notable academics such as Gyanendra Pandey, Ranajit Guha, and David Arnold. Where does *Can the Subaltern Speak* begin? When addressing disadvantaged groups—often impoverished peasants in rural areas—Spivak criticises the work of post-structuralist theorists like Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. Despite their shared belief that human consciousness is formed discursively—that is, from places outside of itself—theoretically, Spivak and McLeod both claim that writing about subalterns primarily involves conceptions of the "sovereign subject". Intellectuals like them would also consider it an honour to speak for the oppressed [44].

The main question that Spivak wants answered is whether or not subalterns may express their own concerns. The ancient Indian ceremony of *sati* serves as an example that she uses. In this ritual, the woman approaches the funeral pyre after her husband has died and immolates herself beside his body. Spivak explains that the British used this "barbaric" ceremony as a basis for their "colonial mission", and that there were many colonial writings on the subject. However, such writings did not originate from women but rather were about women. Furthermore, indigenous women were not consulted by the colonial males who enacted legal measures that primarily impacted them. The lady is obviously a subordinate and powerless agent in this scenario. To begin with, the emotions and desires of the woman are disregarded in texts about *sati*. We hear about what the lady does throughout the rite, but not her thoughts or feelings. Secondly, once again, the matter was approached without considering the female viewpoint, since legislation was passed outlawing *sati* and women's participation in the rite. Reflecting on these factors, Spivak assembled the phrase 'White men are rescuing brown women from brown men. The 'double colonisation' of women is shown by this line. Women are oppressed in two ways: first, inside their own society (i.e., by 'brown men'), and second, by colonial domination (i.e., by 'white males'). The concept of woman as subaltern is particularly intriguing for this article. According to Spivak, women in nations that have been colonised are at the lowest degree of subordination. Regardless of a woman's socioeconomic status, the very concept of gender makes her subaltern. The woman is seen as subordinate in hegemonic civilizations because these communities are often

patriarchal, meaning they are oriented upon men. "For the 'figure' of woman, the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves; race and class differences are subsumed under that charge," Spivak asserts conclusively [45].

Spivak elaborates on the concept of "double colonisation" by saying: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow". The majority of dominant historical accounts focus on male characters and exclude the perspectives of women. It is hardly unexpected that women are considered subaltern' for these and other reasons. "The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read," concludes Spivak. the following: "The subaltern is unable to communicate". Obviously, this is not intended literally, but the female subaltern is unable to have her voice heard due to the low value placed on her words and the uncertainty around their interpretation by those around her. Because they were ignored in formal historical accounts, their opinions will go unheard. Forty to fifty years after this tragic occurrence, scholars began to examine the Partition from the female point of view. The experiences of women during Partition have only just been addressed by female researchers, such as Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon, and Kamla Bhasin. They collected as much objective information as they could from interviews with eyewitnesses and used it in their publications. The reader may have a comprehensive picture of the horrific hardships these ladies endured and how they have attempted to overcome them via this study. Because males are traditionally seen as the primary players in historical narratives, the reader of these authors' works learns that women were not only left out of these discussions but actively sought to avoid them [46].

The writers often write about women who had never talked publicly about their lives in South Asia and who needed to be convinced that their narratives were vital to understanding that region's past. While it's true that traditional histories primarily focus on the actions of a small number of influential people—often (male) elitist politicians and leaders—the histories of everyday people and how those events impacted their lives are largely ignored. Consequently, it should come as no surprise that the vast majority of historical studies about Partition neglect to include women's narratives and experiences. Literary works may be particularly essential since they give (postcolonial) authors with a new place to express subaltern women's voices. A distinct literary subgenre devoted to Partition exists in South Asian literature, as we have seen; this subgenre sometimes offers readers more intimate insights. It is not uncommon for books to take a more straightforward approach. Since many victims of the Partition chose not to reflect on or discuss their experiences, literature provides a rich window into the social climate of that period. Sometimes it's simpler for literary "fiction" writers to attack certain situations and write "more freely" about historical and political topics. Adding to this, Menon and Bhasin note that "Partition fiction has been a far richer source both because it provides

popular and astringent commentary on the politics of Partition and because, here and there, we find women's voices, speaking for themselves". Common people's lives are recounted in Partition books, and women often play a significant role in these stories. A number of books about the Partition, particularly those authored by women, provide women agency and a voice so that they may take part in the historical conversation around the Partition. In the next chapters, we will examine the agency of women, their portrayal, and their role in Partition [47].

Within the theoretical frameworks of feminism and post-colonialism, the following analyses will be presented. Under the guise of "Feminist Postcolonialism," the studies need to reveal the "double colonisation" of women and their ability to exert agency and voice while oppressed by colonialism. A lot of the talk about "Postcolonial Feminism" will revolve on the author's life story. Readers should have a good understanding of the problems faced by women in the "third world" as a result of the portrayal of these difficulties in works written by women from that region. It is not feasible to compare them since, as far as my study has discovered, there are no Partition books produced by western women.

The traumatising effects of partition on South Asian cultures were far-reaching and multi-faceted. The society as a whole was severely traumatised, and the effects of this trauma have been passed down through the generations, a phenomenon known as intergenerational trauma. This kind of shared tragedy has seeped into the very fabric of South Asian society, enmeshing all citizens in the pain of their homelands. Authors of South Asian descent whether they are living in Diaspora or not, may be considered both a part of and a genuine mediator of the tragedy that their nations and communities have endured [48].

## 6. Struggles of Women in Urvashi Butalia's Works

### 6.1. Historical Amnesia and Collective Memory

The historical erasure of women's experiences is a common theme in Butalia's writings. Her book, "The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India," brings attention to the effects of the Partition on women, whose stories are often ignored in favour of more expansive political accounts. By delving into first-hand accounts, Butalia questions the tendency to erase the agency and suffering of women during this turbulent era.

### 6.2. Gender and Violence

Butalia fearlessly addresses the issue of gender-based violence, a pervasive yet silenced reality for many women. In "The Weight of Our Sky," she explores the trauma of sexual violence against women amidst the backdrop of historical turmoil. Through her narrative, Butalia not only exposes the

brutality women endure but also underscores the resilience and strength they exhibit in the face of adversity [49].

### 6.3. Feminist Historiography

Butalia, a feminist historian, shifts the focus of history to include the lived experiences of women. In "Women and Partition: A Reader," she critically investigates the gendered components of Partition, questioning standard historical interpretations that overlook women's roles and views. Through thorough study and analysis, Butalia foregrounds women's agency and contributions to creating history.

### 6.4. Intersectionality and Marginalization

Recognising the many identities and conflicts within feminist discourse, Butalia's works demonstrate an intersectional perspective. Kashmiri women's stories are often drowned out by geopolitical conflicts, but in her piece "Can You Hear Kashmiri Women Speak?," she gives them a platform. However, by focusing on their lives, Butalia draws attention to how gender, race, and political strife all work together to oppress people.

### 6.5. Agency and Empowerment

However, Butalia's writings also respect the strength and independence of women, even as they portray their hardships. Her book, "Making a Difference: Memoirs from the Women's Movement in India," details the struggles and victories of women in India who battle patriarchy. The experiences shared by Butalia highlight the profound impact that may be achieved through unity and collaborative effort [50].

## 7. Conclusion

Urvashi Butalia's writings shed light on women's marginalised stories and question prevailing narratives that uphold their erasure and marginalisation. Butalia stresses the need of empowering women to rewrite history and create social change by delving into a variety of experiences and hardships. While we persist in addressing gender inequality and injustice, Butalia's writings serve as a powerful reminder of the importance of storytelling in shedding light on women's experiences and motivating us to work together for a more just future.

## Abbreviations

IFBF International Feminist Book Fair

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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