

*Q. Comment on the Oral Tradition of Narrative technique used by Urvashi Butalia in the Other Side of the Silence*

*The Other Side of Silence by Urvashi Butalia is a distinctive work on the history of the Indian split. Oral history serves as this book's main source. Exaggeration, subjective interpretation, personal restraint, personal preferences, etc., are all significant factors in every book about oral history. The facts are frequently misrepresented. However, no one can dispute that an oral history book provides the deepest emotions and insights. A history is more than just the history of monarchs. Historical facts may also be best understood and explained by the way an average person would have perceived the event. Knowing the past is also aided by a person's perspective and evaluation of the circumstances surrounding him.*

*Naturally, Butalia states unequivocally that in order to describe the horrific sufferings of the people during and after the Indian split in 1947, she has relied not only on her interviews with common victims of the division but also on other documentary data. She states:*

*While interviews form my primary sources, I have also looked at diaries, memoirs, newspaper reports and the kinds of documents that I feel are important for my work: letters written by different people, reports of enquiry commissions, pamphlets and, of course, books. I have reconstructed many different 'voices' of Partition: official, unofficial, informal, others. (Urvashi Butalia, p.20)*

*Informal and firsthand reports of the facts of the partition history may be ignored by Indian official narratives in public discussions. However, this does not imply that the past is not real. Perhaps the official history based on documentary proof and the well-balanced facts gleaned from in-person conversations with Indian partition victims highlight the nature and causes of this historical event. Butalia adds more remarks: The absence of the 'I' in such histories helps perhaps to establish distance, even to create the illusion of objectivity, perhaps to establish factuality. I have no wish to pretend that these histories, these stories, are in any way an 'objective' rendering of Partition. I do not believe such a thing is possible. For the many years that this work has been with me, I have felt involved in it, intensely and emotionally, politically and academically. To pretend then, that this is a history that has 'written itself', so to speak, would have been dishonest....There was no way I could deny a personal involvement; no way I could pretend that there wasn't an emotional entanglement; no way I could wipe out my politics. . . . This is a personal history that does not pretend to be objective. (Urvashi Butalia, pp.20-21)*

*The book in question by Butalia is a work of fiction and a thesis on the history of the Indian Partition. Now, let's go back to my first argument in the research chapter, "Crisis of Identity and Partition Fictions." Due to the economic and social abuse of the minority group—the Muslim community—by Hindus and Sikhs, one of the main causes of India's 1947 split was the crisis of Muslim identity. This aspect is included and emphasized in the*

*official narratives on partition. This official explanation of the causes of the Indian split is supported by Butalia's The Other Side of Silence. She remarks:*

*One could argue that the economic and social divide between Muslims and Hindus/Sikhs was a contributing factor in the development of the Partition concept. The majority of Partition recollections describe the pre-Partition era, when Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus coexisted in a condition of frequently mythological harmony. However, this harmony was based on tangible, tangible distinctions. Other disparities existed on a more daily basis. I spoke with Bir Bahadur Singh a few years ago, and he articulately explained these:*

*. . if a Musalman was coming along the road, and we shook hands with him, and we had, say, a box of food or something in our hand, that would then become soiled and we would not eat it; if we are holding a dog in one hand and food in the other, there's nothing wrong with that food. But if a Musalman would come and shake hands our dadis and mothers would say, son, don't eat this food, it has become polluted. Such were the dealings: how can it be that two people are living in the same village, and one treats the other with such respect and other doesn't even give him the consideration due to a dog? How can this be? They would call our mothers and sisters, didi, they would refer to us as brothers, sisters, fathers, and when we needed them, they were always there to help. Yet, when they came to our houses, we treated them so badly. This is really terrible. And this is the reason Pakistan was made. (Urvashi Butalia, pp.92-93)*

*Musalmaan's socioeconomic marginalization*

*During India's colonial era, the socially and economically marginalized Musalmaan people experienced an identity crisis that eventually led them to desire their own independent Indian country. In his doctoral thesis, "Communal Riots in Bengal 1905-1947," Suranjan Das demonstrates how Hindu landowners' mistreatment of Muslims in Bengal during pre-partition India fueled communal sentiment. However, Das's assessment that Hindus in Bengal abuse Muslims economically and socially also applies, in part, to other parts of India. The official accounts of the 1947 Indian partition place a lot of emphasis on the issue of Muslim identity. And in *The Other Side of Silence*, Butalia illustrates this crisis of Muslim identity, which drives the Muslims to in India to demand Pakistan for their homeland.*

*The Other Side of Silence is actually distinct from other writings that deal with the issue of partition. There is no indication of a Muslim identity crisis here. No crisis of Hindu identity is there, as in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. The identity issue that is described in *The Other Side of Silence* is the one that results from his longing for the friendships and family members that departed Lahore for India following the partition. Here, religion is irrelevant. Here, the author demonstrates how India's ominous separation splits families apart. By flight, it just takes 30 minutes to travel from Lahore to Delhi.*

*One family's members go for India, while others remain in Pakistan. While his seven brothers depart for India, the author's grandmother and her uncle Ranamama remain in Lahore. In*

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*1987, forty years after the Indian partition, Ranamama's niece Butalia, a Western-educated woman, overcomes several obstacles to secure a visa from the Pakistani government and visits her uncle in Lahore. The main issue of the author's experience on the trip to Lahore, which is introduced at the start of the book, is the suffering brought on by family dissolution.*

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