

Dr. Vandana Singh

Partition as the backdrop of Urvashi Butalia's The Other Side of Silence

The first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru is not able to foresee the dangers of Partition, while he delivered the "Tryst with Destiny" speech on the eve of Indian Independence. On July 9, 2001 when Sudan was partitioned into the Republic of South Sudan and the Republic of Sudan, Indian people began to think on another Partition that took place over sixty years before, which is now a part of Indian history. Till 2011, Indian people's interest in the 1947 Partition of India is defined by an inherited sense of loss. People of India and Pakistan are aware of their genealogy. They are aware of their ancestor's migration from West Punjab to East Punjab and vice versa.

In the wake of Partition, many Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs on the borders of India and Pakistan turned against and killed each other due to religious fanaticism. Thousands were slaughtered at that time and an equal number became victims to cholera and other diseases. Saros Cosasjee and Kartar Singh Duggal recollect that "Every yard of the way there was a body, some butchered, some dead of cholera" (29). Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (1998) discusses this pathetic tragedy of Indian Partition and, how this holocaust has affected the lives of ordinary people of India and Pakistan.

Urvashi Butalia (1952-) was born in Ambala, Haryana, in 1952. She was the third of the four children of Joginder Singh Butalia and Subhadra Butalia. She earned BA in literature from Miranda House, Delhi University in 1973 and, a Masters degree in South Asian Studies from the University of London in 1977. She is an Indian feminist and publisher. Along with Ritu Menon a famous modern Indian Feminist, she co-founded Kali for Women, India's first exclusively feminist publishing house, in 1984. In 2003 she found the Zubaan books, another publishing firm.

Butalia has started her writing career at Oxford University Press in Delhi and later she worked at its London office. There she became the editor of Zed Books in 1984. Her main areas of interest are Indian Partition especially the oral history related to it. She has written on gender, communalism, fundamentalism and

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media. Her writings appeared in several newspapers and magazines including *The Guardian*, *The New Internationalist*, *The Statesman*, *The Times of India*, *The Outlook* and *India Today*. She is the co-editor of *Women and the Hindu Right: A Collection of Essays* (1995), *In Other Words: New Writing by Women in India* (1992), *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir* (2002), *Women and Right Wing Movements: Indian Experiences* (1995) and *Inner Line: The Zubaan Book of Stories by Indian Women* (2006).

The Other Side of Silence is the product of more than seventy interviews which Butalia has done with the survivors of the Indian Partition. It uses the history of Indian Partition as its backdrop. The book offers an alternative radical reading of the Partition of India in 1947 with crucial implications on current conflicts and peace on Indian subcontinent.

The book focuses on otherwise silenced subaltern subjectivities like that of women, children and dalits or the marginalized people. Furthermore, the book re-examines Partition, the exchange of populations and, the violence that accompanied it from the perspective of survivor's personal narratives on the Partition. Ultimately, the book constitutes a radical critique of every previous official historiography written on Partition.