

## Partition Paradox: Marginal Voices in Select Partition Narratives

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### Abstract

This paper examines how marginal voices—subaltern, gendered, and minoritized—are constructed, silenced, and partially recovered within four canonical partition narratives: Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1988/1991), Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988). Drawing on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theory of subalternity, Gyanendra Pandey's framework of 'three partitions,' and the feminist historiography of Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, the paper argues that the 1947 Partition constitutes a radical asymmetry between official nationalist historiography and the embodied experiences of ordinary people. The term 'partition paradox' designates this structural contradiction: the very narratives that attempt to give voice to the marginalised necessarily work within representational economies that risk reinscribing the silence they seek to rupture. Through close textual analysis, the paper traces how child narrators, subaltern women, religious minorities, and dispossessed peasants function as loci of counter-memory that official historiography cannot contain. Three recurring paradoxes—epistemological, representational, and temporal—are identified and positioned as the animating tensions of contemporary partition scholarship.

**Keywords:** Partition narratives, subaltern studies, gendered violence, marginal voices, colonial historiography, postcolonial literature, trauma, counter-memory.

### **I. Introduction: The Problem of the Partition Paradox**

Two dates, fourteen hours apart. On 14 August 1947, Pakistan came into existence; on 15 August, India followed. Jawaharlal Nehru's 'tryst with destiny' speech figured the moment as the fulfillment of a historical arc—a national collectivity finally achieving self-governance. Yet the weeks surrounding this constitutional event tell a different story entirely. Somewhere between twelve and fourteen million people were displaced across the new borders; between 200,000 and two million were killed in communal violence in Punjab and Bengal; and estimates range from 75,000 to 100,000 women abducted, raped, and forcibly converted or married across what had, overnight, become an international boundary (Butalia 1998; Menon and Bhasin 1998). The sheer scale of this catastrophe existed, paradoxically, within an official silence—acknowledged only to be swiftly enclosed within the genre of 'communal riots,' a depoliticizing term that abstracted mass killing from its structural causes and assigned collective guilt without assignable agency.

This paper calls the tension between national celebration and subaltern catastrophe the 'partition paradox.' That designation is not simply a way of noting that the Partition was simultaneously liberation and genocide—that observation, however important, stays at the level of description. The deeper paradox is epistemological and representational: the narratives that attempt to recover marginal experiences of partition are inevitably structured by the very representational economies—literary, historiographical, testimonial—that produced the marginalisation in the first place. To represent the subaltern is always already to speak in a language shaped by hegemonic institutions; to give voice to the silenced is to risk ventriloquizing. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak posed this problem precisely when she asked: 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' Representation, she argued, requires the intellectual to assume

knowledge of the subaltern's consciousness—a position that necessarily mirrors the colonial or patriarchal authority it claims to critique (Spivak 1988).

The four primary texts examined here navigate this paradox from distinct narrative and generic positions. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) employs realist fiction to depict the communal collapse of a Punjabi border village. Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* (1988/1991) uses a child narrator positioned at the intersection of gender, minority religion, and physical disability to defamiliarise Partition's violence. Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* (1998) takes oral history as its form, partially recovering women's testimonies from official erasure. Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) meditates, through layered memory and childhood narration, on the arbitrariness of national borders and the violence of forgetting. Together, these texts constitute a constellation of responses to the partition paradox—not a resolution of it. The critical question this paper pursues is: what are the specific strategies through which marginal voices are recuperated, and at what cost—epistemological, ethical, political—are such recuperations achieved?

The paper proceeds as follows. Section II surveys the theoretical framework, drawing on Spivak, Pandey, Zamindar, Menon, and Bhasin, as well as recent scholarship on intergenerational trauma. Sections III through V offer close readings of the primary texts—Singh and Sidhwa together for their shared engagement with child narrators, then Butalia's oral history methodology on its own terms. Section VI synthesises three recurring paradoxes across the corpus. Section VII concludes by locating the paper's contribution within current debates and pointing toward avenues for future research.

## **II. Theoretical Framework: Subalternity, Gendered Violence, and the Long Partition**

### **2.1 Spivak and the Epistemology of Subaltern Silence**

The theoretical foundation of this paper rests on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's reconceptualisation of Antonio Gramsci's concept of the subaltern. Where Gramsci used the

term to describe those excluded from dominant power structures by race, class, gender, or ethnicity, Spivak's postcolonial appropriation sharpens it into a strictly epistemological problem. In 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), she argues that the subaltern is not simply a social subject who lacks access to speech but a position structurally constituted by its exclusion from the very conditions of enunciation. The subaltern's consciousness cannot be recuperated without already operating within the dominant episteme—the same episteme that produced the silencing in the first place (Spivak 1988, 271-313).

Spivak draws a sharp distinction between two meanings of representation: *Vertretung* (speaking for, political delegation) and *Darstellung* (speaking of, aesthetic portrayal). The intellectual who 'represents' the subaltern collapses these two meanings, arrogating both political authority and aesthetic authority in a single gesture—what she calls, pointedly, a 'double-shot' of representation. For partition studies, the consequences are significant. Every act of partition narrative—fictional, testimonial, or historiographical—involves both a *Vertretung* (the narrative speaks for those who cannot speak, claims to represent their interests) and a *Darstellung* (the narrative depicts, re-presents the subaltern experience). The Subaltern Studies Group, founded by Ranajit Guha in the early 1980s, acknowledged this bind by insisting on the primacy of subaltern perspectives, but its own methodological procedures—archival, textual, academic—could not escape the institutional apparatus that produced the subalternity it studied (Guha 1982; Pandey 2001).

Perhaps the most instructive of Spivak's examples for our purposes is that of Bhuvanewari Bhaduri, a young Bengali woman who hanged herself in 1926 while menstruating. Her choice—to die during menstruation rather than in its absence—was a deliberate act to prevent her death being misread as the consequence of an illicit pregnancy. She was a member of an armed independence group who had been assigned to carry out a political assassination but could not bring herself to do so; her suicide was political agency,

inscribed on the body in the only language available to her. Yet that agency remained unreadable within the hegemonic semiotic until Spivak recovered it decades later—a recovery that is itself mediated, that demonstrates the impossibility of pure recovery. This is precisely the condition of partition narrative: the attempt at recovery that demonstrates the limits of recovery.

## **2.2 Pandey's Three Partitions and the Marginalisation of Embodied Violence**

Gyanendra Pandey's *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (2001) provides the second major theoretical axis. Pandey proposes that 'Partition' names not one event but three distinct phenomena that official historiography conflates. The first partition is ideological: the claim that Muslims required a separate nation-state to protect their religious and cultural identity. The second is political: the willingness of Hindu and Sikh elites to accept the division of Punjab and Bengal as the price of independence. The third is the mass catastrophe—the experience of millions of ordinary people who were uprooted, violated, and killed (Pandey 2001, 3-29).

The partition paradox, in Pandey's terms, is that official historiography privileges the first two partitions while treating the third as a regrettable side-effect, the chaos attending an otherwise orderly transfer of power. The masses experienced partition primarily as the third—as an incomprehensible catastrophe rather than political realignment—yet their histories remain subordinated to the telos of independence within nationalist discourse. This subordination is not mere scholarly negligence; it is structural. Nationalist historiography requires a narrative of national formation that can absorb the violence of the third partition as the birth-pains of the nation rather than as an indictment of nationalism itself.

The framework illuminates the dynamics of all four texts examined here. *Train to Pakistan* depicts the third partition almost entirely: the village community has no access to the political negotiations of the first or second partitions, and their violence is both the consequence

of decisions taken entirely above them and entirely illegible to them as such. *Cracking India*, through eight-year-old Lenny, embodies the third partition most literally. Her bewilderment is the novel's sharpest insight: 'Can one break a country? And what happens if they break it where our house is? Or crack it further up on Warris Road?' (Sidhwa 1988, cited in Jaggi 2015, 51). Official political language abstracts the violence of Partition into concepts—partition, independence, sovereignty, nation—that are unreadable from the perspective of those who experience it as the destruction of their specific, irreplaceable world.

### **2.3 Feminist Historiography: Butalia, Menon, and Bhasin**

The feminist historiographic intervention in partition studies was inaugurated by two texts published simultaneously in 1998: Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries*. Both are committed to oral history methodology—to the systematic collection and analysis of survivor testimonies, particularly from women whose experiences had been excluded from official accounts—and both share a theoretical investment in understanding partition violence as fundamentally gendered.

Butalia's central argument is that women's history of Partition is simultaneously a history of violence against women and a history of survival, adaptation, and agency. The violence she documents is multi-dimensional: rape and sexual mutilation; abduction and forced conversion; killing by male relatives to protect family 'honour'; and, perhaps most insidious, the refusal by original families to accept women who had been recovered from the other side, on the grounds that they were now 'contaminated.' As Butalia insists, the partition history is also the history of violence against women—women 'brutalised to the extent that they became dumbstruck,' rendered 'non-existent' within the historical record (Mondal 2021, 1). This last form of violence reveals how Partition simultaneously mobilised women as symbolic bearers of communal identity and rendered them disposable once that identity had been 'violated' through their bodies (Butalia 1998, 19-22).

Menon and Bhasin develop a complementary argument, focusing on the Central Recovery Operation (1947-1951), through which India and Pakistan each attempted to recover women abducted during partition violence. The operation, despite its humanitarian framing, subjected women to a second displacement: having survived abduction, forced marriage, and often childbirth, they were compelled by the state to leave new families and be 'repatriated' to communities that often refused them. Fatima and Tyag (2023) note that women's willingness to reunite with their families after recovery and enduring psychological trauma was turned down and labelled as 'contaminated'—outcasted, compelled to remain with their abductors to protect family honour. The state exercised over women's bodies the same sovereign authority that had failed to protect those bodies during the violence itself (Fatima and Tyag 2023, 1-5).

#### **2.4 Zamindar and the Long Partition**

Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar's *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia* (2007) extends the temporal horizon of partition analysis by arguing that partition was not a 1947 event but a prolonged process of state-formation, refugee management, and border consolidation that continued through the 1950s and beyond. Zamindar identifies what she calls 'bureaucratic violence'—the violence enacted through state mechanisms of refugee registration, property expropriation, evacuee property redistribution, and selective citizenship determination—as integral to partition's ongoing harm (Zamindar 2007, 1-35). For our purposes, this framework is decisive because it reminds us that the partition narratives examined in this paper are not simply representations of a finished historical event. They are interventions in an ongoing process of meaning-making that continues to structure South Asian political and social life. The silence of the official account is not merely a silence about 1947; it is a structural silence continually reproduced through legal, bureaucratic, and cultural mechanisms—and the narratives examined here are political acts as much as literary ones.

### III. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*: Realism and the Limits of Witnessing

Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956), set in the fictitious Punjabi border village of Mano Majra, is among the earliest and most enduring literary accounts of 1947. Singh, a lawyer based in Lahore during partition, drew on his own observations to produce a novel that refuses both nationalist triumphalism and sentimental communal nostalgia. His choice of a border village as the narrative's spatial centre is itself an argument: Mano Majra exists at the literal boundary between the two new nations, and its violence is therefore the violence of the boundary itself—not the expression of differences that pre-existed the Partition but the production of differences the Partition created.

Before partition, Mano Majra is a site of what Singh depicts as organic communal coexistence. Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus share agricultural labour and observe each other's religious festivals without conflict. Dr. Sudhir Nikam observes that Singh has used historical events to present 'the futility of blaming' any single community for partition violence, insisting that communal rupture emerges from systemic forces rather than individual moral failure (Nikam 2014, 39-42). The violence that erupts in Mano Majra is not the expression of pre-existing communal hatred but its importation—arriving on the trains carrying dead bodies, enforced by the police and military sent to 'maintain order,' amplified by rumours and newspaper reports that reconfigure the village's meaning from within and without.

The novel's most significant formal strategy is its ensemble of marginal characters. Central among them is Juggut Singh—a Sikh peasant and outlaw—doubly marginalised by class (poor, landless, invisible to both nationalist historiography and the emerging literature of Partition) and by moral status (a criminal, excluded from the sentimental humanist narrative of the innocent victim). Yet it is Jugga who performs the novel's central act of ethical agency: he gives his life to prevent a train carrying Muslim refugees from being ambushed by Sikh extremists. This act cannot be claimed by any ideological position. Jugga's heroism is

motivated partly by personal love—his lover Nooran is Muslim and presumably on the train—and so it is neither nationalist (he dies for people leaving 'his' nation), nor communal (he dies against members of his own community), nor simply humanist (his love is too particular to serve as an allegory for abstract solidarity). Kute (2018) notes in his comparative study of partition fiction that *Train to Pakistan* is distinctive among North Indian partition narratives precisely in its refusal to assign moral causality at the communal level (Kute 2018, 3-4). This is the partition paradox at the level of realist form: to give voice to the marginalised, the novel must individualise their experience, and in doing so, it risks obscuring the structural and collective dimensions of their suffering.

The women of *Mano Majra* are largely absent from the novel's action—and this absence is its most significant limitation from a feminist perspective. Nooran, the most substantial female character, exists primarily as an object of male desire and a catalyst for Jugga's moral transformation. Her fate—whether she survives, where she ends up, what she experiences—is left entirely unnarrated. This silence within the novel about women's experience is not simply an aesthetic failing; it is a structural feature of the realist mode Singh employs, which privileges action and moral agency over testimony and embodied experience. It anticipates, with uncomfortable precision, the silences that Butalia's oral history would later set out to rupture.

#### **IV. The Child Narrator as Epistemological Strategy: Cracking India and The Shadow**

##### **Lines**

##### **4.1 Lenny's Paradoxical Vision in Cracking India**

Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*—published as *Ice-Candy-Man* in the United Kingdom in 1988 and under its more widely known title in the United States in 1991—deploys the figure of the child narrator as a device for simultaneously enabling and limiting the representation of marginal experience. The narrator, Lenny, is an eight-year-old Parsi girl living in Lahore at the time of Partition. Her multiple marginal identities are carefully constructed: she is a child

(therefore not an agent of adult political violence), female (therefore positioned by her social world primarily as a recipient of violence), Parsi (therefore a member of a religious minority outside the Hindu-Muslim binary that organises Partition's communal logic), and physically disabled, having survived polio and walking with a limp that further marks her as outside normative social legibility.

Parneet Jaggi argues that the novel's title metaphor—'cracking'—operates simultaneously at the literal and figurative levels: India is physically broken and divided; the social fabric cracks; identities crack; relationships crack. Lenny's confusion between these levels—her literal-minded attempt to understand how a country can be broken as if it were a physical object—is both a child's epistemological limitation and the novel's most penetrating insight (Jaggi 2015, 51-56). Dr. Poorva Bhonde observes that in *Lenny*, Sidhwa 'successfully portrays the trauma of a woman who belongs to a minority community' and that Lenny's status as 'a minority within a minority' constitutes her as doubly oppressed by gender and religion—subject to a double effacement that Spivak herself identified when she argued that the subaltern as female is 'even more deeply in shadow' (Bhonde 2018, 43-45; Spivak 1988, 287).

The novel's most significant act of subaltern representation concerns Lenny's ayah, Shanta—a Hindu woman of the servant class—and her abduction by Ice-Candy-Man, a Muslim Street vendor who had previously been presented as an admirer. The abduction is represented from Lenny's perspective, which gives the event a quality of helpless bewilderment: Lenny does not fully understand what is happening, but registers its horror through the disruption of her own security and the loss of the person she loves most. What makes this narratively and ethically complex is Lenny's inadvertent role in the betrayal: she reveals the ayah's hiding place under interrogation—not from malice but because, as a child, she cannot lie effectively under pressure. This is the partition paradox at the level of narration. The most innocent witness is not the safest witness; the attempt to speak from a position of marginal innocence does not

guarantee the protection of those most vulnerable. The form of the novel enacts the very problem it is analysing.

The novel recovers the ayah at its conclusion: she is retrieved from the brothel where Ice-Candy-Man has installed her and 'repatriated' to her family—a reunion framed with unmistakable ambivalence. Like the women discussed by Menon and Bhasin, the ayah's recovery by state and original community is not simply liberation; it is a second displacement from new relationships and attachments that had, however violently formed, become real. This tension—the recovered woman as simultaneously rescued and displaced again—represents one of the most ethically sophisticated moments in partition fiction.

#### **4.2 The Unnamed Narrator and the Violence of Forgetting in *The Shadow Lines***

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* (1988) deploys a different version of the child narrator: here, an unnamed boy growing up in Calcutta and Delhi in the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting retrospectively on events of 1947 and on communal riots in Calcutta and Dhaka in 1963-64. The narrator's relationship to partition violence is mediated, indirect, and fundamentally epistemic—he learns of events through memory, family narrative, and imagination rather than direct experience. This mediation is not a limitation the novel apologises for; it is the novel's central formal argument.

The novel's title refers to the borders drawn during partition, which Ghosh figures as 'shadow lines'—lines that have profound material consequences but no ontological reality in the landscape itself. The borders of partition do not correspond to rivers, mountains, or any natural feature; they are administrative decisions imposed on a landscape and a people who do not, in themselves, constitute divided communities. The violence that partition produces is real; the justification for that violence—that India's Muslims and Hindus were irreconcilably different—is a shadow.

The article 'Child Narrators in *The Shadow Lines*, *Cracking India*, and *Meatless Days*,' published in *World Literature Written in English* (1998), argues that in Ghosh, Sidhwa, and Sara Suleri, the child narrator serves to expose the tension between 'the will to be a nation'—Homi Bhabha's concept, drawn from Renan—and the violence that establishes national identity by requiring constitutive forgetting. Child figures, in this reading, are those who remember what the adult national subject must forget (*World Literature Written in English*, 1998, 190-206). The unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines* is therefore not naïve but epistemologically privileged: precisely because he has not yet been fully inducted into the national narrative, he can see what that narrative requires to be unseen.

The marginal voice in *The Shadow Lines* is not the direct voice of a subaltern subject—the narrator is middle-class, educated, and male. He is instead a voice that mediates between centre and margin, that attempts to speak on behalf of those whose stories the national narrative has consigned to forgetting. This mediation is itself a version of the partition paradox: the educated, English-writing narrator's attempt to recover subaltern experience is inevitably shaped by the cultural capital that separates him from those he seeks to represent.

#### **V. Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence: Oral History and the Ethics of Testimony***

Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (1998) occupies a distinctive generic position within the partition archive. It is neither fiction nor conventional history but oral history—a genre that explicitly foregrounds the relationship between interviewer and interviewee, between the scholar and the survivor. Butalia's book is premised on Joan Kelly's feminist historiographic principle that women's history must simultaneously restore women to history and restore history to women. But Butalia is acutely self-aware about the limits of this principle, about how even the most sensitively conducted

oral history reproduces the asymmetry between the scholar who has the power to ask questions and the survivor who is positioned as the object of inquiry.

The book documents the experiences of 75,000 to 100,000 women abducted, raped, and forcibly converted or married during partition violence. Lily Mondal's analysis underscores that Butalia 'painstakingly captures the saga of displacement, victimisation, and the gruesome shattering of the body and soul of women,' arguing that 'the history of partition almost made women non-existent'—that women were 'brutalised to the extent that they became dumbstruck,' their sense of belonging and citizenship 'permanently contested' (Mondal 2021, 1-4). Fatima and Tyag (2023) observe that women were categorised as 'the other' whose purpose was to endure the sufferings and brutality of masculine politics—worshipped as goddesses in religious texts, subjugated and oppressed in practice. Women were, in Butalia's formulation, simultaneously central to partition's meaning and invisible within its official accounts (Fatima and Tyag 2023, 1-5).

The book's structurally most important chapter concerns Butalia's uncle Ranamama—a Muslim man who stayed in Pakistan after partition while his Hindu family crossed to India. The chapter narrates Butalia's visit to Ranamama in Lahore decades later and the complex affective and political negotiations this visit entails. What she discovers is that the official account of partition—which assigns people to nations based on religion—was not only inaccurate but actively harmful for families who experienced partition as a rupture of intimate relationships rather than a clarification of identity. Ranamama's existence on the 'wrong' side of the border is experienced by his family not as a Pakistani identity but as absence, as loss, as the continuing presence of a ghost. This is the partition paradox in its most personal form.

The oral history methodology that Butalia employs confronts the partition paradox at its most acute. Every testimony she collects is already a representation—a narration of experience shaped by the passage of time, the demands of the interview situation, the social

relationships within which the survivor is embedded, and the conventions of narrative that govern how the unspeakable can be spoken. The women who speak to Butalia are not providing access to an unmediated experience; they are performing a particular kind of speech act in a particular social situation. Butalia is fully aware of these limitations and reflects on them throughout the book, which is part of what distinguishes it from less self-critical forms of oral history. But that self-awareness does not dissolve the problem: to give voice to the silenced is necessarily to produce a mediated voice, and the nature of that mediation is itself a political question.

Many of the survivors Butalia interviews speak through silence—through what they refuse to say, through gaps and breaks in their narratives, through tears and long pauses that are the testimonial correlatives of what cannot be represented in language. Butalia attempts to honour these silences rather than filling them with her own interpretive voice, but she also knows that a published academic book cannot simply reproduce silence; it must frame it, contextualise it, make it legible to a readership that did not share the experience of being silenced. The book is therefore a sustained meditation on the ethics of representation—on what it means to speak about those who cannot or will not speak, and on the inevitable insufficiency of that speaking.

## **VI. Three Recurring Paradoxes: Epistemological, Representational, and Temporal**

The analyses in the preceding sections reveal three paradoxes that recur across the corpus, and that together define the specific character of the partition paradox as this paper understands it. They are not contradictions to be resolved; they are constitutive tensions to be inhabited.

### **6.1 The Epistemological Paradox: Knowing from the Outside**

The most privileged witnesses to subaltern suffering in these texts—Lenny, the unnamed narrator of *The Shadow Lines*, Butalia herself—are all systematically positioned at a

remove from the experience they witness. Lenny is a child, Parsi, and disabled; the *Shadow Lines* narrator is retrospective, educated, and male; Butalia is a feminist academic with institutional resources and a publishing contract. This remove is not incidental—it is precisely what enables the narrative to be produced, disseminated, and received as knowledge. The subaltern witness—Nooran, the ayah, the women whose testimonies Butalia collects—is structurally prevented from occupying the position of the knowing subject within the representational economy that produces the narrative.

Salma Begum poses the sharpest version of this question: would the story have been different if it had been told by the subalterns themselves? And if so, how? (Begum 2018, 1-4). The answer is that we cannot know, because the conditions of production of partition narrative have systematically prevented subalterns from occupying the position of narrators. What we can do—and what the most self-aware of these texts invite us to do—is read against the grain, attending to the silences, gaps, and substitutions through which subaltern experience is marked precisely by its absence.

## **6.2 The Representational Paradox: Voice as Ventriloquism**

All four texts attempt to give voice to those who have been silenced—the peasants of *Mano Majra*, the ayah, partition women survivors, and the victims of communal riots. But each of these voices, in being given, is inevitably shaped by the narrative conventions, institutional pressures, and aesthetic choices of the giving. Nooran's voice is constructed by Singh; the ayah's by Sidhwa; women survivors' testimonial voices by Butalia through selection, transcription, translation, and editing; the retrospective narrator's voice in *The Shadow Lines* by Ghosh through the conventions of the modernist novel. None of these constructions is false, but none is transparent either.

Kute's comparative study (2018) identifies this as a fundamental feature of partition fiction as a genre: partition narratives from different regions of India produce different versions

of the marginal voice, shaped by different regional, linguistic, and cultural archives. The South Indian partition narrative is not the same as the Punjabi or Bengali partition narrative; each constructs its marginal subjects through different conventions and different historical experiences of 1947 (Kute 2018, 3-4). This regional specificity is itself a form of representational complexity that resists any unified account of 'the partition experience.'

The representational paradox is sharpest in the case of women's testimony. The women who speak to Butalia have survived experiences for which the dominant cultural discourse has no adequate language. The speech conventions available to them are precisely those that produced their silencing: the language of honour and shame, of family loyalty, of communal identity. To speak about their experience within these conventions is to reproduce the frameworks that enabled the violence; to speak outside them risks incomprehensibility or social ostracism. The voice that is given is also, inevitably, a constraint.

### **6.3 The Temporal Paradox: The Archive and the Living**

All four texts engage with partition from a temporal distance: *Train to Pakistan* was published in 1956; *Cracking India* and *The Shadow Lines* in 1988; *The Other Side of Silence* in 1998. Each intervenes in the ongoing process of meaning-making about partition that Zamindar's 'long partition' thesis identifies as a process never concluded in 1947. But this temporal distance creates a compound problem. It enables the narrative distance necessary for aesthetic and analytical reflection, while also meaning that primary witnesses—survivors of partition violence—are increasingly absent from the conversation.

The intergenerational dimension of partition trauma is a growing area of scholarship. Kaur and Jaggi (2023) have documented how partition trauma is transmitted across generations through family narratives, silences, and embodied practices, finding that third-generation descendants of partition survivors score nearly as high as second-generation survivors on the Danieli Inventory for Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma. Meanwhile, Trijit Mukherjee

(2025), applying Cathy Caruth's concept of 'unclaimed experience' to *Cracking India*, traces how partition trauma returns compulsively through fragmented narrative, how working through—in LaCapra's sense—requires integrating fractured memories into coherent narrative rather than merely acting them out. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory is relevant here too: partition, for third-generation writers and readers, is experienced as a form of inherited, mediated memory—known not through direct experience but through the powerful, sometimes suffocating, narratives of those who lived through it.

The temporal paradox is also spatial. The shadow lines of Ghosh's title are not metaphors at rest in the past; they are present-tense material structures—the Line of Control in Kashmir, the international border between India and Pakistan—that continue to produce the kinds of exclusion, displacement, and violence that the partition paradox names. The literature examined in this paper not only looks backward; it speaks to a contemporary South Asian reality still shaped by decisions made in 1947.

## **VII. Conclusion: Positioning the Contribution**

This paper has argued that the partition paradox—the constitutive tension between official nationalist historiography and the embodied, gendered, communally differentiated experiences of the marginalised—is not simply a thematic concern of partition narratives but a structural feature of their production, reception, and interpretation. Drawing on Spivak, Pandey, Zamindar, Butalia, and Menon and Bhasin, and through close analysis of Singh, Sidhwa, Butalia, and Ghosh, the paper has identified three forms of the paradox—epistemological, representational, and temporal—and argued that these are constitutive rather than incidental tensions. They define the field within which any act of partition representation must work, whether it acknowledges as much or not.

The paper's contribution is twofold. First, it proposes 'partition paradox' as a theoretical concept rather than a merely descriptive term, giving a name and a structure to what has

previously appeared in the scholarship as a collection of unconnected problems—the problem of subaltern representation, the problem of women's silence, the problem of temporal distance, the problem of regional specificity. By identifying these as instances of a single structural tension, the paper enables a more systematic analysis of their interrelations and consequences. Second, the paper argues that these three paradoxes are not obstacles to be overcome but productive tensions to be inhabited. The most ethically and aesthetically sophisticated partition narratives are those that work within the paradox rather than pretending to transcend it.

Several research gaps are indicated by this analysis. The most pressing concerns communities that fall outside the dominant Hindu-Muslim binary through which partition is typically understood: Dalits, tribal peoples, lower-caste Sikhs, and religious minorities such as Christians and Parsis, whose experiences of 1947 are systematically underrepresented in both the literary and historiographical archives. Sidhwa's novel, with its Parsi perspective, is an important exception; Bhonde (2018) and Begum (2018) gesture toward this gap without fully addressing it. The Dalit and tribal dimensions of partition experience have received almost no sustained scholarly attention and represent perhaps the most significant lacuna in the field.

A second gap concerns geographic diversity. The dominant partition narrative is Punjabi and, to a lesser extent, Bengali; the partitions experienced by communities in Sindh, the North-West Frontier Province, and the eastern Bengal region of what is now Bangladesh have received comparatively little attention. Kute (2018) documents significant regional variation in how partition fiction is produced and received, but the field lacks comparative studies that take this variation seriously as a theoretical problem rather than merely a descriptive fact.

A third avenue concerns the contemporary resonance of partition memory. The partition paradox is not merely a historical phenomenon; it is a contemporary one, enacted in the ongoing exclusion of minorities, the continuing militarisation of the border, and the political

mobilisation of communal memory in both India and Pakistan. Future research might examine how twenty-first-century partition literature inherits and transforms the partition paradox for a postcolonial world that is still, in Zamindar's sense, living within the long partition.

The partition paradox, ultimately, is not a problem of representation alone but a problem of power—the power that determines whose suffering counts as history, whose voice is legible as testimony, and whose memory has the right to make claims on the present. The narratives examined in this paper are not triumphant recoveries of lost voices. They are honest accounts of the difficulty of recovery, evidence of the cost of silence, and invitations to a scholarship that takes the ethical demands of the marginalised seriously—not merely asserting that it does, but demonstrating, through method and form, what such seriousness actually requires.

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