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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Archives of Sexual Violence: Some Testimonies from the Partition of India

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Abstract

The article interrogates testimonies of sexual violence against women, like rape, abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage, during the partition of India in 1947. Unlike sites of violence such as Rwanda, there were no commissions set up either by the successor governments in India or Pakistan or by international agencies to investigate the massacres. Partition violence does not easily fit into the usual frames of genocide or ethnic cleansing used in academic writing on conflict. In the absence of identifiable perpetrators and villains of the partition violence, members of a community were perpetrators wherever they dominated and victims where they were few. The archive for this article consists of statements by survivors and observers of the massacres to the local authorities; for example, army officers and social workers supervising the "recovery" of abducted women or running refugee camps. Interviews were conducted with survivors of the partition many years later, which are generally marked by silence about sexual violence. Questions arise about the meager testimonies and the bias in the archive regarding selection, collection, and publication. Ethical issues abound, including the selective appropriation of testimonies for political ends. Were women silent because disclosure would invite stigma, or is it that trauma is expressed by silence? And finally, how do survivors move toward closure?

Partition of India: Migrations and Communal Violence

The Independence of India in 1947 was accompanied by the partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan.[1] The abandonment of responsibility for

[1] Anita Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India, 1936–1947* (New Delhi: Oxford,1987); Sucheta Mahajan, *Independence and Partition: Erosion of Colonial Power in India*, Sage Series in Modern Indian History (Delhi: Sage Publications, 2000); Sucheta Mahajan, "Why Gandhi Accepted the Decision to Partition India," in *Partition of India: Why 1947*, *Debates in Indian History and Society*, ed. Kaushik Roy

keeping the peace by the departing colonial power triggered massacres and widespread displacement of the population across the new borders. The figure of 10 million displaced has been recently substantially revised to 15–18 million crossing the Western border, and the figure of 200,000 deaths has been revised to 2.3–3 million deaths.[2] It remains the largest migration in recent history.

Widespread communal violence started a year earlier than 15 August 1947, the day of Independence, with widespread rioting and killing in Calcutta following the call for "Direct Action" by the Muslim League on 16 August 1946. The killings were met in equal measure by the organized violence of the Hindu communal groups. In the words of Margaret Bourke-White, the ace photographer, who had covered Nazi concentration camps, "I … found a scene that looked like Buchenwald. The streets were literally strewn with dead bodies, an officially estimated six thousand, but I myself saw many more… In Calcutta, a city larger than Detroit, vast areas were… black with the wings of vultures that hovered over impartially dead Hindus and Muslims. Like Germany's concentration camps, this was the ultimate result of racial and religious prejudice."[3]

Calcutta was followed by widespread violence in Noakhali and Bihar in October 1946 and Rawalpindi in March 1947; the spiral of communal violence spun out of control into civil war.[4] The summer of 1947 in Punjab saw the skies red with the fires from *mohallas* (neighborhoods) in the cities and devastated villages, pillaged and set on fire.[5] The long-drawn and widespread nature of the civil war is a point to be noted, in counterpoint to the common impression of the partition massacres as primarily an August–September affair in Punjab. For example, the book *Midnight's Furies* goes like this: "Like Rwanda, the riots were relatively confined in time and space. The worst killings lasted about six weeks. While the chaos spread throughout most of western Pakistan and great swathes of northern India, much of the rest of the subcontinent was not directly affected."[6]

(New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011); Tan Tai Yong and Gyanesh Kudaisya eds., *Partition and Post-Colonial South Asia: A Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 1–49.

[2] Drawing on demographic studies of Partition, based on an analysis of sequential census data, Leaning estimated the numbers who crossed the border in Punjab one way or the other at around 15–18 million. The range of deaths was 2.3–3.2 million. Jennifer Leaning, "The 1947 Humanitarian Response to Partition in the Punjab" in *The 1947 Partition of British India, Forced Migration and its Reverberations*, eds. Jennifer Leaning and Shubhangi Bhadada (New Delhi: Sage Spectrum, 2022), 47.

[3] Margaret Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself* (New York: Simon and Schuster,1963), 283.

[4] For the rapid spread of Hindu communal ideology, associated organizations, volunteer bodies, and private armies, see Aditya Mukherjee, Mridula Mukherjee, and Sucheta Mahajan, *RSS, School Texts and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi: The Hindu Communal Project* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2008), 58–62.

[5] Note by Field Marshall Sir C. Auchinleck, 15 August 1947, IOR, R/3/1/171, Acc No. 3640, NMML.

[6] Nisid Hajari, *Midnight's Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition* (New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2016), ch. 1.

Colonial State and Communal Violence

The violence escalated over time as the departing colonial power set off an unplanned, hasty withdrawal, which dissolved into a messy scuttle. What made it worse was the perspective of the officials that the "natives" deserved to "stew in their juice."[7] Mountbatten brought forward the date for withdrawal from India to 15 August 1947 from June 1948. When the date of 15 August 1947 was announced, there were only 72 days to quit and divide. Mountbatten contended that an early date to transfer power would help the British government escape responsibility for the worsening communal situation.[8] There was no concern for what happened to people of India.[9] Whether in the Viceroy's house in Delhi or in Whitehall, London, nobody heeded the words of the Governor of Punjab: "In the time available it will be quite impossible to make a clean job of partition, and even if we can check disorder up to 15th August, and the new Governments can maintain themselves thereafter, there will be appalling confusion."[10]

The Boundary Commission made matters worse, presided over by a London lawyer whose inept handling was immortalised in the poem "Partition" by W.H. Auden.[11] Delaying the announcement of the Boundary Commission awards to after the date of Independence compounded the chaos and mayhem, as many a village and town did not know which side of the border it was on. Flags of both India and Pakistan were flown in border regions contested by all communities, Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh.[12]

People were already crossing the border in long foot convoys, *kafilas*, miles long, hoping for safety in numbers, but were ambushed, the men killed, and the

[7] See Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, 199.

[8] Mountbatten defended his decision even two decades after he left India: "If I had the whole of my time over again, one thing I would not change would be the way I handled the speed of the transfer," Interview with B.R. Nanda, Oral History Transcript 351, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

[9] Sucheta Mahajan, "Editor's Introduction," in *Towards Freedom: Documents on the Independence Movement in India, 1947, Part 2*, ed. Sucheta Mahajan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015), xxix.

[10] Governor's Appreciation, July 11, 1947, India Office Records, R/3/1/91, Acc. No. 3416, National Archives of India, in Mahajan, ed., *Towards Freedom*, 1947, Part 2, 1757–58.

[11] "Unbiased at least he was when he arrived on his mission,
Having never set eyes on the land he was called to partition…
"Time," they had briefed him in London, "is short. It's too late
For mutual reconciliation or rational debate:
The only solution now lies in separation....
He got down to work, to the task of settling the fate
Of millions. The maps at his disposal were out of date
And the Census Returns almost certainly incorrect,
….The weather was frightfully hot,....
But in seven weeks it was done, the frontiers decided,
A continent for better or worse divided.
The next day he sailed for England, where he could quickly forget
The case, as a good lawyer must. Return he would not,
Afraid, as he told his Club, that he might get shot.
Partition (1966), accessed December 15, 2023,
https://www.poeticous.com/w-h-auden/partition.

[12] Mahajan, "Editor's Introduction," xlii.

women taken away. The iconic image of the partition is the train, to which people flocked in search of a safe journey, packed with people on top, inside, and clinging to the rails. The trains often became targets of attacking mobs and arrived at their destination as ghost trains filled with dismembered bodies.[13]

Violence against women included rape, accompanied by mutilation, branding of the body with religious symbols, and abduction, followed by forcible conversion and forced marriage.[14] Another form of violence was honor killing, beheading, drowning, burning, and execution by senior male members of the family to protect the honor of "their" women. Women leapt into deep wells to their death rather than falling into the hands of the "other" community.[15]

The President of the Indian National Congress spoke of the violence done to women in his speech at the All India Congress Committee session, which ratified the decision to accept the partition: "Both the communities have vied with each other in the worst orgies of violence, so that in the latest communal frenzy more cruel and heartless things have been done than at any previous time. I have seen a well where women with their children, 107 in all, threw themselves to save their honour. In another place, a place of worship, fifty young women were killed by their menfolk for the same reason. I have seen heaps of bones in a house where 307 persons, mainly women and children, were driven, locked up and then burnt alive by the invading mob."[16]

Feminist Perspectives on Sexual Violence

Scholars have explored the nature of sexual violence during the partition. They have interpreted it as an expression of deep-seated masculine insecurities within a patriarchal society. The ownership of the woman's body and its objectification as a territory (much like land) can explain why, apart from outright murder, rape, and mutilation of the woman's body, it became a preferred form of establishing the community's domination over the "other."

The work of social anthropologist Veena Das is especially insightful, given her engagement with the phenomenon of violence, be it during the partition or when directed against the Sikh community in 1984. She writes that during the partition, it was common to find *Jai Hind* (Long Live India) and *Pakistan Zindabad* (Long Live Pakistan) tattooed on women's bodies. Veena Das suggests that

[13] Extracts from a letter from Evan Jenkins to Louis Mountbatten, 13 August 1947, Lionel Carter ed., *Punjab Politics* (Delhi: Manohar, 2007), Vol. V, 228–32.

[14] Jisha Menon, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 121; Meera Patel, "Rape Accounts Still Surface from India's partition 65 Years On", Women's Media Centre, Women Under Siege, June 26, 2013, accessed December 21, 2023, https://womensmediacenter.com/women-under-siege/rape-accounts-still-surface-from-indias-partition-65-years-on.

[15] Thoa Khalsa, a village in Punjab, was immortalized by the dramatic depiction of a similar episode in Govind Nihalani's sensitive rendering (TV series, 1988) of Bhisham Sahni's classic novel, *Tamas* (Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2017).

[16] Concluding speech by J. B. Kripalani at All India Congress Committee Session, 15 June 1947, *All India Congress Committee (AICC) Papers*, File No. G-1947 (Part 1)/1946, NMML, New Delhi.

inscribing these slogans would create a memory in their fantasy, by which men of the other community would never be able to forget that the women as territory had already been claimed and occupied by other men. In this way, women's bodies were the icons of the new nations, carrying on their person texts written and read.[17]

Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, and Urvashi Butalia pioneered the studies of women's experiences during the partition with their work and the publishing houses they set up. Menon and Bhasin drew attention to a doctor's report of the "amputation of breasts of women." They noted that "Six such cases of chopped-off breasts were brought to the refugee camp and all of them proved fatal"[18] and pointed out that these acts "desexualise a woman and negate her as wife and mother; no longer a nurturer."[19] Other feminist writing interprets violence against women as a way for men to reclaim their masculinity. In this view, partition being seen as a failure of the men to protect the unity of the nation, compounded by Hindu and Sikh men unable to defend their women, led to a very "violent compensatory performance of [Sikh] masculinity."[20]

These feminist perspectives on sexual violence have deepened our understanding of the subject: "the story of 1947, while being one of the attainments of Independence, is also a gendered narrative of displacement and dispossession, of large-scale and widespread communal violence, and of the realignment of family, community, and national identities as a people were forced to accommodate the dramatically altered reality that now prevailed."[21] These perspectives have helped scholars of the partition to place sexual violence within a comparative framework of histories of sexual/communal/mass violence in India before and after the partition and sites of conflict in other parts of the world.

Recovery of Abducted Women

The governments of India and Pakistan took up the issue of the recovery of abducted women in September 1947, when the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan met in Lahore.[22] An Inter Dominion Treaty was signed in 1950 by which both countries resolved that all women abducted or forcibly married after 1 March 1947 should be recovered and restored, and that a joint

[17] Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (London: University of California Press, 2007), 55.

[18] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 44.

[19] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, 42.

[20] Shumona Dasgupta, "The Extraordinary and the Everyday: Locating Violence in Women's Narratives of the Partition," in *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films: History, Politics, and Aesthetics,* eds. Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Debali Mookerjea-Leonard (London: Routledge, 2015), 36–51.

[21] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, No. 17 (1993): WS2-WS11.

[22] Urvashi Butalia, "Abducted and Widowed Women: Questions of Sexuality and Citizenship During Partition" in *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity*, ed. Meenakshi Thapan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 90–106.

organization of both dominions would be set up to carry out the rescue work.[23] In India, the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act was passed in 1949.[24] The passage of the Bill invited a diversity of responses in the Constituent Assembly, from proposing that abducted women remain with their "new" families to opposing the sweeping powers given to police officers to recover the women.[25] The job of recovery was assigned to the local police, assisted by senior officers and social workers. A district-wide list was prepared of Hindu and Sikh women who went missing or were presumed abducted in Pakistan.[26] The Pakistani newspaper, *Dawn,* published regular appeals for information about abducted women. In 1950, the official estimate for the number of abducted women stood at 50,000 Muslim women in India and 33,000 Hindu and Sikh women in Pakistan.[27] 9,000 women from India and over 5,500 women from Pakistan were rescued during the first year of the working of the Act. In four years, 30,000 women were recovered. The Act was renewed periodically to continue recovery work and repealed in 1957.[28]

Archives of Partition

Despite the scale of violence, there are no substantive consolidated archives of the partition. No trials or commissions were set up either by the successor governments of India and Pakistan or by international agencies to investigate the massacres during the partition. The obvious question is, why were there no mechanisms of redress or justice for the victims of the partition? One answer is that the colonial rulers exiting India would not have wished to set up a tribunal or encourage the setting up of an international body, which could well condemn their role. Bilateral or national-level commissions could hardly be contemplated given the hostilities between India and Pakistan in Kashmir, not to speak of fragile relations between the Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu communities. The troubled functioning of bilateral institutions such as the Punjab Boundary Force, the Partition Council, and the Joint Defence Council was hardly heartening.[29] Further, the context of migration to another country made legal redress difficult.

Also, it would have been tough to initiate the process of justice when perpetrators and victims were from both communities. Generally, X community ended up being perpetrators where they were in the majority and victims

[23] Ministry of External Affairs, India, Agreement between the Governments of India and Pakistan regarding security and rights of minorities, 1950, accessed March 25, 2025, https://www.commonlii.org/in/other/treaties/INTSer/1950/9.html.

[24] Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act, 1949, accessed March 25, 2025, https://bombayhighcourt.nic.in/libweb/legislation/actc/1949.65.pdf.

[25] Constitution Assembly debates, November 28 to December 17, 1949, accessed March 2024, https://eparlib.nic.in › cald_06_17-12-1949.

[26] Publication by Central Recovery Organization in India, 1952 cited in Butalia, "Abducted and Widowed Women," 96.

[27] Menon and Bhasin, "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance," WS2.

[28] https://bombayhighcourt.nic.in/libweb/actc/1949.65.pdf, consulted 10 May 2025.

[29] Mahajan, *Independence and Partition*, 199-200.

where they were in the minority. Given this circumstance, sexual violence was seen as a social phenomenon; it was not seen to constitute a crime.[30] In the case of women abducted by men of the other community and kept in forced unions by them, even the social workers entrusted with their rehabilitation were of the view that it was very tough to punish the wrongdoer as the abducted women had "changed many hands."[31]

Another consideration was that even the social workers dealing with the abducted women were not in favor of courts and trials or the recording of women's experiences. To quote Sarabhai,

> I met Shri Sikri, the Advocate General and explained why it was not a good idea to produce the file before the court as it will be a part of the official record and could be used to blackmail the girl in future and ruin her life. It is also not desirable for abducted women to be produced before a court. Pakistan discourages the recording of brutal experiences undergone by women as it gives a bad name to the girl. We will get known as "a country of brutal acts."[32]

For example, there was no description of the atrocities committed against women in the eleven-page document that Rameshwari Nehru, social worker, political activist, and president of the Central Advisory Board for rehabilitation of displaced women, prepared for a talk on the difficulties and challenges faced in rehabilitating women sufferers.[33] However, she did write about the violence against women in the newspaper *Deshdoot*. In the first of a three-part series beginning on 20 July 1947, she described a visit to Tuthiyal village in Jhelum, where ten to twelve women and children returned to their village after hiding in the fields to escape assailants. They evaded their enemy, living in desolate forests, and "when they met other women, they cried loudly and screamed… we cried too… who would be so hard-hearted as not to cry?"[34]

While noting the absence of a consolidated official archive of the partition, it is essential to emphasize the severe challenges faced by women elsewhere who have given their testimonies in tribunals.[35] Anna Bryson, an oral historian of the Irish Troubles, who later did fieldwork in Cambodia, pertinently wonders if

[30] Rape was institutionalized as a war crime by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in 1997. Alexandra Adams, "Legacy of the International Criminal Tribunals for the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda and their Contribution to the Crime of Rape," *European Journal of International Law* 29, no. 3 (2018): 749–69.

[31] Mridula Sarabhai pointed to this while putting forward recommendations to a fact-finding mission constituted in 1956 to expedite recovery work. *Mridula Sarabhai Papers*, microfilm, Reel 1, NMML, New Delhi.

[32] Note on legal problems to Joint Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, 14 September 1953, *Mridula Sarabhai Papers,* microfilm, Reel 1, NMML, New Delhi.

[33] *Rameshwari Nehru Papers,* 1st installment, File no. 103, NMML, New Delhi.

[34] *Rameshwari Nehru Papers,* 1st installment, File no. 103.

[35] Jonneke Koomen examines these in "'Without These Women, the Tribunal Cannot Do Anything': The Politics of Witness Testimony on Sexual Violence at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 2 (2013): 253–77.

there are less invasive ways to record the accounts of women victims, away from the glare of the public eye, and which would lessen the threat witnesses typically face.[36]

This brings us to the question: what does the archive of sexual violence during the partition consist of?

First are the statements made by the survivors of and eyewitnesses to the massacres to the local authorities, be they camp superintendents, officials at railway stations, policemen, army officers, or liaison officers supervising the "recovery" of abducted women.[37] Those who arrived at the refugee camp or a railway station made a statement at the time of registration or admission to whosoever was in charge. The police and military were expected to maintain the peace in the disturbed conditions, and they often could not or did not do so, but they sent reports about these eyewitness accounts.

Second, the experiences of women sufferers can also be gleaned from the reports, letters, and memoirs of social workers—Mridula Sarabhai, Rameshwari Nehru, Kamlaben Patel, and Anis Kidwai[38]—involved in the recovery of abducted women. The letters and reports pertain to the years between 1947 and 1956, to the period of recovery. Memoirs came later.

Third are the interviews conducted with survivors of the partition, decades later, when there was renewed interest in the partition after the mass communal violence in the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and the riots consequent on the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992. In India, there were individual collections of testimonies by scholars in the field, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, and Ravinder Kaur,[39] among others. Today, there are institutional archives of oral narratives, such as the 1947 Partition Archive,[40] the Harvard Partition Stories Project,[41] and the BBC Partition Voices Project[42], to mention three. Interestingly, they are based outside the subcontinent, at Berkeley, Harvard, and London, respectively. The Partition Museum, set up in recent years in Amritsar, has

[36] Anna Bryson, "Victims, Violence, and Voice: Transitional Justice, Oral History, and Dealing with the Past," *Hastings International & Comparative Law Review* 39, no. 2 (2016): 299–334..

[37] See the report compiled by Sardar Gurbachan Singh Talib in 1947 and published in 1950 by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (hereafter SGPC).

[38] Mridula Sarabhai Papers and Rameshwari Nehru Papers, Manuscript Section, NMML, New Delhi; Kamlaben Patel, *Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir*, trans. U. Randeria (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2006); Anis Kidwai, *In Freedom's Shade*, trans. A. Kidwai (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2011).

[39] Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Duke University Press, Durham, 2000); Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State and Gender: On Women's Agency during Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, no. 17 (1993): WS12–WS24; Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*; Ravinder Kaur, *Since 1947: Partition Narratives among the Punjabi Migrants of Delhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[40] Set up in 2010, the *1947 Partition Archive* has recorded more than 10,200 testimonies in thirty-six languages from fourteen different countries. Accessed December 21, 2023, https://www.1947partitionarchive.org.

[41] The Partition Stories Project crowdsourced 2,000 oral narratives now available at the Lakshmi Mittal and Family South Asia Institute, Harvard University. Accessed December 21, 2023, https://mittalsouthasiainstitute.harvard.edu/partition/.

[42] *Partition Voices*, BBC accessed December 21, 2023, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b090rrl0.

created facilities for visitors to listen to recorded interviews with people who lived through those years.[43] There are now Partition museums in Delhi and Kolkata. Oral history is now an acceptable area of the practice of academic and public history. It has come a long way since only written records were considered the basis of "objective" history, and data from interviews were supplementary and consigned to the Appendix. Today, oral history is deemed legitimate in areas or periods for which no written record exists, such as phases of civil conflict, be it the Irish Troubles or the Indian partition.[44]

In March 2019, I conducted interviews in Noakhali, now in Bangladesh, a site of widespread communal violence in October 1946.[45] *The Statesman* of 24 October 1946 had reported that for the 13th day, "about 120 villages in Ramganj, Lakshmipur, Begamganj and Senbagh thanas in Noakhali district, with a Hindu population of 90,000 and nearly 70 villages in Chandpur and Faridganj thanas in Tipperah district, with a Hindu population of about 40,000, remained besieged by hooligans."[46] Despite the extreme violence against women in October 1946, my interviewees had little to say about it.

Defining the Archive

Let us look at a definition of an archive by the Haitian anthropologist, Michel-Rolph Truillot:

> By archives, I mean the institutions that organise facts and sources and condition the possibility of existence of historical statements… Archives assemble. Their assembly work is not limited to a more or less passive act of collecting. Rather, it is an active act of production that prepares facts for historical intelligibility… In short, the making of archives involves a number of selective operations: selection of producers, selection of evidence, selection of themes, selection of procedures which means at best the differential ranking and at worst, the exclusion of some producers, some evidence, some themes, some procedures."[47]

[43] The Partition Museum in Amritsar is located in the historic Town Hall next to the Golden Temple, sacred to Sikhs and Hindus, and the Jallianwala Bagh Memorial, commemorating an infamous episode of colonial repression. Accessed December 19, 2023, https://www.partitionmuseum.org/visit-the-museum-2.

[44] See Sucheta Mahajan, "Beyond the Archives: Doing Oral History in Contemporary India," *Studies in History* 27, no. 2 (2011): 281–98; Pippa Virdee, "Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories and the Partition of 1947," *Oral History*, 41, no. 2 (2013): 49–62; Anjali Bhardwaj Datta, "Gendering Oral History of Partition: Interrogating Patriarchy," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41 no. 22 (2006), 2229–35; Devika Chawla, *Home, Uprooted: Oral histories of India's Partition* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014).

[45] Shri Saha, Director, Gandhi Ashram, Jayag, Noakhali, Bangladesh, and Nasir Ahmed, Assistant Professor, Jagannath University, Dacca, who was then my doctoral student at JNU, made this fieldwork possible. Bodh Prakash brought his interest in partition to bear on our fieldwork, joining in the interviews with keen enthusiasm. The recordings of the interviews are in my personal archive.

[46] *The Statesman,* October 24, 1946.

[47] Michel-Rolph Truillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 52–53.

Selective Testimonies: Niche Archive

The archive selected for analysis in this paper fits Truillot's definition of the archive in terms of organization, assembly, production, selection, and exclusion. It is a niche archive compiled by G. S. Talib ("Talib" in Urdu, denoting a seeker of truth) for the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, the apex body that manages Sikh temples.[48] The evidence in the archive pertains only to what was done to Hindus and Sikhs; it excludes what was done to Muslims. Indeed, the archive is constituted for a specific declared purpose: to highlight the actions of the other community, more specifically, the conspiracy of the Muslim League. The archive does not pretend to give the other side of the story, that of the plight of Muslims. This imparts a homogeneity which, rather than being limiting, in the sense of being one-sided, makes it useful as a research tool, as the scope and the bias in its constitution are overtly evident. Further, the very constitution of the archive, its "production," in Truillot's words, mirrors the communal polarization of society at the time. The Hindus' and Sikhs' testimonies are in a ghetto, metaphorically speaking.

The testimonies in the archive were the immediate, spontaneous outpouring of sufferers, not a careful statement vetted by a lawyer. Survivors spoke freely of being forsaken by family members, of girls being killed by family members when they were close to losing their "honour," and of their wanting to stay on or return to their family. The testimonies raise a mirror to the argument of scholars of the partition that the women were forcibly recovered and restored to their family and their nation by the Indian state.[49] The Recovery of Abducted Women Act of 1949 expressly excluded all actions and statements associated with abducted women and their recovery and restoration from the ambit of the courts to protect the persons concerned.

Apart from the list of atrocities, the report has fifty appendices, accessed from reports by civil and military officials stationed in the western part of Punjab before and after 15 August 1947, and newspaper reports. Altogether, I have classified twenty-five first-hand named accounts, nine by women (Table 1) and sixteen by men (Table 2), covering the period from March 1947 to January 1949. I have not analyzed the seven unnamed accounts and the eleven accounts of a general nature (newspaper reports, a letter from the Governor of Punjab to Jinnah, a government publication, a report by the Punjab police on the seizure of illicit arms, and a list of atrocities).

The statements were primarily verbal, in Punjabi or Urdu, from which a few were translated into English by the official before whom they were made, to be included with the report to the government.

Analysing the Testimonies

Of the twenty-five testimonies, eleven stand out on three counts: the perspective they provide on the complicity of the military and the police in

[48] Sardar Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Muslim League Attack on Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab* (SGPC, 1950; New Delhi: Voice of India Books, 1991).

[49] Menon and Bhasin, "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance."

Table 1. Representative Data on Testimonies by Women

S.No.	Name/ Gender	Age	Marital status	Date	Place of the incident	Caste/ Religion	Reporting authority	Involvement of police/military	Reference to abduction of women
1	Laj Wanti/ F	23	Widow	Sep-1947	Nurpur Sethi, Jhelum dist.	Hindu/ Khatri	Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore	Military	Yes
2	KrishnaWanti, Lajwanti, Rajrani, Shanti Devi, Ram Piari, Lajwanti, Phullan Rani, Rani Bai /F	–	7 widows 1 married	After 28 Aug 1947	Lyallpur (6) Jhang (2)	Hindu	Officials, DAV Refugee Camp, Lahore	Military & Police	Yes
3	Santosh Kumari/ F	20	Married	24-Nov-1947	Kamoke/ Lahore	Hindu/ Khatri	Kamoke/Lahore	Military & Police	Yes
4	Raj Rani/ F	–	Not stated	21-Oct-1947	Shahdara, Sheikhupura	Hindu/ Khatri	–	Military & Police	Yes
5	Chanderkant/ F	13	Unmarried	–	Kahuta, Rawalpindi	–	Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore	Military	Yes
6	Viranwati/ F	16-17	Unmarried	–	Mirpur	Hindu	Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore	–	Yes
7	Rampyari/ F	20	Married	–	Sialkot	Hindu	Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore	–	Yes
8	Sarjit Kaur/ F	19	Married	10-Nov-1947	Mirpur	Sikh	Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore/ Hoshiarpur, East Punjab	–	Yes
9	Harbhajan Kaur/ F	–	Married	26-Nov-1947	Mirpur	Sikh	Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore	–	Yes

Table 2. Representative Data on Testimonies by Men

S.No.	Name	Gender	Occupation	Date	Place of the massacre	Caste / Religion / Ethnicity	Reporting authority / Location	Involvement of police/military	Reference to women abduction / any other
1	Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore	M	Official	23-Jan-1948	Parachinar	–	East Punjab Government	–	–
2	Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore	M	Official	11-Jan-1948	Gujarat	–	East Punjab Government	Military & Police	–
3	Ram Nath	M	Advocate, High Court	24-26 Aug 1947	Sheikhupura	Hindu	–	Military & Police	Yes
4	Gurdial Singh	M	Tehsildar	–	Sheikhupura	Sikh	–	Military & Police	Yes
5	Hansraj Gulati	M	Medical practitioner & Municipal Commissioner	After 27 Aug 1947	Sharaqpur, Sheikhupura	Hindu	–	Police	–
6	Ram Das of Lalla, Sialkot	M	Head Constable	–	Gujranwala	Hindu	–	Police	Yes
7	BW O' Connor	M	Military Officer, 2nd Marathas	01-Nov-1947	Sargodha	European	Lahore	Military & Police	Yes
8	Harbhajan Singh	M	Magistrate First Class	06-Oct-1947	Gurdaspur	Sikh	Deputy Commissioner	Military	–
9	Khazan Singh	M	–	17-Jan-1948	Muzaffarabad, Jammu and Kashmir	Sikh	–	–	–
10	Sona Ram	M	Opium contractor	–	Mianwali	Hindu/ Khatri	–	–	Forced conversions

(*Continued*)

Table 2. (*Continued*)

S.No.	Name	Gender	Occupation	Date	Place of the massacre	Caste / Religion / Ethnicity	Reporting authority / Location	Involvement of police/military	Reference to women abduction / any other
11	Mr. Sehgal	M	Assistant Liaison Officer	30-Jan-1948	Lahore	Hindu/ Khatri	–	Military & Police	–
12	Ram Dass Sabarwal	M	Sub Inspector of Police	Sep-1947	Bhawal, Sargodha	Hindu/ Khatri	–	Military	–
13	Ganpat Rai Khosla	M	Assistant, Financial Commissioner's Office	Aug 1947-Apr 1948		Hindu	–	Police	–
14	Sardar Sohan Singh Dora	M	Recruiting Officer, Amritsar (Prisoner in Lahore fort)	6 Aug 1947-Jan 1949	–	Sikh	–	Police	–
15	Sardar Prem Singh Prem	M	Member, SGPC / Advocate, Jullundur	09-Mar-1947	Campbellpore, / Rawalpindi	–	–	Saved by military	Honor killings of women
16	British Officer, Military Evacuation Organisation	M	Military Officer	Sep-1947	Sheikhupura	–	–	–	Abduction, rape and bestial violence

the violence, the enormity of the massacre, and the challenges before women survivors in narrating the act of rape itself. Shrimati Laj Wanti, a survivor of the Kamoke massacre, recounted:[50]

> Approximately 5,000 people had collected to go in the train. Out of them between 6 to 7 hundred were women…When everybody had got into the train…, a huge crowd of Muslims came from the side of the Mandi and factories. They were armed with rifles, chhuras,[51] axes, barchas[52] and other lethal weapons. They were shouting Ya Ali and came running. They entered the compartments of the train and started butchering male passengers…The women-folk were not butchered, but taken out and sorted. The elderly women were later butchered while the younger ones were distributed… I was taken by one Abdul Ghani to his house. He was a tonga driver. I was kept in the house for over a month and badly used… I also saw a large number of Hindu women in the houses of the Muslim inhabitants of Kamoke. All of them complained that they were being very badly used by their abductors.

The testimony is replete with euphemisms. The abduction of women on a large scale and their distribution among the captors was described as "taken out and sorted." "I was kept in the house for a month and badly used" was how the survivor narrator described her forced detention and repeated rape.

It is interesting to compare the accounts of the Sheikhupura massacre by Ram Nath, advocate in the High Court,[53] and Sardar Gurdial Singh, tehsildar of Sheikhupura. The advocate's account spoke of the role of the officials and military:

> With the imposition of the curfew, the Magistrate (Qazi Ahmad Shafi) leading the Military started from one end of Sheikhupura known as Akalgarh and began to march through the whole of old Sheikhupura abadi. Their work was very systematic and done with military precision. They systematically killed all men and old women, and abducted young girls. A second party followed, looting the property and setting fire to the houses of non-Muslims. Some Hindus and Sikhs strangled their girls and threw them into wells to save them from dishonour.
>
> In one of the places called the New Ihatas all the Hindus and Sikhs were gathered, women-folk in one line and men in the other. Before the very eyes of the parents, brothers and husbands, the young girls began to be selected… The worst killing took place in one of the Sikh rice factories of Sheikhupura… Men and women were made to stand in separate lines.

[50] Appendix I of Gurbachan Singh Talib, *Muslim League Attack*. Hereafter, all appendices refer to this book. Hence, the title is not repeated. Also, Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration, and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot 1947–1961* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011) documents this region.

[51] Daggers.

[52] Wooden poles with a long metal point.

[53] Appendix III.

> Women were selected after being subjected to most insulting examination and men shot down in large numbers. Bren guns and sten guns were used for this mass murder.
>
> History will not ever find on record a worse case of Genocide than this.
>
> This went on till 4 p.m. on the 26th August. About 10,000 men had been shot. Truck loads of girls had been removed.[54]

Three aspects stand out in the second testimony, which is that of the tehsildar. One was the role of the magistrate, and a special magistrate at that, in the episode, when he should have been keeping the peace. The second was the wells filled with bodies of young girls, drawing attention to another form of violence against women. The third aspect was bringing history into the conversation, indeed, into the conflict. The magistrate was crowing about the Muslim community, to which he belonged, coming out as the victors in the conflict. The reference was to the Muslim and Sikh rulers and, following them, members of the two communities who had been at war in the Punjab and beyond in the preceding centuries. To quote:

> Towards mid-day attack was made by Muslims on the Sikh quarter of Ramagarha with a population of 1,200.
>
> Now, at about 2 p.m. the military took up positions to attack the Sikhs. There was a fight between Sikhs and the military for 2 hours. It was, however, a very unequal fight, though the Sikhs fought bravely. By 5 p.m. the entire area of Ramgarh had been devastated. Many Sikhs had been killed under the heavy military fire… The total number of those killed may be between 14,000 and 15,000. The looting, murder and arson stopped only on the evening of the 26th August.
>
> 3,000 were killed in Atma Singh's factory. Here women were molested. One Sikh resisted this; he was immediately shot dead…
>
> Inside the compound of the Namdhari Gurdwara two wells were filled with the bodies of such Sikh girls as had immolated themselves by drowning to escape dishonour. Two other wells were similarly filled.
>
> When this carnage was proceeding, Ahmad Shafi, Section 30 Magistrate,[55] tauntingly told Lt. Col. Dr. Surat Singh to convey to the Sikh leaders that Muslims had done in Sheikhupura in two days what Sikhs might not be able to do in their entire history. [56]

[54] Appendix IV.

[55] Section 30 Magistrate refers to a magistrate given special powers to award punishment under Section 30 of the Criminal Procedure Code in India.

[56] Appendix V.

The statement signed by eight "ladies" who arrived as refugees in the D. A.V. College Camp, Lahore, is significant for the involvement of the military in the violence against women.[57] These women appear to be recently widowed; the husbands having been killed in the massacre of which they were survivors.

> Pir Sahib[58] agreed to their suggestion out of fear and handed us over to the Military men who took us to the trucks standing on the road… But after a short period we were made to get down on the pretence of delay and were told we would be leaving next day. We stayed in the village school.
>
> At night the Military men harassed us and did shameful acts with us.
>
> (Here follow unprintable details of rape and brutality to these helpless women at the hands (sic) of Pakistan Military and Muslim goondas.)[59]

The testimony of Raj Rani[60] is quoted here for its matter-of-fact tone in narrating what was, in her words, "horrible treatment" and "great insult and hardship." The testimony also highlights the nefarious role of the military in communal violence. It reveals a profound irony that the keepers of the peace were abetters and perpetrators of violence, and the refugee camps were not havens of refuge but places for continuing sexual assault on women.

She spoke of thousands being killed at one site, of mobs which surrounded a village, butchered the men, carried off the women, kept them forcibly in their homes, subjected them to repeated rape, and forced marriages on them. However, the narrator used general euphemistic terms, "kept" for forced confinement and "insult" for rape. Later, the narrator spoke directly about girls being "badly raped" in the D.A.V. College Camp in her presence. She used the vernacular, *badfeli,* for rape. Nevertheless, she reverted at the end to the general term, "treatment."

> On the 24th/25th August night about 20,000 Muslims attacked Babakwal with the help of the Muslim Military. They killed about 3,000 Hindu and Sikh residents of the town and abducted 200 Hindu and Sikh ladies. I was one of them. Myself, Lilawanti, daughter of Labha Shah and Parkash, daughter of Dayal Chand along with nine others were taken by Fateh, and he kept us in his house. He kept us there for 12 days. After that he sold us off to different persons. He sold me to Ghulam Mohd. of village Karaul. Ghulam Mohd. kept me for 1½ months. I was put to great insult and hardship. Being tired of life I sent a message to Bawa Singh of Rattanpura. Bawa Singh who had become a Muslim, paid Rs. 140 to Ghulam Mohd. and

[57] The names are given as Krishna Wanti, widow of Kanshiram; Lajwanti, widow of Tara Chand; Rajrani, widow of Faqirchand; Shanti Devi, widow of Nandlal; Ram Piari, widow of Bahadur Chand; Lajwanti, widow of Piare Lal; Phullan Rani, wife of Malik Desraj; and Rani Bai, widow of Jiwan Das. Six were from Lyallpur, and two were from Jhang, Appendix X.
[58] Holy man, keeper of a Sufi shrine.
[59] Appendix X.
[60] Thana Shahdara, Sheikhupura, Appendix XIII.

> brought me to his house. About 8-9 days ago with the aid of Military (Hindu) Bawa Singh brought me to Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, day before yesterday, i.e., 19-10-1947, I was brought to D. A.V. College Camp. As I was confined to bed I was spared badfeli (rape). The other girls were badly raped in my presence. The treatment is most horrible to remember.[61]

S. Harbhajan Singh, 1st Class Magistrate, Gurdaspur, reported to the Deputy Commissioner, Gurdaspur,[62] an episode of murder, forced confinement, and repeated rape at a military picket on the border. The army men reported on the men in the fifteen-member group being murdered and the women being kept by the "Muslim Military" in the tents at night and their shrieks "as if they were being raped." It is interesting to note that even the Indian army and later the police, who were informed of the events, were squeamish about calling a rape a rape.

S. Khazan Singh of Village Kotli, Tehsil and District Muzaffarabad (Jammu and Kashmir State)[63] spoke of losing a son and daughter, of children being butchered, and of being converted to Islam. He mentioned Afridis abducting thirteen girls and one boy from his village. Significantly, he used the term "given in marriage" instead of "forcibly married." "Three girls of my village were abducted by the residents of my village and were given in marriage to the local Mohammadens." [64] Khazan Singh's testimony is significant as it answers a question often asked about partition violence: were the abductors neighbors or were they nameless outsiders? They were both. The narrator speaks of Afridis from the North West Frontier Province or beyond, as well as men from the village abducting and "marrying" the girls.

Viranwati, aged 16/17 years, from Mirpur,[65] wrote about abductions, rapes, and killings on a big scale. She spoke of a mob attacking her village and her being abducted and married. Four thousand five hundred girls were abducted from the refugee camp at Mirpur. Significantly, she was rescued by the police and taken to the camp in Rawalpindi. So here the role of the police was positive. She wrote:

> About 2½ months ago a Muslim mob attacked my village. My father and mother were killed in this attack. Nawab Pathan one of the raiders abducted me and took me to Hoti Mardan. The attack took place on the refugee camp at Mirpur where lots of people from the neighbouring villages were gathered. The raiders took away 4500 girls with them. From Hoti Mardan, he took me to Maj Garhi. I remained with him for over a month. I was married to him at Maj Garhi… The police afterwards caught hold of me and brought me to Rawalpindi and put me in the Camp. Nawab asked me whether I wanted to go back to India but I under fear told him that as my parents had been killed I would not go to India and thus agreed to the *Nikah* with him.[66]

[61] Appendix XIII.
[62] Appendix XIV.
[63] Appendix XVIII.
[64] Appendix XVIII.
[65] Appendix XXI.
[66] Wedding ceremony.

This testimony nuances Menon and Bhasin's argument about forcible recovery and restoration by the state. Here, a woman "married" her abductor out of fear.

Ram Piari, aged 20 years, of Baddomali, District Sialkot, reported outsiders raiding, burning, and looting the village, killing the men and abducting the women.[67] The terms used for abduction are euphemistic, "I was forced to accompany a Muslim whose name I do not know. Later, at the asking of Labhu, a tongawalla of Baghbanpura, I was taken over by him." She spoke directly of rape: "Against my consent and at the point of dagger I was subjected to rape" but later goes back to, "After 7-8 days this Labhu against my wishes performed Nikah ceremony with me and used me as a wife."

The last testimony is one to end further testimony. A British officer of the Military Evacuation Organisation of West Punjab[68] tersely recounts an episode of bestial violence: "at a place near Sheikhupura he was called to rescue a Hindu girl, who had been carried away by Muslim National Guards. He found the girl in a hut with 4 of her captors, who had raped and cut off her breasts and were now frying them. He shot the lot."

Conclusion: Politics of Remembrance and Silence

Although testimonies of survivors are critical archival sources for a study of sexual violence, one must be aware of their possible misuse for political purposes. For example, after the terror in Noakhali in East Bengal in 1946, workers of the Hindu Mahasabha, a Hindu communal political party, popularized the accounts of violence against "our" women among Hindus in other parts of the country. Hindus were urged to donate vermilion, worn as a mark by married women, for the "dishonoured" Hindu women. One of the co-conspirators of Gandhiji's assassination, Vishnu Karkare, was a relief worker in Noakhali who worked to polarize the already communalized situation.[69]

In his annual Independence Day speech on 15 August 2021, the Prime Minister declared 14 August as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day.[70] It was soon evident that this official initiative was a far cry from what Partition scholars had been calling for—remembering partition, and more specifically, the violence, which, in their perspective, constituted partition.[71] The political agenda of this official project of remembrance is one with the broader project of polarizing communities, othering minorities, and promoting a mythical narrative of victimhood of the majority community. The glossy fifty-two-page

[67] Appendix XXVII.

[68] Appendix XXXX.

[69] Sanjeev Nayyar, "Why Was Gandhi Killed (Full)," accessed March 25, 2025, https://www.esamskriti.com/e/History/Indian-History/Why-was-Gandhi-killed-(full)-2.aspx.

[70] Government of India, "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day," accessed March 25, 2025, https://amritmahotsav.nic.in/partition-horror-remembrance-day.htm.

[71] See Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* is also a call to recover the voices of the survivors.

brochure on the website of the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day only recounts episodes relating to Hindu and Sikh victims of Muslim assault.[72]

There are many groups, with a considerable presence on social media, whose mission is to keep the memory of the atrocities on Hindus alive in the public mind, for instance, hindugenocide.com,[73], highlighting "the untold holocaust of Hindus" and the Facebook page of "Atrocities against Hindus,"[74] which claims 27,000 followers. Recently, Donald Trump, elected President of the US, wooed Hindu voters in the US by lending support to a Hindu Holocaust Memorial in Washington D.C.[75]

Be it the stigma attached to being publicly known as a survivor of sexual violence or the absence of safe spaces to share their memories, available testimonies by women are insignificant relative to the enormity of the atrocities. Those entrusted with rescuing and rehabilitating the women survivors of the partition, for example, Rameshwari Nehru, did not encourage them to come forward to relate their experience: "I don't think it appropriate to describe such matters in detail as I have heard from refugees … let it be known that what was done was inhuman."[76]

A collector of stories for the remarkable digital initiative, the *1947 Partition Archive*, said that of the fifty stories she had collected, the only two accounts of violence on women were related by men and were honor killings, about family members killing their girls so that they did not fall into the hands of the enemy community.[77]

I come from a refugee family. My parents came from Lahore to Delhi. We did not hear any stories of sexual violence or even violence. Sometimes, there was talk of the lost land, but the prevailing sentiment was about getting on with life and making good. After years of badgering my mother to introduce me to a partition survivor, she disclosed, after swearing me to silence, that a family friend, whom we called Rama Masi, was brought back by her brother with the help of the army almost a decade after the partition.[78] This instance nuances the dubbing of the state as patriarchal by some scholars of the partition. Here, the government machinery was responding to the initiative taken by the natal family of the woman, not forcibly bringing the women back home to their "family" and "nation."[79]

Veena Das interprets this code of silence as one that protected women brought back to their families by social workers assisted by the military. This

[72] https://cmsadmin.amritmahotsav.nic.in/writereaddata/Portal/Images/compressed-revised-english-updated-ignca.pdf, accessed March 25, 2025.

[73] https://hindugenocide.com/, accessed March 25, 2025.

[74] "Atrocities on Hindus," accessed March 25, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/HindusTargeted/; and "Atrocities on Hindus," accessed March 25, 2025, https://www.hindujagruti.org/hindu-issues/atrocities-on-hindus.

[75] "Trump For Hindu Holocaust Memorial, But Can The Atrocities Be Denied? Arnab Debates" accessed 25 March 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zo26CmIaqBc

[76] Rameshwari Nehru Papers, 1st installment, File 103, NMML, New Delhi.

[77] Personal communication.

[78] Conversation with Savitri Mahajan, New Delhi, *c.*1985.

[79] Menon and Bhasin, "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance."

was because "the violation of their bodies was never made public." While we may, following the example of the Holocaust, expect these women to "bear witness"[80] to the horror they had gone through, the women expressed it differently: "Just as a woman's body is made so that she can hide the faults of her husband deep within her, so she can drink all pain - take the stance of silence." Another woman said, "What is there to be proud of in a woman's body–everyday it is polluted by being consumed."[81]

The code of silence is to be found among families of survivors in zones of conflict in different parts of the world. The *Washington Post* reports[82] on the ongoing war in Gaza write of the silence within the families of the survivors about the body of the woman and its violation during the conflict. A doctor was quoted to the effect that victims of rape sometimes provide testimony indirectly, saying "that they heard there was rape in a neighbour's house, or that there was an adolescent who was raped in front of her grandmother, in a nearby house. They are speaking indirectly, but I am not sure that it didn't happen to them." An Israeli sufferer, whose cousin was abducted and who has been shown horrific videos of her captors issuing threats to her life and body, speaks of "the nightmare that every woman is afraid of, of not being able to defend her own body." "It's an issue that we dare not even say out loud."[83] This is when the taboo is not societal, the press carries explicit details of brutal sexual violence, and the state and civil society are at one in the effort to bring justice to the survivors and healing to the victims of trauma. For the individual survivor, veils of fear envelop her: first, the fear of not being able to defend her body and then, should the nightmare become a reality, the fear of speaking of it.

Every culture has its ways of remembering and forgetting. A perspective privileging forgetting conflict in the dialectic between remembering and forgetting comes from the philologist-historian Ernst Renan[84] in late nineteenth-century France:

> Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation and it is for this reason that the progress of historical studies often poses a threat to nationality… However, the essence of a nation is that all of its individual members have a great deal in common and also that they have forgotten many things. No French citizen knows whether he is a Burgund, an Alain, a Taifala, or a Visigoth. Every French citizen has forgotten St. Bartholomew's Day and the thirteenth-century massacres in the Midi.

[80] The concept of "bearing witness" has a Holocaust context; see Elie Wiesel, *Bearing Witness* (Brookfield, CT: Millbrook Press, 1984).

[81] Das, *Life and Words*, 54.

[82] Shira Rubin, "Israel Investigates an Elusive Horrific Enemy: Rape as a Weapon of War," accessed November 26, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/11/25/israel-hamas-rape-sexual-violence/.

[83] Rubin, "Israel Investigates."

[84] Ernst Renan, "What is a Nation?" Sorbonne lecture on March 11th, 1882, in Ernst Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, trans. Ethan Rundell (Paris: Presses-Pocket, 1992), accessed December 15, 2023, http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf.

Memorials along the lines of the Holocaust are perhaps inappropriate in India, where members of both communities continued to live together after the partition and rekindling memories of conflict could trigger further conflict. A voice from "troubled" Ireland cautions, "The danger is, the stories we tell about the past are so often used to continue the present battles, rather than to resolve the past."[85]

Partition survivors also share with the early Holocaust victims that, initially, trauma cannot be narrated or shared; it can only be expressed by silence. The celebrated oral historian Luisa Passerini reminds us that the imperative to remember after the Holocaust was preceded by silence: "But let us not forget that before monuments of memory were built to the Shoah, a long period of silence about it had to be gone through: debate over its historical significance and place in the heritage of the West developed very slowly."[86]

It has been almost eight decades since the partition. "A long period of silence" is over and survivors can move on to build 'monuments of memory' to the partition. Uncovering archives is one way of recovering memory.

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[85] Anna Bryson, "Victims, Violence, and Voice," 321.

[86] Passerini, "Memories Between Silence and Oblivion", in Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone eds. *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, Routledge Series in Memory and Narrative, 2003, 238.

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