

Analysing the Role of Memory in Oral History with respect to Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence*

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Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* attempts to reinforce the significance of memories of survivors of the Great Indian Partition of 1947. Published in 1998, it is a collection of interviews narrated in the form of essays, dismantling the water-tight compartment of looking at history from the perspective of the historiographer. She, therefore, aims to present the less explored truths of the past through the experiences of individuals. By including testimonies from experiences shared by the then marginalised – women, children, the aged, and the Dalits, Butalia has focused on presenting an oral history deleting “the major players of history: Gandhi, Nehru, Patel, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali Khan, Mountbatten” (11). This analysis focuses on re-presenting oral historiography as a storytelling technique that subsists itself on the memories of the ‘storytellers’. Stories are considered fiction and hardly facts. Therefore, Butalia critiques the validity of the mainstream history that dwells on recorded facts. There have been multiple records of the Great Indian Partition of 1947 enlisting the number of casualties, number of women and girl children raped, and the number of people killed and displaced. Analysing these statistics under the pretext of the emotions of the survivors makes this methodology more relatable to the present citizens of India.

It is impossible for a historian to capture emotions in the historiographical process if facts are the only information relied upon. In some cases, emotions do not become part of history because they are a threat to the blinkered view offered by mainstream history. French historian Lucien Febvre called emotions “primitive feelings” and said that he urged his contemporary historians to beware of sensibilities and fundamental human emotions as they were capable of turning the world into a “stinking pit of corpses” (Frevert 29). This proves the capacity of emotions to generate meaning. Therefore, the absence of emotions in mainstream history leaves an unidentifiable gap.

When the nation-building process continued under the pretext of Partition in 1947, two kinds of identities were formed – ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’. Therefore, the history of the Partition should describe the histories of these two sects as they have different stories to convey. This negates the possibility of a singular, monolithic history and makes the historiographical process ambiguous. Butalia explains this by comparing the varied consequences of partition in both India and Pakistan. She documents how Pakistan did not have its own banknote as the minting of currencies happened in India. There was an imbalance in the occupational sector when barbers, weavers, and tailors shifted from India to Pakistan, and the accountants, lawyers, and teachers shifted to India, both in the name of religion (97). Being raised in India, Butalia focuses mainly on the story of partition as narrated by an Indian.

Donald A. Ritchie, in his book *Doing Oral History*, mentions that in the case of oral historians, the source of information will be “first-person observations of witnesses of events great and small” in order to learn “what sense those people made of the events in their own lives. Motivations and objectives are especially important”. A lot has been recorded down under the mainstream partition history as facts. However, as Pippa Virdee records in her article “Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories and the Partition of 1947,” it was in the early 1980s that a new historiographical school emerged that shifted its concern from the “great men of history” approach to a “history from below approach” (50). Ranajit Guha's contribution to the subaltern perspective of history and its impact on Regional Studies (shift of focus from national to regional history) is rightly acknowledged in this essay. However, Virdee acknowledges the role of feminists and social activists in helping history dig into an individual's traumatic past (50). This is what Urvashi Butalia does as she compiles the stories of the victims of partition in *The Other Side*

of Silence. She says in the collection that the most suitable way to understand partition and its consequences is to analyse the event from the perspectives of people who felt it (13). Thus, Butalia explores the human element of emotions in her approach to history. It is the presentation of history, the facts that the historian chooses to present and the ones that are deliberately silenced that shapes the future of a nation's ideology. Butalia ensures that the voices of the survivors or informants hardly leave any gaps in her presentation of history. However, the possibility of gaps arises when her version of history gets compared with mainstream history. One villain here is the unreliability of memory as a source of information due to various factors that will be discussed further in this paper.

Butalia's decision to adopt the methodology of oral history and the dilemmas she faced as a result of it are discussed by Ira Raja in his review of the book. According to Raja, there are two reasons why Butalia chose this methodology: one is her urge to do right to the survivors of partition, and the other is to exhibit her inclination towards the postmodernist disposition of distinguishing the 'truth' from opinion (102). Oral History is comparatively more inclusive. The voice of the oral historian will be felt by the reader when the historian filters and presents the information collected from the stories of the informants. Butalia reveals her role in choosing the narratives that were to be included in the book. She says in the book, "And in the end I have chosen to use a rather arbitrary criterion. I have included the stories that meant the most to me, the stories of people with whom I have formed real friendships, or stories to which I keep returning again and again" (14).

Butalia collects these stories as information; she structures them in such a way in her book that they foreground their parallelism to mainstream history. She claims that the historical account she is producing is purely subjective, and the personal history will therefore be coloured by her political and emotional preferences (20-21). By pointing out the constructed quality of her 'history', she associates history with the art of storytelling. This thought resonates with that of Richard Waswo, who believes that both histories and stories are narratives. He quotes Hayden White and says, "Recognizing this formal and etymological identity, Hayden White has argued with respect to nineteenth-century historiography that history itself is 'made' by the choice of tropological and narrative structures derived from literature" (304). R.F Foster's elaboration of these narrative structures with respect to Irish history in his work *The Irish Stories: Telling Tales and Making it up in Ireland* shows how the historiography of the Irish is influenced by the myths, legends, and folktales of Ireland. He showcases that the 'Story of Ireland', when narrated, would adhere to Vladimir Propp's laws as mentioned in "The Morphology of Folktales" (5). Therefore he proves that Propp's narrative modes were sufficient to narrate Irish national history. In other words, the narrative modes of historiography can be similar to that of a fable or folktale. Since History involves telling/narration of stories, it is not just a product of "academic orthodoxy." The 'Story of Ireland' is an interwoven narrative of "personal experiences and national history" (2). Therefore narrative mode can demote the status of History as 'the collection of facts' and can present the same facts as a narrative from one perspective. However, these narratives contributed to the nation's story.

The compelling notion of the Story of Ireland, with plot, narrative logic and desired outcome, reached its apogee in the later nineteenth century. The historiography thus created is intimately connected with the discovery of folktale, myth and saga as indices of national experience; the development of Irish nationalism is strongly influenced by the transference of these forms into a narrative of nationality. (Foster 3)

Narration can thus blur the distinction between a narrator and a historian. Butalia believes that it is important to express herself in the collective narrative as it is the implicit presence of the

speaker in many histories that misleads the reader into believing that the facts presented as historical are the only truths (20). She also claims that such a history that has “written itself” would be “dishonest” (20). Unlike the mainstream history that presents the truth of the omniscient historian as facts, this personalised history presents itself as an alternative, showcasing the ‘truth’ as the version of the teller or narrator. Therefore, “the teller is to us (audience) as the hero is to the tale. Defiant or solicitous, embittered or engaging, he and the shape of his story make the history that we recognize as ours” (Waswo 326). R. F. Foster’s finding that Irish history implies a beginning, middle and end like a plot of any other story, and the belief that “the formal modes of *Bildungsroman*, ghost story, deliverance tale, family romance have lent motifs to the ways Irish history has been told” (2), add on to the constructed quality of history as literature.

However, the product of oral history is very different from that of conventional history. In *Narrating Our Pasts*, Elizabeth Tonkin studies the power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee in the active process of collecting oral testimonies. Viewing the interview as a dialogue between interviewer and narrator, she says that the history thus created is a mutual construction of reality in itself as the informants present facts, giving meaning to them in their own ways, which might even be problematic (85). She also adds that along with the data collection, calculating how the historian’s interpretations and interests shape the construction of the text is also important, as it is these assumptions that will help the reader make sense of the narrative (80). Besides, “translation of the narrator’s experience-near terms to the audience’s vernacular puts a creative burden on the researcher” (86). *The Other Side of Silence* reveals that Butalia successfully overcomes this burden by taking the initiative of narrativising them (15). She says that while transferring words to text, so much gets lost. This results in “conscious shaping of the interview by the interviewer who is usually in a situation of power vis-à-vis the person being interviewed” (15). Therefore, the stories Butalia built from interviews of maternal uncle Ranamama, the only sibling of her mother who decided to stay back in Pakistan, and her mother Subhadra Butalia’s version of it, of a scooter driver Rajinder Singh who explains the reluctance of people to displace themselves; of Damayanti who tasted only loneliness in life; till the story of Maya Rani, a Harijan who witnessed the violence of partition in her childhood— were chosen and narrated by Butalia in a sequence that would fit in as sections in the book. The sections are titled Beginnings, Blood, ‘Facts’, Women, ‘Honour, Children, ‘Margins’ and Memory, like that of an episodic novel. Thus, oral historiography adds multiple layers to the otherwise linear narrative of mainstream history.

The act of sharing stories is a means of making a connection with the present. “Storytelling is, in the words of historian David Blight, part of “the human quest to own the past and thereby achieve control over the present” (Melissa 2). Oral history narrators use the tool of memory to build connections. Memory demands the survivor to remember and recollect the trauma, which is ironically wished to be forgotten. Since people locate their memories in different frameworks of space and time, different perspectives of the same incidents are obtained. Indira Chowdhary notes the difference between recording oral testimonies of other historical incidents and that of partition and says that, unlike other historical incidents that occurred in India, the great partition cannot be pinned down to a location or place. She feels that an effort taken to locate or “monumentalize” this incident would result in the creation of “sites of memory,” which are “artificially created in order to eradicate memory and create and organise history” (39). Butalia compares the memories of the Great Indian Partition and the holocaust memorials and the memorials of the Vietnam War to conclude that there is nothing called “institutional memory” for the former, unlike the latter two. She claims that there is nothing at the border where masses migrated that could be marked as the site of partition (361-362).

For people, for the State, what is at stake in remembering? [...] No matter how much Indian politicians, members of Congress Party, tried to see themselves as reluctant players in the game, they could not escape the knowledge that they accepted partition as the cost of freedom. Such histories are not easily memorialized. (Butalia 362)

But oral history functions against the conventional methods of documentation and rejects any effort to hierarchise the generally accepted truth. Like Butalia's narration, oral history tries to connect memories and their surroundings to history as perceived in general (Chowdhary 39). Therefore, memory is directly associated with history as a lens projecting the frame of mind of the contributors. As Butalia rightly points out in the book, though the memories of partition are never wished to be remembered, remembering becomes, unfortunately, an "essential part of resolving" (269). In an effort to reflect upon the ideology of the then Hindus, Butalia gives the example of one of her informants – Hoondraj Kripalani. He was hooked on the belief that the Hindus were abused by the Muslims. He explains how the Muslim women approached the Hindu household in the pretext of selling something and how they occupied the house and refused to leave (187-188). This account of aggressive Muslim women from the perspective of an individual's conception of the past offers a different framework of space and time that is absent in mainstream history. Similarly, interacting with people from different sects gives different perspectives on the same incident.

Dipesh Chakrabarty explains the difference between memory and history as "history seeks to explain the event and the memory of pain refuses the historical explanation and sees the event causing the pain as a monstrously irrational aberration" (322). He also says that besides the sentiment and trauma, the aspect of memory that contradicts the relationship of an individual's present to the past and to the collective memory of the nation concerns the oral historians. He says that the narrative structure of the memory of an individual who has undergone trauma is different from the conventional historical narrative, paving the way for new insights. However, for memory to be plausible, it has to be associated with the historical event, the general conception of trauma that validates the emotions and claims of the informants. Therefore, the construction of the general past should coincide with the individual construction of memory (319). Therefore, the importance of collective memory in interweaving individual memories is high.

Frank de Caro claims that memory is not just a collection of facts but also a re-creation of meaning. He also feels that the "thematic thread" connecting the stories told by the informants can reveal significant information connecting their past to the present, as their once-lived experiences would have the potential to interconnect with the present. He believed that the stories that are narrated by the informants give hints to the readers to associate the past with their reality (263). Thus, the stories told by the informants of oral history are not just creative constructs and mere traumatic recollections but also linkers that make the past progressive. Butalia associates independence with the success of 'anti-colonial nationalism' and the Great Partition with 'the triumph of communalism', both having long-term consequences (192). This shows the relevance of the stories told by the informants of Butalia's works to date. It also proves that oral historiography is a systemic way of telling stories and not just recording facts. Memories surface in the lives of the survivors unpredictably. The haunting memory of visualising the murder of a kin, the trauma of an abducted woman who was raped, the pain of a child separated from his/her parents; all their stories continue even though the documented history of partition records only about the year 1947. By introducing the human element of memories and presenting 'facts' in the form of stories, the reality faced by the victims in the past was felt by the readers in the present. Thus, presenting historiography as a storytelling method eased the transmission of information across time periods.

With memory playing the lead role, oral history brings two perspectives in front of the readers – the perspective of the insider (witness) and that of the outsider (historian). However, when the historian and the interviewee interact, there is a chance that their interpretations of the historical facts differ, leading to a conflict. Allen Barbara explains that when an oral historian asks the informants to explain their past, they “re-create” what was experienced (6). In other words, they are not ‘constructing’ historical facts while describing the events to the historians but attempting to express the intensity of the trauma of their historical experience and to deliver a suitable “context” for the historian to approach history (6). Therefore, it is necessary that historians allow the interviewees to ‘recreate’ their memories without establishing a relationship based on the hierarchy between the interviewer and the interviewee.

The interviewees are conscious of the subjective nature of the history they are contributing to the world. They realise that their stories will become part of the narrative of historiography. Their awareness that their perspective may alter the course of official history makes them nervous about the consequences. Therefore, their recollection of the past has an impact on the present and on their memories. This may be conscious or unconscious. Kenneth R Kirby says that if it is unconscious, it is because the informants have faced changes in their outlook on life. Their growth in terms of experiences and their evaluation of the past changes their historical perspective (Kirby 30). This makes the pieces of evidence of oral history ambiguous.

The story of Mangal Singh, as described by Butalia, shows that the impact of a decision taken during a crisis stays for a lifetime. Mangal Singh was one among the three brothers who killed seventeen of the women and children in their family during the Partition. His is a “legendary status” in the locality, and he was adamant in naming this act as martyrdom and not murder (94). When Mangal Singh was asked the reason for their forced martyrdom, he replied that it was about pride and honour and not about fear (195). Therefore, it is the fear of conversion and the knowledge of its consequences that will last for a long time that makes Mangal Singh justify the killings. However, Mangal Singh initially refused to speak to Butalia, asking why he should dig up his past (194). This may be a conscious decision because he might be aware that the scenario has changed and that he may be accused of killing people of his own blood. Therefore, he emphasises the word “martyrdom” many times in the interview in order to hide his guilt and to make the killings context-specific. Such screening of information by the interviewees may mislead the historian from collecting authentic information from oral testimonies.

Storytelling demands coherence between sequences, and so does historiography, which knits stories of multiple instances from the past. While trying to co-relate the various stories told by her informants (who belonged to various sections of society), Butalia struggled to find continuity. There were instances when memories of different individuals on the same incident provided varied information. Such information not only challenged the written evidence but also questioned the credibility of listening to only one version of ‘truth’. This is referred to as the ‘Rashomon Effect’ by historians. According to Sam Azgor, “The Rashomon Effect emerges, where people give significantly different but equally believable details of the same event. It describes a situation where the people involved in the same incident give conflicting interpretations or descriptions, while everyone’s interpretation seems plausible” (Web). Karl G. Heider lists out some of the possible reasons for the change of perspectives – the speakers may be looking at different cultures or subcultures, they may be referring to the same culture at different times, some speakers may have wrong information about incidents, they may be looking differently at the same culture, they may possess different value systems, etc. (75-76). One instance where Butalia provides two perspectives of an event is in her presentation of the story of Ranamama from his perspective and that of her mother, Subhadra Butalia. When Ranamama’s story makes the readers sympathetic towards his helplessness as an unemployed youth who was

forced to stay back in his motherland, the story of Subhadra, who had to take up the responsibility of the whole family by migrating to India, is equally justifiable (29-65). However, Butalia cleverly reduces the impact of the 'Rashomon effect' by making it less evident. This is one of the few incidents to which Butalia does not offer an extensive interpretation, leaving it to the readers to be judgmental.

Retrieval is an important aspect of memory. "In discussing memory process and retrieval, researchers make a distinction between accessibility and availability" (Hummert 56). While some believe that "once information is understood and stored in long-term memory, it is always available," there are other oral historians who believe "in the constructive and reconstructive aspects of memory" (Hummert 56). Butalia mentions a number of times in *The Other Side of Silence* that her interviewees admitted that they forgot many things when they tried to recollect their stories. For example, her conversation with the record collector Savitri Makhijani ended with Makhijani saying that she could not recollect what happened to the girl who was returned to the NGO after adoption, saying that she was naughty (250). Hummert lists many reasons for such forgetting: "when we did not pay much attention to some incident and it never reaches our long-term memory," piling up of later events making it difficult to "recall an incident from the garbage," decaying of "memory traces" and "selective recalling" of memories are some of these (55). Another reason for forgetting could be the desire in the informants to "forget the frightening past, or the equally uncertain and fearful future, and live only for the present" (150). Butalia records Damayanti Sahgal's words on the abducted Muslim women born in poor families, who were exposed to "silken salwars, net dupattas and cold ice creams"(150), all of which they could not have enjoyed otherwise. Circumstances made these women forget their past after abduction, and the retrieval of memories after conscious forgetting becomes difficult.

Memory gets silenced when the informants in the partition historiography are women. The information given by the women survivors who were interviewed was either influenced by the presence of men in the household or by the fear of getting silenced by the patriarchal pillars at home. Butalia gave importance to the silences and gaps of women in her interviews. "Silence," according to Sherry Thomas, is another technique used by the historian to present the trauma faced by the survivors (53). He points out that "silence is terribly important and the significance of the sentence changes if you leave the pauses and silences in," giving it a poetic and emotional feel. However, for Butalia, silence is meaningful if uttered by the survivor. She describes "speaking to and with women as learning to listen differently, often listening to hidden nuances, the half-said thing, the silences which are sometimes more eloquent than speech" (16). But she also adds that a researcher may come across a dilemma of "whether is it better to 'allow' silence or 'force' speech" (16)?

Oral historians who came later found a methodology to gather information from such 'silences', thus extending the credibility of voices from the survivors. The continuing research on this silence proves the need to know the 'truths' beyond written pieces of evidence. Parul Sehgal, in her article "Seventy Five Years After Indian Partition, Who Owns the Narrative?" refers to Aanchal Malhotra's *Remnants of Partition* in which Malhotra devises a wise plan to collect memories from her silent grandparents who were Punjabi migrants from Pakistan. Since they were reluctant to share their stories, she asked them what they carried with them. Thus, the conversation that started from everyday objects that her grandparents carried with them during the journey to India produced stories of trauma and separation. "Her book is a history of Partition told in twenty-one possessions: a string of pearls, a sword. These objects are not relics; many are pointedly, movingly, still in use." Thus, the strategies to bring out 'facts' from stories evolved as oral historians stressed the need for multiple perspectives.

However, the credibility of oral history also depended upon the type of informant contributing to the story. The story of Zainab and Bhuta Singh, described by Butalia, is a good example of how women were proved incapable of providing the right information to oral historiographers of partition. Zainab, who was abducted on her way to Pakistan, was sold to Bhuta Singh, a Sikh who fell in love with her. They lived happily with two kids until the government decided to rescue the abducted women to help them find their routes. Zainab was asked to leave for Pakistan to reunite with her parents. She left with her second child, promising Bhuta Singh that she would return. However, she was forced by the relatives in her hometown to marry her cousin (so that the property in her name would not go outside the extended family). Bhuta Singh, who got the news, converted to Islam in order to get a passport and visa to Pakistan. After all the hardships, when Bhuta Singh met Zainab as Jamil Ahmed, he was rejected by Zainab. She had no choice like the thousands of women “who live their lives in silence” (127-131). The immediate surroundings and the patriarchal power controlled the voices of women, silencing them often and shutting them off their past. Therefore, when it comes to women informants, the place of the interview and the presence of men/patriarchal agents at the site of the interview influenced the narration by women.

Butalia has also taken into account the ‘information’ given by informants who were children during the time of partition; the reliability of the ‘truth’ in it is more problematic. When it comes to the recording of the marginal voices, she questions the possibility of the voices of children who cannot speak on their own behalf when women’s lives are silenced by patriarchy (286). If given a voice, Butalia also doubts the reliability of children’s memories, assuming that the narration of children could be just fantasies (258). Listening to the stories of the ‘partition children’, Butalia rethinks the aspect of memory: “I could not help feeling that these were the words, and the interpretation of an adult [...] How else would memory have reconstructed the details” (259)?

The deepest emotions can only be felt and can never be expressed in words. The trauma of partition can never be translated into words by the survivors. Butalia records how the informants struggled to describe their experiences as the language seemed to lack expressions to convey what they suffered. The memory is often shunned as “indescribable” (360). “Partition, the word itself is so inadequate. Partition is a simple division, a separation, but surely what happened in 1947 was much more than that” (360). Therefore, memory only remains as an intangible reality in the minds of the survivors. Though the survivors wished to tell their stories of the past, the medium failed them. The stories go untold, leaving questions behind. Individual memory takes the upper hand here because stories get confined to the individual memory and never reach the collective memory. However, it is the realisation of the presence of a common past in these memories that connects the past to the present that instills a sense of unity among the nationals of both nations.

The scope of memory is not just limited to oral historiography. Stories and testimonials of partition have helped in documenting these memories in many other forms, re-creating history. Partition literature is one genre that comprises such stories. Though the victims of partition are presented as characters in stories, they can be any Indian/Pakistani who was part of the great migration. “Creative writers have captured the human dimensions of Partition far more effectively than have historians,” Parul Sehgal quotes the scholar Ayesha Jalal. Thus, partition literature not only emphasises the fact that history is another form of literature but also contributes to the documentation of the lesser-heard voices in the form of stories. Sehgal cites many examples: the realist narrative *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, Yashpal’s feminist epic *This is not that Dawn*, Manto’s short story “Black Margins,” Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children*, Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man*, Veera Hiranandani’s American young-adult novel, *The Night Diary* are

literature set in the background of the Great Partition. Sehgal also feels that partition literature has chronicled the trauma and terror of partition like that of oral history:

Two decades ago, Akash Kapur, writing in the *Times* about a landmark work of Partition oral history, directed the reader back to “the excellent fiction” of Partition, such as Khushwant Singh’s “Train to Pakistan” (1956), which “does a far better job of evoking the terror, the bewilderment and the remorse that still shadow so many lives on the subcontinent.” (Sehgal Web)

When Geetanjali Shree’s *Tomb of Sand* won the International Booker Prize in 2022, the story of lives torn apart by partition reached an even wider audience. This also highlights the fact that Partition Literature is preferred by readers across the world to acknowledge the experiences of the survivors. Therefore, academic history is not the only document revisited in the present to understand the facts. The importance given to the voices of the unheard is evident in the success of Partition Literature like that of *Tomb of Sand*.

The essay has so far analysed how oral history showcases the gaps in written history and the challenges an oral historian has to go through while showcasing these perspectives. It is also important to acknowledge the emotions in history and the facts fictionally represented in Partition Literature. However, oral history is never independent of official history. There should be an officially written history for the oral historian to prepare questions for the interview. Besides, knowledge of official history is the primary necessity to understand where the gaps are and how they are being filled by oral evidence. “Even the most ardent advocate of oral history cannot argue persuasively that interviewing is worthwhile if conducted independently of prior research in surviving written materials” (Morrisey 23). Butalia agrees with Morrisey as she explains in the book that it is the anger and dissatisfaction with the facts recorded in mainstream history that provoked her to explore the gaps in the former using the methodology of oral historiography (Butalia 6). This led to the world of oral evidence. Therefore, the project of oral history had its origin on the official history.

However, recent trends in documenting the past do not stop with reading the documented facts and listening to the stories of the survivors. Memories are archived by organisations like Guneet Singh Bhalla’s 1947 Partition Archive and Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy’s Citizens Archive of Pakistan (CAP). Sehgal also mentions Project Dastaan, initiated by the students of Oxford University, which “not only collects testimonies but also offers refugees a chance to “visit” their homeland using virtual-reality headsets.” Thus, historiography is beyond the recording of the past. It is recovering the past to make meaning of the present. Therefore, historians nowadays are adding to the archives collected by oral historians like Butalia.

By admitting the inaccuracies of oral history and the limitations of its primary tool, memory, Butalia asserts that though memories keep changing, the fundamental certainty in them can help one arrive at a probable truth (13). She quotes James Young, who says, “Whatever “fictions” emerge from the survivors’ accounts are not derivations from the “truth” but are part of the truth in any particular version” (13-14). This resonates with the words of Edward S. Casey, an American philosopher who believed that the memories of an individual will always be loyal to the truth of the past, though it need not exactly be the past (Kirby 32).

Urvashi Butalia, through her significant nonfiction work, *The Other Side of Silence*, has tried to normalise the high status enjoyed by ‘History’ as a form of literature by analysing the event of the Partition of India (1947) through the stories told by its victims. The oral historiography and its results complement the official history and highlight the significance of storytelling in generating

facets of truth. The reliability of using memory as a tool during the storytelling process is also analysed in the project. Though memory and storytelling based on it have their own drawbacks, this initiative by Urvashi Butalia has unveiled the hidden side of history, that of emotions and humanity. Her significant methodology of chronicling the emotions and experiences of the subaltern in parallel to the written pieces of evidence questions the superiority of the generally accepted truth. The paper also mentions the role of Partition Literature in expressing the human elements of history, thus highlighting the power of literature in showcasing the past. By traversing through the stories told by the survivors and witnesses of the Great Partition of 1947, Urvashi Butalia not only connected the memories of the past to the perceptions of the present but also re-created history for the otherwise voiceless protagonists of *The Other Side of Silence*.

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