

Revisiting India's Partition

*New Essays on Memory,
Culture, and Politics*

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THREE

A Will to Say or Unsay

Female Silences and Discursive Interventions in Partition Narratives

Parvinder Mehta

The issue of deliberate silence, especially in traumatic history-laden narratives, revolving around nationalism and superseding the personal and private tragedies in favor of building a collective consciousness, becomes a metaphoric apparatus of repression, even strategic dominance in some cases. The tug-of-war between "silence" and "narration" of traumatic events—a predominant engagement in many history-inspired literary narratives—reveals a dichotomous struggle between repressive paradigms of fragmented history and the confessional urges to express and articulate that which has not been narrated yet. Silence becomes a non-narrated discourse which seeks articulation and demands inquiry into its own subject formation. Mute experiences of traumatic incidents, especially those acts committed with atrocity, when represented in creative expressions, offer a discursive framework underscoring the limitations of the mainstream history as well as interrogating, even challenging them on the one hand, and creating possibilities for alternative narrative spaces, albeit marked by belatedness. Thus, for example, in the Indian historical context, a plethora of narratives about the 1947 Partition of British India have traced the official discourse/history that celebrates nationalistic imperatives and endorses the courage of the freedom fighters and national leaders. Although many narratives about the partition have highlighted the Partition violence, including mass killings, rape of women on both sides of the border, as well as homelessness and abduc-

tion leading to a catastrophic loss in India's recorded history, there is a remarkable tension between silence and discourse. Thus while the predominantly celebratory, nationalistic aspect of India's awakening at the dawn of its independence from the British rule is resplendently eulogized through narratives of patriotic history, glimmering with tales of bravery, there is also another emerging trend of narratives that has evolved from discourses on loss and nostalgia. In recent decades, narratives revealing shame and sexual violence that were intrinsically ignored or passingly referred to in mainstream history have emerged to underscore aberrations and an alternative history of Partition.

History, especially in the context of Indian independence and Partition, reveals a strange bifurcation between the official history endorsing the Nehruvian/Gandhian vision of nation-formation, and the countless individual stories of victimhood, and trauma encoded within enforced silences. Historians such as Gyanendra Pandey, and many others, have written about historiographic interventions needed to understand the gaps and silences about the unspoken subject positions that struggle against a shallow homogenization of historical analysis. In "In Defense of a Fragment," Pandey establishes that the history of sectarian violence in modern India is written as an "aberration" and as an absence as "violence is seen as something removed from the general run of Indian history: a distorted form, an exceptional moment, not the "real" history of India at all."¹ Such a disjuncture between different versions of history—one that endorses ultra-nationalism and the other history on the margins that is only partly channeled through inadequate examination and/or representation—reveals a willful indifference and even contributes to a collective amnesia. "[Violence's] contours and character are simply assumed: its forms need no investigation."² The history of partition linked with the mainstream, inflated rhetoric of nationalism, that ignores the agonies suffered by minorities, is limited and unacceptable: "because it tends to be reductionist and not only because it continues to ply a tired nationalist rhetoric. It is unacceptable also because, willy-nilly, it essentializes "communalism" and the "communal riot," making these out to be transparent and immutable entities around which only the context changes."³ Pandey urges historians to do away with a sanitized history; the scars of history must be examined deeply to reveal "the totalizing standpoint of a seamless nationalism that many of us appear to have accepted."⁴ His call for doing away with an inadequate, aberrant history of Partition and instead recuperate from its amnesiac lethargy and question its hegemonic parameters has indeed led to many critical works that followed on the inadequacy of mainstream history. His sense of urgency has been acknowledged in many scholarly books that have come out since 2000. As Urvashi Butalia investigates, "Why had the history of Partition been so incomplete, so silent on the experiences of the thousands of people it affected? Was this just historiographical neglect or something deeper: a

fear, on the part of some historians, of reopening a trauma so profound, so riven with both pain and guilt, that they were reluctant to approach it?"⁵ Butalia also draws attention towards "the patriarchal underpinnings of history as a discipline" and challenges the feminists to retrieve female agency in a predominantly male-centered discourse.⁶

Many writers have traced unheard, unspoken limns of empowering moments in adversity, so to speak, and have reflected on the inane humanity as well as inhumanity of Partition.⁷ Despite such a plethora of narratives, there are critical imperatives defined within nationalistic/masculinist frameworks that attempt to revoke the trauma of violent violations especially with female victims through repressive silences and non-representations. By relegating experiences of female victims of Partition in terms of unspoken, shame-induced moments of violation, a non-represented discourse does not merely ontologically negate the experiences of female victims and survivors, but is also rendered a collateral necessity that must be forgotten. Such histories, curbed through the rubric of shame and trauma, remain embedded and unresolved because the silence surrounding these histories becomes a male-sanctioned attestation, an iconography of selectively chosen moments of valorization and limited remembrance. The wide disjuncture between the State-endorsed, textbook history and its step-sibling, revealed through individual personal histories that are either framed within the specialized modes of academic dissemination by social scientists or creative writers or filmmakers, must be and has been critically acknowledged by scholars in recent decades.

My central argument in this article relates to the representations of such an unspoken discourse through female silence and opacity that becomes imperative, even instrumental in suggesting a closeted, totalizing notion of history in them. Sometimes, such representations reveal a bifurcated politics: they valorize masculinist ideals of martyrdom and courage while relegating shameful incidents of female violations and victimhood to discursive frameworks of amnesiac, forgetful narrations. Referring to selected works such as Rajinder Singh Bedi's short story "Lajwanti," Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*, and Sabiha Sumar's *Silent Waters (Khamosh Pani)*, this chapter underscores the discursive implications of this metaphoric female silence or inchoate narrations and highlights the legitimate, feminist questions that these writers highlight. In most partition narratives, a ubiquitous sense of urgency is blocked by notions of shame, willful forgetting, and erasures. The hidden voices that emerge may be framed by their silence or even whispering vocality rather than an assertive intervention, a transgressive take on mainstream history. In registering the discursive framing around silence, I also want to explore viable theoretical standpoints to understand the private, unspoken discourse around Partition and the complicit politics of representation, especially of the female voice or lack thereof, which affirms a particular kind of totalitarian history in collective memory. For

example, in her oft-cited essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak offers an interventionist claim that the subaltern, always placed in a subordinate position, cannot speak in a hegemonic framework and is already effaced by gender politics.⁸ Silence, merely seen as an absence, frames the non-utterance as a quiet act of choosing not to speak or narrate—a repressive act of curbing secrets and/or traumas. However, silence can also be seen as a presence, as a yet-unuttered discourse that has been *denied or delayed* narrative space within available paradigms. Even when attempts of articulation are made, they are either consigned to secret, private spaces or usurped over dominant narrativity that can then choose to interpret it strategically. Likewise, choosing to be silent endorses a willful relinquishing, a surrender of articulation. Yet not being allowed to speak from a particularly subjective vantage point becomes a censorial, oppressive act of regulation, a disciplinary decree that must negate any affirmation through totalitarian control. Silence can thus operate through strategies that must be acknowledged. As Foucault explains (albeit in the context of seventeenth-century repression of sexuality), silence as the discretion between different speakers is less a limit than “an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies.”⁹ Instead of focusing on binary divisions between what is said or not, Foucault insists, “we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, *how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case*” (emphasis added). The forbidden, unuttered silence thus operates not necessarily through the limits of discourse—that which is narrated and related—but even constituted through it.¹⁰ Another valuable, theoretical concept about silences can be drawn from what Barrett Watten describes as a “non-narratives” in *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics*: “Nonnarratives are forms of discursive presentation where both linear and contextual syntax exist but where *univocal motivation, retrospective closure, and transcendental perspective are suspended, deferred or do not exist*”¹¹ (emphasis added). Through “non-narratives,” as I will show later, silences can be attributed with an alternative to its teleological understanding by way of a creative history that not only intervenes, but also suspends or displaces given interpretation of totality, thereby revealing hidden structures of passive complicity.

A CARTOGRAPHY OF SILENCE ON THE MARGINS OF HISTORY

The issue of silence in relation to voice has been a predominant concern with feminist thinkers, scholars, poets, and activists. Thus Adrienne Rich, Tillie Olsen, Audre Lorde, Cherrie Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and several others, have addressed the bi-

naries of silence and voice, powerlessness and agency amid dichotomies created within discursive formations of gender. The deployment of female silence amid masculinist, patriarchal narratives and utterances becomes a strategic intervention. Many feminist writers have underscored the ethical imperatives of understanding the oppressive or liberating silence (depending upon the context), overcoming it and even interpreting and/or translating the encoded resistance as counter-hegemonic to lackadaisical or patriarchal voices. Adrienne Rich writes on silence in her poem “Cartographies of Silence”—silence can be a plan, a presence and should not be confused with any kind of absence.¹² Likewise, Trinh T. Minh-ha underscores the use of silence as a subversive intervention and its multifarious aspects:

Like the veiling of women . . . , silence can only be subversive when it frees itself from the male-defined context of absence, lack, and fear as feminine territories. On the one hand, we face the danger of inscribing femininity as absence, as lack and blank in rejecting the importance of the act of enunciation. On the other hand, we understand the necessity to place women on the side of negativity and to work in undertones, for example, in our attempts at undermining patriarchal systems of values. Silence is so commonly set in opposition with speech. Silence as a will not to say or a will to unsay and as a language of its own has barely been explored.¹³

I am interested in exploring this idea of silence as its own language and as “a will to say or a will to unsay” that inscribes female silence through absence, non-utterance, or enforced silence. When voiced, the fictionalized incidents of rape, murder, and suicides of countless women are revealed through the male prerogative and a masculinist language. Notably, the female silence about the traumatic encounters or memories depicts the female victims and survivors on the margins of otherness. Despite diverse authorial interventions, the female voice or silence is relegated to the condition of impossibility: an aporetic conundrum of irresolute struggle. As Ramu Nagappan maintains: “To confront social suffering is to struggle with silence: both to respect the silence of survivors who cannot speak and to break the political silences that veil social calamity. The silence of survivors, that chilling aporia, points again and again to the desecratory potential of narrative.”¹⁴ Nagappan also maintains that despite the guiding humanism and/or moral outrage that may be the intentional motives, many a times, controversial or shocking accounts can cause narrative ambivalence through critical and pedagogical jostling of diverse isms.

Examining the representations of history and social sufferings, coded within the rubrics of shame, dishonor, trauma, and acceptance, brings forth key ethical and moral arguments (if any) raised by the writers of partition narratives where unheard silence is a metaphoric presence.

When writers represent the violence, more so, through their representation of *silently* passive female victims, what function does the silence offer for the readers of these narratives? Is silence only a punishment, a cover-up, a shame-coping mechanism, or can it also reveal the dysfunctional deficiency of language? Likewise, the employed language and its operation on the narrative requires a critical examination: the implications of a narrative that attempts to create or destroy historical nostalgia by framing it with suffering could be a repetitive, mimetic act of performance. Being silent does not necessarily mean being powerless, and likewise, being vocal does not simply imply articulation of power.

The ethics of portraying female victims and survivors predominantly through a spectacle of their silent otherness and mute narratives must be examined. Implicated in an inaudible address, are such women characters, in most cases, maybe essentially placed only as arbitrary descendants of inherited shame and loss? For instance, portraying female victims within a nationalist framework, especially in colonial setting as victims of history and/or postcolonial rebels, does bring the risk of commodifying their marginality/shame. A cross-comparative examination of how women writers have represented the trauma of partition and its historical implications in contrast to multiple narratives written by male writers also reveals an interesting dynamic that mostly attributes to male victims of Partition a more provocative sense of mimetic sympathy compared to female victims struggling against the trauma and shame.¹⁵ Take for instance, Rajinder Singh Bedi's acclaimed Urdu story "Lajwanti" that depicts the recovery efforts of abducted women during Partition. The protagonist, Sunderlal, yearns for his own missing wife Lajwanti/Lajo, whose name invokes the sensitive "touch-me-not" plant that withers at human touch. The story begins with reference to the Punjabi folk song admonishing against touching lajwanti "for she will curl up and die."¹⁶ Each morning, Sunderlal, as the secretary of the newly formed rehabilitation committee for abducted women, along with his supporters, would chant the song and end up choked with tears and follow in silence. The plant's sensitivity is related to the fragility of human beings: "the mere shadow of a hand could make them tremble and wither."¹⁷ Sunderlal recalls his abusive behavior towards his wife, Lajo, and yearns for her. "How frequently had he thrashed her because he didn't like the way she sat or looked, or the way she served his food!" His reminiscences of Lajo's personhood "with the mercurial grace of a drop of dew on a large leaf" highlights his casual stance on his physical abuse of his wife, almost as if she expected it and had accepted it as a part of her life.¹⁸ Lajo's passive reticence about the abuse is responded to only through a non-serious statement that if he beats her again, then she will not speak to him. Domestic abuse of wives is referred to as a norm in patriarchal culture. Even as Bedi reveals Sunderlal's progressive views on accepting and honoring the innocent, abducted women, he also underscores Sun-

derlal's restrictive views and inability to handle any traumatic experiences.

The emphasis on the frailty of women as leaves of lajwanti can be seen as Bedi's commentary on Sunderlal's own sense of insecurity and fragility in dealing with the bitter truth. The way his sermon-like pleas are ignored or dismissed by people also indicates a sense of apathy towards words and ideals: "one repeats them like a futile argument, collides with them, hums them as one goes about the tasks of the day."¹⁹ The denial and rejection of some of the returned women by their relatives also reflect on their cruel expectation of death instead of rehabilitation. Bedi's story does not only depict the cruelty of dismissive emotions shown through the condescending remarks or passive dejection but also demonstrates an innate sense of weakness, an essential crisis of communication especially for progressive citizens like Sunderlal. In an attempt to encourage people to rethink their insular, dismissive attitudes about the survivors of partition violence, his efforts to intervene and offer correctives to his friend, Kalka Prashad's failing rhetoric drawn on religious scriptures, would always bring him to face his own expressive inabilities: "His voice would choke. Tears would begin to flow down his face, and overcome with emotion, he would be forced to sit down."²⁰

During a conversation between Sunderlal and Narain Bawa, Bedi skillfully brings the Hindu mythological reference of the Hindu God, Ram, who had evicted his wife, Sita, because she had lived with her abductor, Ravana. By alluding to the Hindu mythology, Bedi juxtaposes these responses in a post-partition context and reveals the rigid expectations in patriarchal thought and how their validation, even sought via mythological references, remains framed by silence. Through irony, Bedi allows the two discourses—religious and socio-political—to coalesce on how silence can be used as a repressive tool for argument. Thus when Sunderlal's voice is initially unheard by others, he suggests that in "Ram Rajya," a washerman could express his thoughts unlike now when he is not allowed to speak. Sunderlal emotionally exhorts his audience: "Did Sita commit any sin? Wasn't she, like our mothers and sisters today, a victim of a violence and deceit?"²¹ Although seemingly portraying Sunderlal as a fearless, progressive man with liberal views, the narrative shifts to reveal his limitations eventually. In a strange ironical twist, Lajwanti has been recovered. At the Wagah border, Lajo is perhaps one of the few younger women that has been exchanged as part of the mutual deal. As the people stare at her, she "stood there trying to hide her tattoo marks from the curious gaze of people."²² Sunderlal's initial response to this news is represented with a vacancy of thought and action. When assured by the description of Lajo's tattoos that indeed his wife has been recovered, Sunderlal nostalgically remembers her tattoos:

They were like the soft green spots on a lajwanti plant that disappear when its leaves curl up. Whenever he tried to touch them with his fingers, Lajwanti would curl up with shyness . . . as if they were some secret and hidden treasure, which could be despoiled by a predator and a thief.²³

Initially, Sunderlal is relieved: "he enshrined Lajo like a golden idol in the temple of his heart and guarded her like a jealous devotee."²⁴ However, when Lajo attempts sharing her sorrow with him, he urges her to not go there. "Let's forget the past; you didn't do anything sinful, did you? Our society is guilty because it refuses to honour women like you as goddesses. It ought to be ashamed of itself. You shouldn't feel dishonored."²⁵ By imposing silence on Lajwanti, Bedi shows the irony of her recovery. Although the story shows his sympathies, her suffering is never heard and she is marginalized through enforced muteness. "She had returned home, but she had lost everything. . . . Sunderlal had neither the eyes to see her tears nor the ears to hear her sobs."²⁶ Idolizing Lajo as a Devi, a goddess, and never touching her, Sunderlal deprives her of any vestigial individuality, yet gains sympathy and respect from others. Lajo's re-covering is not merely incidental, but also symbolically constitutive of covering shame.

Another text that visually depicts a silent victim of Partition finally speaking out is Sabiha Sumar's highly acclaimed Pakistani film *Khamosh Pani: Silent Waters*.²⁷ Initially, it was supposed to be a documentary showing a story about Partition violence against women, but then Sumar changed it into a feature film production as "it would mean scratching people's wounds."²⁸ In showing a film dealing with Partition, and contemporary Pakistan, Sumar depicts violence as a continuing process and how "politicization of religion" had affected women. The protagonist is Ayesha (Kirron Kher), a widow with a teenaged son, Saleem, living in the village Charkhi in Pakistan. The film's narrative begins in 1979, and Ayesha is respected by all. She manages her livelihood by her late husband's pension and by teaching Quran lessons to young village girls. We learn how Ayesha never went near the village well and had other girls draw water for her from the well. Her haunting memories around the well are revealed partially like pieces of a puzzle. When asked by her friend if she misses her husband, Ayesha replies, "Life catches up with you, what you don't have . . . you have to let it be." Strategically set during the rule of military ruler Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, the film shows the gradual enforcement of Islamic law in Pakistan. We see how Ayesha's son Saleem, under the influence of Islamist fundamentalists, gets estranged from his love-interest Zubeida and becomes more aggressive. Saleem, a flute-playing music-lover fascinated by Zubeida's charm, pursues her romantically but is transformed by his indoctrination through radical Islamic thought.

Later, we find that a group of Sikh pilgrims are visiting Pakistani Punjab to visit holy shrines. A Sikh man, Jaswant Singh, inquires the villagers about his sister, Veero, who had remained in Pakistan after Partition. When the pilgrims visit the Panja Sahib Gurdwara, Ayesha sends sweets for them. However, Saleem gets angry upon finding about such interaction with "non-believers." The film shows moments of stereotypical humor towards the Sikh pilgrims, the respect and affection shown by the village barber and other villagers, and also sensitively depicts the scene where Sikh men, inside the Gurdwara, are combing their unshorn hair. When they talk about the women who were left behind, one of them vehemently refutes it, saying that all twenty-two women were killed for honor, "so the Muslims couldn't touch them." At that point Jaswant thinks about the possibility that some women might have survived the horror of partition. However, he is strongly rebuked to silence as it is a dangerous premise to even think about. Jaswant Singh, relentlessly, wants to search for his lost sister, Veero. Initially, when he inquires about her, he is unable to get much information until Amin, a Pakistani policeman, visits Jaswant at night stealthily and tells him that "she is the one that does not go to the well." Earlier, Amin shares with his wife that he knows "their pain" as he too is grieving for the loss of his sister Mina.

Ayesha is indeed Veero, who had been raped by Muslims during the Partition violence and then later had married one of her rapists, after converting to Islam. When Ayesha's past as a Sikh girl collides with her present as Muslim mother of a young radicalized Muslim man, she is at a critical threshold, reminded of her history of trauma and violence. In an evocative scene, Jaswant meets Ayesha for the first time and is convinced that she is indeed Veero; Saleem enters the house and is upset and questions Ayesha about the truth. All the pieces of her haunting past come together as the sepia-toned memories collate her past, question her present, and portend an uncertain future. Saleem, now a radical Muslim, is visibly displeased upon finding about his mother's Sikh identity, a non-Muslim, *kafir*. This creates a segregationist politics as her friends start avoiding her. Saleem insists Ayesha's "unconditional commitment" towards Islam and demands her public self-acknowledgment as a Muslim.

Ayesha's silences as Veero and her traumatic past, when in a moment of impending crisis, her family tries to preserve the family honor through willful annihilation, require a critical understanding. The women in the family are jumping into the well, as men, fearful of impending danger including potential rape, are urging them to end their lives. Young Veero, hesitant, refuses to jump into the well and runs away from her family, as young Jaswant attempts to call her. Veero's refusal to take her own life has been interpreted by some critics as a feeble attempt to refute the patriarchal imposition of masculine ideals. Even Ayesha retorts when

Jaswant urges her to return with him to meet their dying father. "But he wanted to kill me for his peace . . . seeing me alive and Muslim . . . how will he go to Sikh heaven." Such portrayal of Veero's anger, and its interpretation however, becomes problematic, even complicated in the film. As a young girl, her inability take the consensual, suicidal step, unlike her mother and sister, and in her naiveté her futile escape lead to fateful consequences. She can't save herself from Muslim rapists and suffers victimhood, even though it leads to her subsequent conversion to Islam and marriage to one of the rapists.

In her analysis on *Silent Waters*, Kavita Daiya maintains: "Ayesha's voice articulates the feminist critique of the rhetorics of honour invoked by men to sanction their dehumanizing violence against women."²⁹ Thus Ayesha's passivity and lack of viable agency is seen in terms of a subalternity. Daiya asserts, "[in] both contexts, through the use of religions, the female citizen subject is increasingly rendered subaltern as object, property and undesired citizen" and Saleem's transformed radicalization is seen as "emerging through the estranging and demonizing of female subjectivity as Hindu and modern."³⁰ Such an interpretation echoes the Spivakian inability of the subaltern to speak.³¹ However, I want to explore another evaluation of Ayesha's final act where she jumps into the well towards the end of the film, without any witnesses, and any imminent danger that propels her to take the drastic step that she avoided as a young girl in Partition. An unexplored facet of Ayesha's past identity is the fact that she was a Sikh girl (not "Hindu and modern" per Daiya's view). While it is easy to interpret that her refusal to jump into the well maybe a neo-feminist refusal to follow patriarchal expectations, we must also see the nuances of that sepia-toned memory in the film. Young Veero sees her mother and sister jump into the well, while the worried men warn about the potential danger from Muslim rioters. The women who jumped into the well may have taken that drastic step in the Sikh spirit of *shaheedi*, to follow martyrdom instead of being forced to convert to Islam. In Sikh history, the struggle against the Mughal rule's dictates to accept Islam or face death, and the *shaheedi* of the Sikh Gurus as Guru Arjan Dev and Guru Tegh Bahadur and many other Sikh followers are seen by Sikhs as exemplary cases of self-affirming heroism. In the film, the women are jumping amid recitation of the *Japji Sahib*, the Sikh meditational prayer on the mystery of God and the Universe; their final act then becomes a similar act of self-affirmation that defies any possibility of conversion to Islam. As Suvir Kaul explains, the seemingly senseless deaths are recuperated by the vocabulary of martyrdom. "In this vision, the nation, or *quam* (community) demands its shaheeds, and is strengthened by them."³² It is notable to see that before Ayesha takes the final drastic step, even though she offers her prayers as a Muslim woman, she also wears the necklace (containing her picture as young Veero) that Jaswant gives to her to remind her of her past identity. In jumping into the well, Ayesha

is reclaiming her past identity as Sikh Veero and finally giving her belated *shaheedi* in the Sikh spirit. Later, Zubeida questions the meaning of Ayesha's drastic step: "So this is how Veero went away, and Ayesha stayed behind. . . . Or do we really know who left and who stayed?"³³ Despite her conversion to Islam, Ayesha had not fully discarded her past identity as a Sikh.

After her death, Saleem opens her trunk to find Sikh prayer books, (*Sukhmani Sahib* and *Japji Sahib*) and pictures of the Sikh guru Guru Nanak Dev ji. Ayesha is given a burial; her belongings (including the Sikh prayer books) in the trunk, are dispersed in the river, almost as if performing last rites in the Sikh tradition wherein the cremated remains are dispersed in a river. Saleem hands over Ayesha's necklace to Zubeida and it is Zubeida who is shown remembering Ayesha, and not her son Saleem. The film ends with the urban setting in Rawalpindi, 2002, as it is announced on radio: "Pakistan won't be a haven for Islamic extremists." Zubeida's voice-over acknowledges remembering Ayesha: "Sometimes I dream of her. I preserve each dream and try not to let it go." The film's final question as to why Pakistan was created is answered by Saleem's incomplete utterance as an older, Muslim minister saying, "Pakistan was made for Islam." Ayesha's silence, although seemingly curbed forever within the male discourse, through her final symbolic act of annihilation, is also carried on through Zubeida's personal remembrances.

Another representation of the trauma of Partition is offered by Shauna Singh Baldwin in her debut novel, *What the Body Remembers*. Baldwin narrates the story set in 1937 at Rawalpindi, pre-independent India, about sixteen-year-old Roop, in a bigamous marriage with a Sikh man, Sardarji, who is twenty five years older than her. The first half of book shows the antagonism between Roop and Satya (Truth) vying for power implicating in being Sardarji's wife. The interesting plot incidents, sometimes too predictable, even incredible, carve female sensibilities marked by patriarchal assumptions, symbolic roles and seemingly feminist efforts. Satya, the uneducated, older wife of Sardarji, belongs to an upper class and although barren, having failed to produce children, she is also the manager of Sardarji's assets. Roop, initially a naïve, child-like, semi-educated, village wife, gives Sardarji three children for his progeny. Their narratives, about what their bodies remember and their experiences, bring out Baldwin's commentary about the partition from a thoughtful, Sikh perspective.

The novel's most horrific experience, also the most relevant section for this discussion, shows us the traumatic violence and its effects through the narration of the killing and eventual dismemberment of Kusum (the wife of Roop's brother, Jeevan). Kusum's killing is drawn from a real incident narrated in Urvashi Butalia's book *The Other Side of Silence* where a father killed his daughter-in-law to save her honor from potential Muslim rapists. Earlier, Baldwin shows how Roop saves Jorimom, her Muslim

maid and herself from potential danger from a group of Muslim soldiers. Through strategic silence and aggressive vocality, Roop prevents Jorimon's potential rape. Roop ultimately meets her brother Jeevan and finds out about Kusum's killing supposedly by Muslim rioters. "This body was sliced into six parts, then arranged to look as if she were whole again."³⁴ Kusum's breasts had been chopped off and her womb was ripped out too. Jeevan's narrative underscores the message and interpretation of her bodily violation as "a war against [their] quom."³⁵ The narrative about Kusum's mutilation seems suspect to inquisitive Roop, who is not a passive listener of narratives and questions its viability. "Questions jumped like trapped fish in the loose mesh of her mind."³⁶ Jeevan's narrative is implied through a focus on interpreting the iconographic implications of Kusum's bodily violation. It is a tangential narrative that sees "*Kusum only from the corners of his eyes*"³⁷ and one that Jeevan feels should not be shared with others: "It must be ignored, so that *no Sikh man* shows weakness or fear."³⁸ Roop's counternarrative is her interrogative aside—an interior monologue that, although silent and unheard, contests the very narrative until she finds other plausible meanings. Later Roop learns how her father, Papaji, had killed Kusum by one stroke of his *kirpan*, his ceremonial sword, an article of faith and how Kusum had willingly offered herself to be killed instead of being violated by Muslims. Even though the traumatic experience of Kusum's dismemberment becomes a homosocial discourse, a narrative told separately by Jeevan and Papaji, Roop is given the prerogative of remembering: "Roop will remember Kusum's body, re-membered."³⁹ The lack of omniscience around Kusum's death might seem to relegate Roop's horror and, by extension, the readers' horror, to margins of unreliable fragments of history, narrated by the male preservers of female honor. Roop becomes the ultimate reader of the narrative of Kusum's mutilation and provides her own "non-narrative" (as defined by Barrett Watten). She assumes the critical role of a translator, which in Judith Butler's terms, is "to bring into relief the nonconvergence of discourses so that one might know through the very ruptures of narrativity the founding violences of the episteme."⁴⁰

TRANSLATING SILENCES OF LAJO, VEERO, AND KUSUM: RUPTURES OF NARRATIVITY AND NON-NARRATIVES

A crucial question worth investigation is: when writers challenge the official, documented narratives of nationalist versions of partition history, to produce alternative, personal histories that might even negate the nationalist discourse, do such interventions enable a more mimetic, empathic understanding of history or trauma, or do they merely show glimpses of fragments of history trying to emerge within the interstices of a silent, passive rhetoric? How do we then formulate the silences repre-

sented through the female subjects vis-à-vis the male narrators studied in this chapter? Can the unheard stories and silences about the traumatic incidents of Lajo in "Lajwanti," Ayesha/Veero in *Silent Waters*, and Kusum in *What the Body Remembers* be reframed to signify more than a lack, an inability, or an absence and rather seen as a mode of cognitive affirmation? Ultimately, the implied legacy of received narration of Lajo, Veero, and Kusum's silent trauma can be contrasted to see how their subjectivities are engendered and received in the process. Interestingly, the *cultural translation* of the traumatic female silence in these stories engenders different responses by the male characters. In "Lajwanti," Lajo's narrative is never heard or even imagined by her husband, who actually denies her any tangible subjectivity, making "her feel as if she was precious and fragile like glass, that she would shatter at the slightest touch . . . she would never be Lajo again."⁴¹ Lajo's silence is never even translated; its interpretation is not possible as it becomes a paraphernalia of absence, an annihilatory assumption, and a logo-centric, nihilistic act of finality prescribed by male hegemonic monopolization. Sunderlal's reinscription of Lajo as Devi is an example of subalternizing her silence, in terms of what Spivak calls "the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject,"⁴² and hence Lajo remains doubly effaced as one without history and a voice. As a subaltern, Lajo cannot speak, because her narrative is illegible and inaccessible. There is no interpreter or translator available to legitimize her experience and agency, as there is no linguistic original accessible. Sunderlal's mimetic replication of Lajo's silence through his own imposed silence in the end merely frames it and controls its meaning via male privilege of interpretation.

In *Silent Waters*, Veero's trauma and silence is only an absence that is never uttered yet is gradually visualized through the sepia-toned interruptions as the spectator is stealthily included in Veero's narrative. Her thoughts on her past experiences, as she is shown sitting by the window many times, are never a part of the film's narrative and we are oblivious to her voice. Likewise, we never learn about her perspectives on why she commits the final act of jumping into the well. Her *own* discourse is never accessible, rather, it is extrapolated in retrospect through Zubeida's internal thoughts presented as a voice-over narration in the end. Veero's narrative is then inherited by Zubeida, who symbolically inherits Veero's necklace, and not Saleem, her son, who simply ignores Veero's past. Veero is not a subaltern, doubly effaced, in Spivakian terms; however, her history and her voice remains framed in Zubeida's private memories. Veero's story reminds us of Foucauldian paradigms whereby we can see how the notion of trauma is circulated through discursive formations and strategic deployment of silence: "how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case."⁴³ Female silence in

this film, is intrinsically related to trauma which is thus relegated to oblivion and inaccessibility in public memory.

In *What the Body Remembers*, the silence around Kusum's traumatic experience, although initially inaccessible and trapped within male voices of interpretation, is reflectively translated through Roop who, while she listens to Jeevan and Papaji's narratives about Kusum's tragic end, simultaneously questions them. As mentioned earlier, Roop becomes a translator who underscores the "ruptures of narrativity" and the implications of male violence in Jeevan and Papaji's versions. When Jeevan first tells Roop about his wife's dismemberment, he also imagines the motive of killing a young woman: "without first raping—a waste, surely."⁴⁴ He also speculates and interprets Kusum's response to the violence: "She looked accepting. . . . How can she actually desire it, move to her captor with a smile on her lips?" Like Sunderlal in "Lajwanti," Jeevan initially feels that the symbolic implications of Kusum's dismemberment "must be ignored, so that no Sikh man shows weakness or fear."⁴⁵ The burning of the ancestral house, *Pari Darwaza*, is also a matter of "shame" and Jeevan cannot trust anyone except the Sikhs.⁴⁶ Likewise, Papaji's narrative of how Kusum, his daughter-in-law, was his responsibility and duty to protect, and how he killed her with one stroke of his *kirpan*, is a matter of *izzat* (honor), and yet Roop evaluates the stories of loss and death of Kusum, and possible deaths of Gujri and Revati Bhua. We are also told of Sardarji's possible traumatic experience which is never shared and remains relegated to the world of silent secrecy.

The demarcated difference towards personal trauma is thus discernible in how male characters subsume and relegate it towards silence, whereas Roop, a female respondent to these narratives, translates and even assumes the responsibility of not relegating this personal trauma (of Kusum's dismemberment) to unheard silence or through a predominantly male rhetoric of honor and/or shame. As a translator of traumatic experiences, while revealing the Butlerian "ruptures of narrativity" in the male discourse on Partition experiences, Roop's thought-provoking investigations conceptually underscore Barrett Watten's definition of "non-narratives" that may range from simple to complex forms of articulation, "but their distinguishing feature is an affective/cognitive unity of temporal sequence in their presentation by means of punctual, accretive, associational, or circular forms, whose formal organization and affective force would be lost if subsumed within an overarching narrative."⁴⁷ Analyzing the closeted narratives of Kusum's killing for instance, Roop's translated meanings of the violence narrative, enables a non-narrative articulation of female silence leading to counter-patriarchal implications: "In their affective immediacy and associational complexity, nonnarratives engage, rescript, and displace narratives, but they are not reducible to merely deformed or negative species of narrative and thus are not fully narratable as such."⁴⁸ Grounded on narratives uttered by Papaji and Jeevan,

Roop's non-narrative confronts the inexactitude of a particular totalitarian history by way of incidental references.

Ultimately, then, the very process of reading narratives on Partition, especially where female experiences are represented within silence, demands a critical understanding of discursive strategies employed for their affective immediacy and cognitive affirmation rather than a myopic examination for historical appropriation and/or representational practices. The enforced silences of women in such narratives, especially those written by women writers, attempt to decode the inaccessible stories to reveal patriarchal assumptions and question the nationalist-statist framework that denies female agency and address. At the same time, I have underscored how these narratives also seem to foreground the urgency of un-silencing female agency. The female subject may be rendered subaltern as an unheard woman, framed within private, discursive spaces and may (sometimes) even transcend narrative limitations imposed through a consciously engendered response. Regardless, the politics of privilege and the privileging of the (female) body as a communal marker for honor/shame can produce violence of epistemic regimes.

NOTES

1. Gyanendra Pandey, "In Defense of the Fragment: Writing about Hindu-Muslim Riots in India Today," *A Subaltern Studies Reader, 1986–1995*, ed. Ranajit Guha (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, 18.

4. *Ibid.*, 33.

5. Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State, and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India," *Women and the Politics of Violence*, ed. Taisha Abraham (New Delhi: Har-Anand Publications, 2002), 127.

6. *Ibid.*, 128.

7. Thus writers like Saadat Hasan Manto, Bapsi Sidhwa, and Khushwant Singh along with other writers have referred to the amnesiac histories around Partition. Several Bollywood films, likewise, have portrayed the Partition violence. Scholarly books such as Gyanendra Pandey's *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and others have highlighted alternate histories surrounding Partition. Likewise, critical anthologies have endorsed literary and visual representations via critical examination of fictionalized personal memories.

8. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271–313.

9. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1980), 27.

10. Foucault states that his aim is "to examine the case of a society . . . which speaks verbosely of its own silence, takes great pains to relate in detail the things it does not say, denounces the powers it exercises, and promises to liberate itself from the very laws that have made it function." *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley, Vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1980), 8.

11. Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics*, (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 200.
12. Adrienne Rich, "Cartographies of Silence," in *The Fact of a Doorframe: Selected Poems, 1950–2001* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company), 139–40.
13. Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Not You/Like You: Postcolonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference," *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 416.
14. Ramu Nagappan, *Speaking Havoc: Social Suffering and South Asian Narratives* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 14.
15. Obviously, this cannot be taken as an essential predicament, but more as an observation relevant to the specific texts examined in this chapter.
16. Rajinder Singh Bedi, "Lajwanti," *Manoa* 19, 1 (2007): 21.
17. *Ibid.*, 22.
18. *Ibid.*, 22.
19. *Ibid.*, 23.
20. *Ibid.*, 24.
21. *Ibid.*, 25.
22. *Ibid.*, 29.
23. *Ibid.*, 28.
24. *Ibid.*, 30–31.
25. *Ibid.*, 31.
26. *Ibid.*, 32.
27. *Silent Waters: Khamosh Pani*, DVD, Sabiha Sumar (dir.) 8th October, 2004, (Vidhi Films et al.), September 20, 2005.
28. Nermeen Shaikh, "Interview with Sabiha Sumar," *Asia Society* (New York, 2005) <http://asiasociety.org/arts/film/interview-sabiha-sumar>.
29. Kavita Daiya, "Visual Culture and Violence: Inventing Intimacy and Citizenship in Recent South Asian Cinema," *South Asian Transnationalisms: Cultural Exchange in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Babli Sinha (New York: Routledge, 2012), 143.
30. *Ibid.*, 143.
31. Daiya maintains, "The film thus creates a visual narrative space for the female subject to represent her pain and to critique her abjection by the violence of patriarchal ethnicities which she equates structurally with that of masculine fundamentalism." *Ibid.*, 145. Identifying Veero's past as a "patriarchal ethnicity" serves to present her as an un-understandable otherness and limits ethical perceptions about her dilemmas and their resolution in the end.
32. Suvir Kaul, "Introduction," *The Partition of Memory: The Afterlife of the Division of India* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 7.
33. *Silent Waters: Khamosh Pani*, DVD, Sabiha Sumar (dir.) 8th October, 2004 (Vidhi Films et al.), September 20, 2005.
34. Shauna Singh Baldwin, *What the Body Remembers* (New York: Random House, 1999), 446.
35. *Ibid.*, 447.
36. *Ibid.*, 447.
37. *Ibid.*, 447, emphasis original.
38. *Ibid.*, 448, emphasis mine.
39. *Ibid.*, 451.
40. Judith Butler, "Restaging the Universal," *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, ed. Ernesto Laclau, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek (New York: Verso, 2000), 37.
41. Rajinder Singh Bedi, "Lajwanti," *Manoa* 19, 1 (2007): 32.
42. Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg (Basingstroke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 287.

43. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (Vol. 1. New York: Vintage, 1980), 27.
44. Shauna Singh Baldwin, *What the Body Remembers* (New York: Random House, 1999), 447.
45. *Ibid.* 448.
46. *Ibid.*, 451.
47. Barrett Watten, *The Constructivist Moment: From Material Text to Cultural Poetics* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), 201.
48. *Ibid.*

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