

Project description + about me

Project description + about me

This project is a digital repository dedicated to the histories of sexual violence during the 1947 Partition, bringing together oral histories, survivor testimonies, archival materials, and scholarly literature to recover voices that have often remained absent from dominant narratives of Partition. It aims to contribute to the study of women's histories, violence, memory, and trauma while encouraging greater public engagement with a historically silenced subject. Through this project I aim to provide an interdisciplinary resource for researchers, students, and the wider public on a tabooed topic and silenced history. This project is important because many histories of Partition discuss sexual violence as one aspect of communal conflict, rather than a strategic function of conflict. The interest here lies in understanding how survivors themselves chose to remember, or not remember, these experiences. Oral histories provide a way of examining how traumatic events are narrated across time, how silence functions within testimony, and how memory is shaped by family, community, and changing social contexts. I hope to contribute to these conversations by approaching these testimonies with both historical rigor and ethical care. This topic is sensitive. Being a grandchild of Partition survivors, I am aware that these testimonies concern deeply traumatic experiences. My interest is not in documenting violence for its own sake, but in understanding memory, agency, silence, and the ways survivors choose to narrate these experiences.

As for my experience, I am an IB history student at the American International School, Riyadh. I have researched Partition, using the works of Urvashi Butalia, Ilyas Chatta, (and others). I wrote my history IA (2000 word research paper) on the Partition of India, using my grandpa (Muzaffer Haider, his interview is in the archives as well) as a primary source. I have also written my extended essay (4000 word research paper) on sexual violence during fascist regimes and their militaries in the 20th century. This blend of personal history and passionate activism inspired me to complete another project of my own; documenting sexual violence during the partition of India. I also aim to write an oped piece about sexual violence during partition and hopefully interview second generation migrants to understand the full impact of intergenerational migration and conflict.

I hope this project can remain fruitful, and inspire others to think more deeply about the hidden aspects of our history.

Contact Us!

Zaina.i.ahmed08@gmail.com

Feminist Perspectives on Sexual Violence

Feminist Perspectives on Sexual Violence

The formation of a new land and the destruction of others started with the mutilation of a woman's body. The act of sexual violence against women during conflict is a longstanding casualty of war. Often brushed off, its great significance to understanding the physical and psychological torture of victims is ignored. Hence, the cycle continues as more women get raped, abducted, or mutilated, branded, and subject to forced marriages with each passing conflict. Often when the main cause of the conflict is control over territory, ideology, or nationality, the act of sexual violence against women is an expression of deep rooted masculinity in a patriarchal society. The objectification and ownership of women's bodies can be comparable to ownership of land and territory, which is why dominating it is seen as dominating the 'other'. Anthropologist Veena Das writes that during the partition, women would often be tattooed with "*Jai Hind*" (*Long Live India*) and "*Pakistan Zindabad*" (*Long Live Pakistan*) to burn a memory of loss and domination, so that the men will never forget that their women had already been occupied and ruined by other men, and dehumanize them as trophies of war. By extent, their land and their honor had been ruined. These acts of violence strip a woman of her 'feminine' qualities of being a nurturer, mother, and wife - the essential pillars of a community - dismantling society from the bottom. By abducting women as hostages, forced wives, or captives, men were able to act on the impulse to consume, change, and erase the remains of the other country, solidifying themselves as the sole ruler and controller over the territory and dominion. Other feminist writing interpret sexual violence as a way for men to reclaim their masculinity. When outside forces invade a state, the local men feel emasculated, as their role as protectors has been threatened. In return, they facilitate violence upon women to reclaim their sense of agency, control, and dominance. Through this lens, the partition can be seen as the men's failure to protect the unity of a nation and inability to defend their women, and in turn, the men of victim state had also taken it into their own hands to protect their honor by killing drowning, shooting, sacrificing, their women and children, some by their own accord, to avoid being ruined by the enemy. "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." (Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, "Recovery, Rupture, Resistance: Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition")

Sources

[Archives of Sexual Violence: Some Testimonies from the Partition of India | Law and History Review | Cambridge Core](#)

<https://womensmediacenter.com/women-under-siege/rape-accounts-still-surface-from-in-dias-partition-65-years-on>

Stripping, parading naked, mutilating, tattooing, disfiguring, branding the genitalia, amputating breasts, raping, knifing the wombs open, killing fetusus, all acts of sexual violence, tells us that women were used as objects as men - weaponized for their own honor. A woman's sexuality is a direct extension of her menfolk's masculinity and manhood - when shamed and ruined - has to be avenged. In the end with all this violence, it is women who are ultimately dealt with the most violent consequences. Each one of these acts of violations has specific meaning and physical consequences. Above all, women's bodies are weaponized as conquered territory, claimed and branded by the invaders. The acts of violence may be continuous or simultaneous, such as starting with stripping and ending up with rape, branding, and tattooing. It might take place publicly, or with family forced to be witnesses. Tattooing 'pakistan zindabad' or 'hindustan zindabad', brand the woman for life but also ensure that her family will never accept her again, and cause eternal humiliation for her, her family, and community. For the partition specifically, sexual violence against women on both sides deepened the divide between the religious communities through the bodies of the women, in a way, 'becoming' those countries, imprinting shame and dishonor onto their community. Branding and tattooing breasts and genitalia with religious symbols extended the violation, metaphorically, to future generations - casting them as traitors to their origins, meaning that the bloodline will end there. Amputating breasts was seen as a form of desexualizing, stripping away the woman's role as wife, mother, and nurturer because a violated woman could no longer be seen as a legitimate vessel of lineage or fertility by her own community. Thus, each act of violation transcended beyond the individual woman. It was designed to restrict her from any future she might have offered her community, turning a single act of physical harm into an intergenerational injury. Hence, her body, was never just a body, it was the battlefield where communal identity, honor, and continued rule were fought over, making sexual violence a central instrument during the 1947 partition of India.

Sources:

Abducted and Widowed Women
Questions of Sexuality and Citizenship
During Partition
Urvashi Bu talia

Borders &Boundaries
WOMENININDIAS PARTITION
Ritu Menon
&
Kamla Bhasin

Conflict Overview

The partition of India in August of 1947 was a result of a rushed departure by ruling colonial powers, the British, as well as the incompatibility of the Hindu and Muslim leaders who desired a separate state. This triggered a long line of massacres and forced displacements - roughly around 15-18 million crossing the western border and around 2-3 million deaths as the largest migration in modern history.. 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." (*Archives of sexual violence* Margaret Bourke-White, *Portrait of Myself* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 283).

Main source

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/law-and-history-review/article/archives-of-sexual-violence-some-testimonies-from-the-partition-of-india/D28A8CE435F180EF96DB21A7A84DB3AF#fn14>

Testimonies

The section highlighted in green is the source. The section highlighted in yellow is the person giving the testimony.

Appendix: Muslim League Attack on Sikhs and Hindus in the Punjab 1947

1. Shrimati Laj Wanti; The Kamoke Massacre, widow of Shri Manak Chand Age 23 years, caste Khatri, resident of Nurpur Sethi, District Jhelum, to the Chief Liaison Officer, Lahore, August 1947.

“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, axes, barchas, 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 saw an old woman who cried for water being caught hold of by her feet by a Muslim and flung twice on the ground and killed. The children were also similarly murdered. All the valuables on the persons of the women were removed and taken away by the mob. Even clothes were torn in the effort to remove valuables. My son was also snatched away in spite of my protests. I cannot say who took him away. 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... went to other houses to look after my son. I saw a large number of children but I was unable to find my son. During these visits 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. After about a month it was announced by beat of drum that the Hindu Military had arrived and those of the inhabitants who had Hindu women and children in their possession should produce them at the police station. On this account, I and many other women (about 150) were produced at the police station. During the period of a month, that I stayed in the house of Abdul Ghani the members of his family and he always said that there was no food in India, the relations of all Hindu women had been killed and no one was prepared to have them back into their homes and that even Mahatma Gandhi said that there was no food in India and therefore, no women or men who had been kept in Pakistan should return to India. We were also told that all the girls who would go to India would be made to stand in line and shot dead by the Indian Military because they were not fit for being returned to Hindu society and Hindu society was not prepared to take them back. Such propaganda was made in every Muslim house and all the women whom I met told me of it as I went from house to house in search of my son. One Muslim Mirassi named Barkat Ali who had also taken a young Hindu girl was boasting that he had with his own hands

killed 50 men with his dagger and had been rewarded by the SubInspector of Police, Kamoke, for his valour. We were also told that we must state before the police and other authorities that we were not willing to return to India. The 150 women who were produced at the station, Kamoke, were taken in tongas to Gujranwala. Out of the women collected, only 20 got up and said that they wanted to return to India. I was one of them. There were 10 children with these women. The remaining lot was put into the trucks and sent back to Kamoke by the Sub-Inspector of Police. We were then taken to the Hindu refugee camp and put into trucks which brought us to Amritsar. My uncle, my aunt and my husband were all killed at Kamoke railway station. I have not yet been able to trace my son and the daughter of my uncle and aunt must have also been similarly killed.”

Appendix I of Gurbachan Singh Talib, Muslim League Attack.

2. The Magistrate (Qazi Ahmad Shafi) leading the Military started from one end of Sheikhpura known as Akalgarh and began to march through the whole of old Sheikhpura 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 Sheikhpura... Men and women were made to stand in separate lines. Women were selected after being subjected to the 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.”

3. Raj Rani

“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 1 1/2 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 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.”

4. S. Harbhajan Singh, 1st Class Magistrate, Gurdaspur,

“Rape. On 4-10-47, a small caravan of about fifteen non-Muslims tried to cross the bridge Ravi from Pakistan to this side. They were entrapped by the Muslim Military picket on the other side of the bridge. That caravan included four women. The male members of the caravan were murdered during the night. Our Military picket on this side of the bridge heard shrieks and cries of the victims. The Gurkha Jamadar in charge of the picket saw the women with Military (Muslim). They kept those women in their tents during the night and the military picket on our side heard their shrieks too during the night as if they were being raped. Later on those women never crossed the bridge on this side. The above facts were conveyed to the police by the Additional Police Head Constable, Ranjit Singh who is also with the police picket at the bridge. The S. H. O. verified these facts from the Gurkha Jamadar too. Murder and Abduction (Jhelum) On the night between the 4th and 5th December, 1947 two non-Muslim evacuees were killed and two young girls were carried away forcibly and the property of the rest was looted near Khanpur, District Jhelum.”

5. S. Khazan Singh of Village Kotli, Tehsil and District Muzaffarabad (Jammu and Kashmir State)

“He 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 Mohammadians.” 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. “

6. Viranwati, aged 16/17 years, from Mirpur

“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. Here, a woman “married” her abductor out of fear.”

7. Ram Piari, aged 20 years, of Baddomali, District Sialkot

“About 3 months back, my village was raided by Muslims and the village was set on fire and there was general looting. The Hindu population was asked to walk out with a promise that they would be given a free passage across the river Ravi towards India. When we walked out of our houses we were subjected to searches and all our belongings were taken away. They did a lot of killing. I was forced to accompany a Muslim whose name I do not know. Later at the asking of Labhu, a tongawala of Baghbanpura, I was taken over by him. Against my consent and at the point of dagger I was subjected to rape by Labhu. I was also deprived of my two gold rings, one gold necklace, one pair of earrings and about Rs. 8,900 that I had carried with me. After 7-8 days this Labhu against my wishes performed Nikah ceremony with me and used me as a wife.”

8. A British officer of the Military Evacuation Organisation of West Punjab recounts an episode of bestial violence:

“at a place near Sheikhpura 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.”

9. 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 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. 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, tauntingly told Lt. Col. Dr. Surat Singh to convey to the Sikh leaders that Muslims had done in Sheikhpura in two days what Sikhs might not be able to do in their entire history."

10. 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 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.)"

The ladies:

- 1. Mrs. Krishna Wanti, widow of Kanshi Ram Khorana, Douglasspura, Lane 10, Lyallpur.
- 2. Mrs. Lajwanti, widow of Tarachand Vermani, Douglasspura, Lane 10, Lyallpur.
- 3. Mrs. Rajrani, widow of Faqirchand Dora, Chak 232, Khemsinghwala near Risalewala, Lyallpur.
- 4. Mrs. Shanti Devi, widow of Nand Lal Malhotra of Jhang.
- 5. Mrs. Ram Piari, widow of Bahadur Chand Gillu of Kandawala, Post Office Langar (Jhang).
- 6. Mrs. Phul Rani, wife of Malik Des Raj Sehgal, Putli Cotton Mills, Douglasspura, Lyallpur.
- 7. Mrs. Lajwanti, widow of Piarey Lal Janiji, Douglasspura, Lyallpur.

- 8. Mrs. Rani Bai, widow of Jiwandas Kharbandi, Douglasspura, Lyallpur

11. REPORTS OF INDIAN LIAISON OFFICERS

“ Sale of women, Girls abducted from Mirpur side are sold in Jhelum city at Rs. 10 or 20 each. The local police refuses to interfere on the ground that the girls were not removed from the Punjab and also they express their helplessness because of the attitude of the armed Pathans possessing these girls. I am bringing this to the notice of the West Punjab Government but I am afraid nothing would come out of it and in our helplessness all these girls shall have to stand hardships for all their lives and suffer misery. Abducted Girls Sold. According to the information received most of the girls abducted from Jammu and Kashmir States and some of the girls abducted from Gujranwala, Jhelum, Mianwali, Jhang and Dera Ghazi Khan districts are taken to the North-west Frontier Province and from there to the tribal territory. At Mansera and some other places (North-West Frontier) there are regular camps where Hindu girls are being sold.”

12. statement of Parsini, a 15 year old Hindu abducted girl, rescued by Indian Military. Her statement to the Chief Liaison Officer, East Punjab Government

“About three months-back our village was raided by Muslims and our street known as Samaj Wali Gali was set on fire and the property was looted. They announced to the Hindu population that they would be given safe passage across the river Ravi towards India if they would go out peacefully. When men, women and children walked out of their houses the Muslim raiders committed atrocities with the women in the open streets and all young girls were taken away and a very large number of men and old women were killed. I was forcibly taken away by one Fazal Din alias Fajja, a tonga driver of Baghbanpura. A very large number of raiders belonged to Baghbanpura. Mst. Piari, who is now present outside and her cousin named Piari were also with me at the time. Two men named Labhu and Allah Rakha were with these two girls and were forcing them to go with them. We all the three girls with three men walked on foot and passed the night at Passianwala at the house of a Muslim whose name I do not remember. The owner of this house was uncle of Allah Rakha who had abducted the senior Piari. Next day we were marched again to Baghbanpura at about 10 in the night. I was taken to the house of Fajja and the other two girls also spent the night at the same place. During the course of the night Labhu, against the wishes of senior Piari, who is present outside, committed rape on her and also relieved her of two gold rings. The next morning both these girls named Piari, were taken away by Allah Rakha and Labhu respectively. After 15 days or so I was forcibly married to one Farid, aged about 25 years, a relation of the said Fazal

Din. I was taken to his house where he used me as wife in the face of great protest and resistance put up by me. I was given the name of Khurshid and was forcibly converted.”

Borders and Boundaries Ritu Menon & Kamla Bhasin

13. Durga Rani

“In the villages of Head Junu, Hindus threw their young daughters into wells, dug trenches and buried them alive. Some were burnt to death, some were made to touch electric wires to prevent the Muslims from touching them. We heard of such happenings all the time after August 16. We heard all this. The Muslims used to announce that they would take away our daughters. They would force their way into homes and pick up young girls and women. Ten or twenty of them would enter, tie up the menfolk and take the women. We saw many who had been raped and disfigured, their faces and breasts scarred, and then abandoned. They had tooth-marks all over them. Their families said, “How can we keep them now? Better that they are dead.” Many of them were so young—18, 15, 14 years old—what remained of them now? Their “character” was now spoilt. One had been raped by ten or more men - her father burnt her, refused to take her back. There was one village, Makhtampura, where all night they plundered and raped, they dragged away all the young girls who were fleeing in kafilas. No one could do anything—if they did, they would be killed. Everyone was running for their lives. I saw it all—mothers telling their daughters they were ruined, bemoaning their fate, saying it would have been better if they hadn’t been born... .”

Women would be forced to dance for their captors, would be raped in front of their men.

14. Medical doctor at Jhang refugee camp

“Apart from the injured from Jhang-Maghiana town (following the violence of August 26, 1947) over 500 seriously wounded persons were brought to the refugee camp from adjoining villages. One of the cases that I treated was of a woman from village Chund Bharwana who was the wife of a railway porter. One of her hands was chopped off above her wrist and then she was thrown into the fire, as a result of which her lower portion got burnt. But she escaped from there and was then thrown into a well with her two daughters and one son. She was taken out of the well later on and brought to the refugee camp.” Among the chief types of injury inflicted on the wounded, the same doctor cites “amputation of breasts of women”, and adds that “six such cases of chopped-off breasts were brought to the refugee camp and all of them proved fatal”.

15. The Fact Finding Team recordings from Bewal village (Rawalpindi distt.)

“During the massacres of March 10, 1947, “many women and girls saved their honour by self-immolation. They collected their beddings and cots in a heap and when the heap caught fire they jumped onto it, raising cries of ‘Sat Sri Akal!’”

16. School teacher of government high school, Sheikhpura, who was in one of the three camps attacked on August 26, 1947

“During the attack, my wife and daughter got separated. My wife took shelter in one house and my daughter in another. My daughter tried to put an end to her life by persuading a lawyer’s son to strangle her. Three attempts were made but my daughter survived though she remained unconscious for some time. There were one or two girls in this house also, and they prepared a pyre with some quilts and charpayees!” Women would commit suicide as dying was seen as more honorable than being assaulted by the enemy. Forced into death, they would jump into wells and set themselves on fire, alone or in groups, including children.

Borders and Boundaries

“we begin to discern some specific features of “communal” crimes against women: their brutality, their extreme sexual violence and their collective nature. The range of sexual violation explicit in the above accounts stripping; parading naked; mutilating and disfiguring; tattooing or branding the breasts and genitalia with triumphal slogans; amputating breasts; knifing open the womb; raping, of course; killing fetuses - is shocking not only for its savagery, but for what it tells us about women as objects in male constructions of their own honour. Women’s sexuality symbolises “manhood”; its desecration is a matter of such shame and dishonour that it has to be avenged. Yet, with the cruel logic of all such violence, it is women ultimately who are most violently dealt with as a consequence.”

From the Ashes of 1947, Reimagining Punjab

17. Khurshid Bibi

“When I was inside that village and came to Pakistan, we faced atrocities all the way. They invaded the village from all sides and started the massacre. They started firing bullets at people and burnt alive those that were hiding in their houses. They lifted the corpses of Muslims in the air on their blades. They did horrible atrocities. They set fire on such a scale as to kill each and every Muslim, even then few people escaped to Pakistan. I was also one of them. Our house had been set on fire while we were hiding inside – roof was on flames, doors, windows and everything else was on flames. They dragged the females out with them and nobody heeded the children – most of us were lost and our mothers never saw us again. They took the females outside and loaded them on vehicles, left over children were ignored and not taken away. I not only saw all

this but I equally suffered on that fateful day. I was present at that place. When the night came, someone took me and three other children with him – he was not from our family but someone else [a Sikh as she reveals afterwards]. People said to him that he should kill the Muslims kids. They teased us with their blades. They said to him that if he couldn't kill us, he had to leave that to them. While he was taking us with him many attempted to kill us on the way, but he said that he wouldn't kill us. We were four children, I [she was seven and a half years old then] had my younger sister with me and the other girl had her sister with her. There was some wisdom in my mind, which was transferred to me by my grandfather, who was a wise and renowned man. The lessons he taught and the advice he gave me helped me a lot on the way to Pakistan. It was night and the gangs who had killed nearly all the Muslims by then, started looting and plundering their houses. While that man, who was a Sikh took us with him. On the way, he halted for some time and took the two other girls to a field and murdered them and at seeing this, great fear overwhelmed us. We ran for our lives, he followed us running. We saw a house with some people at a distance. We ran to that house and started crying over the atrocities done to us. The other girls were killed and we knew that we would also be killed in the same way. The people in that house forbade that Sikh from taking us away and requested him to leave us there – saying 'these kids neither have parents nor any caretaker, so please leave them with us, don't take them away'. He did as they requested and left us there. The people of that house took us to another village, where Muslim women had been taken. Even there we found no one who knew us. So, they took us back to their house and we lived with those Hindus for six months. There was no news of our relatives but we often heard that Muslim military would come during that month and take away Muslim women and children who were left behind. The Hindus didn't want to lose us and never let us out of the home. We were also afraid because we had already seen much of atrocities. We thought that this military of Muslims would kill us after taking us away because we were not so sensible. We were also afraid of the Hindus we lived with. One day those Hindus sent us to bring water from the well and that's where the military saw us by chance. We Muslim kids were easily distinguishable from other kids as our noses and ears were pierced for putting on jewellery. The military men saw us; they stopped the jeep and came to us hesitatingly because they were not sure that we were Muslim kids. We also feared them. They asked the women with them to come forward and talk to us. Those women treated us with love and concern. When we told them that we were Muslims, they gave us more love and called the military people to take us to their vehicle. They military people treated us with great love and concern as well. When we sat in the jeep, everyone including those men started crying. But they made us feel better with their concern. We were taken to the camp in Ambala and we were wondering about possibilities of meeting any of our relatives who might still be alive. During the six months we stayed there, we witnessed atrocities of Hindus and Sikhs towards Muslims. They murdered Muslims brutally and shattered their bodies to

pieces with spears. Displayed the corpses in air on their blades and threw them on earth afterwards. Those were the rainy days and water became red with blood of the corpses lying unattended on the ground. When we started from there our feet got red with that bloody water. [Where was your grandfather at that time?] He was murdered at the time of attack. The attack was so ferocious that many women committed suicide due to its fear. They didn't want to get caught by Hindus so taking their children in their arms they jumped in the wells. Both the wells of our village were filled with dead women and children. We saw many of the dead bodies being taken out of wells. The dead body of Naziraan, our relative, was also taken out of a well."

18. Ayesha Bibi & Nazeeran Bibi

"The Sikhs after attacking and burning other villages intended to attack our village. We escaped before the attack. One of our relatives' girls was raped and afterward they [Sikhs] tried to kill. When one of her uncles saw her, he spread his own chadar to her body to cover her. She survived and a doctor told us that she had twenty knife wounds in her body. They [Sikhs] also killed her children. There was one other girl who joined our caravan on the way. A Sikh abducted her along with her child. At night time, she managed to escape and left her child in the Sikh's house. She concealed herself in a sugar field and eventually managed to find and join our caravan. She left her own child there...children and young boys were chopped off like vegetables."

"May God forgive us; we could hear the cries and lamentations on the abduction of young girls because we used to live very close to the city that was the centre of violence. The day when we were supposed to be attacked by them, we gathered in a field. All our men encircled us and the children and we sat down there waiting for our fate. But before they could attack us, it started raining and we all dispersed to take shelters. After that, we made a deal with them and paid a lot of money to let us go safely. They allowed us to go but they accompanied us for a while and it was very horrific to travel under their gleaming swords. I got surprised to see the road full of blood and I asked my husband what it was. My terrified husband asked me to keep quiet and carry on with the journey."

19. In Thoa Khalsa (Rawalpindi), March 15 1947, 90 women and children jumped into a well, committing suicide, to prevent sexual violence and forced marriages. Three women's experiences are as followed:

“I don’t know much but I had heard stories of partition. When the caravan consisting of the inhabitants of our village moved towards Pakistan, they were very much afraid of the assailants. The major worry was about the women because they did not want to let their women taken by Sikhs. So, it was mutually decided that in case of an attack women will tie up their children with legs and will jump into the water; in any canal or well they will find nearby. The lambardar of the village had been travelling, on his horse, far ahead of the caravan to see if there were any attackers on the way. Once he returned waving his shawl, the caravan misunderstood it as a sign of danger. When women were about to jump he shouted ‘my sisters do not jump, I have seen Pakistani army coming towards our caravan. Now the danger is over and we are in safe hands’. The women did feel much relief on hearing this news.”

“Yes, many wells filled with dead bodies of young girls who threw themselves (to save their honour) in Sultan Pura. That was nearby Amritsar. Our relatives used to live there. Many girls were humiliated and raped. Many wells swelled up with their dead bodies. They threw themselves for the sanctity of their honour. This all happened in a village nearby Amritsar, Dhariwal, Gurdaspur and Dina Nagar were all located side by side. The Sikhs were really bad people; the Hindus were not too much brutal. Now the Sikhs have developed good relations with the Muslims. We had many relatives there; they also migrated to Lahore.”

“I told you, one of our relatives was in the military. His family was migrating to Pakistan by the train. On his way to Pakistan, his sister who was very pretty was abducted. The girls’ brother was Iqbal and due to the shock he became mad. The family tried hard to find her but remained unsuccessful. Yes, he reported this incident. Everyone reported the missing of their girls, therefore the government tried to recover them when the incidents were reported. In a village Khan Pur, our relatives committed suicides. First, they countered the enemies but when their weapons run out they committed suicide. Women jumped into well and died. They were very brave girls. One of their daughters fired on the attackers. When all rounds of fires run out, they had no other option, so they committed suicide.”

20. Krishna Thapar, social worker

“Sometime in 1950 I was required to escort 21 Muslim women who had been recovered to Pakistan. They did not want to return, but the Tribunal had decided that they had to go. They were young, beautiful girls and had been taken by Sardars [Sikhs]. They were determined to stay back because they were very happy. We had to use real force to

compel them to go back. I was very unhappy with this duty – they had already suffered so much and now we were forcing them to return when they just didn't want to go. I was told that these girls are simply creating a commotion for nothing, their case has been decided and they have to be sent back...Those women cursed me all the way to Amritsar, loudly and continuously...It was complete helplessness, they had been transferred from one set of butchers (kasais) to another...they kept saying, 'Why are you destroying our lives?'

21. Reshmi Bibi

"She did not want to come back; she has two children now. The Military men brought her back. They cunningly and forcefully left their children to her mother-in-law in India and took her away, first, in Amritsar then in Jullundur; then they wrote a letter to her brother who went to Jullundur and fetched her back to Lahore and then here to the village. Here she gave a birth to a baby girl. Men of the family intended to kill the baby because of the dishonour to family but we [women] did not allow them to kill her. She wrote a secret letter to her husband in India. When this secret came out, the men of the family beat her badly. Afterwards, they arranged her marriage and now she had got sons; even grandsons. [What happened to the baby?] She died after a year. [Did she speak about the tragedy that happened with her that time?] She told us. She tried to come back. One day her previous husband took her to the nearest city. She got chance to talk with goldsmith. She requested him to send her and offered gold ring to him. He said I could not do this. People from Pakistan would take you back. She told me that she wanted to go to Lahore but could not find a chance."

22. Nadira Khanum and Zakira Fatima

"My aunt, who was abducted in India, had got children in India when she was recovered and brought back to the fold of the family. She again got married here in Pakistan. She was an innocent woman. She did nothing wrong...she was recovered after a long time and during that period she had got children there in India. [Does she talk about this episode?] Nobody could talk about such shameful incident. One of our relatives' daughter was left in India and was not allowed to come back here. She used to scream and cry desperately. Refugees who came from there told us about her miserable tale. She was a very pretty girl. She was abducted because of her beauty. God knows how she lived there. [This happened on both sides. Many Hindu and Sikh girls remained in this side of the Punjab.] This side, no, here nothing like this happened. I never heard about any Sikh girl being abducted here. Maybe some girls were left over here. The Muslims were not so cruel. They also killed Hindus and Sikhs. Refugees who reached India told us that the Muslims had been killing, attacking and looting their caravans. Everyone was involved in looting and killings. The Muslims were also involved in

looting, but this type of incidents (abduction of Sikh women) did not happen here. Such incidents did not happen in our village. [Those girls in your family who were abducted during the partition, are they still alive?] Yes, one of them presently lives in Okara. She has got grandchildren now. They did not commit any crime, or wrongdoing. But they returned, got married here and now have settled down. [Does she talk about those days?] No, we never asked her about such things; we feel shame in asking anything like that. They suffered, why should we disturb them by recalling their bad memories? [How did people of the family come to know all about this?] She must have talked with anybody; perhaps her own family, sisters or brothers. In fact, the entire family knows that they were abducted in India and were recovered after a long time. They were indeed abducted involuntarily and forcefully, otherwise girls did not have any relations with the abductors. [Both governments were trying to recover these girls.] Yes, because of such efforts these girls were recovered and they returned to their own homes. Some returned shortly while others took years to recover. Some girls came back within six months but others came back after many years. My sister-in-law came back after six years and other relatives came back after seven years and more.”

23. Fatima Sughra

“I know a case very well; a Syed family who came from Amritsar to Lahore, their daughter was abducted in Amritsar. When they came to know that Fatima Begum [an activist working for the recovery and rehabilitation of abducted Muslim women] had brought a truck of Muslim recovered women in Lahore, they learnt that their daughter was in the custody of a Sikh. The Sikh was nice man; he took over the girl from other Sikhs and kept the girl in his house like his sister. He helped the girl to be handed over the recovery team who finally sent her to Pakistan. Even the Sikh man, who escorted her to the border to see off her, gifted her sewing machine. He said: ‘she is like my own daughter’. Eventually, this girl reached home but the family never said anything about her abduction and recovery to anyone, chiefly because of tarnishing their honour in the society. At the end, the girl committed suicide but the family still never disclosed anything to anybody. She did not speak to anyone; she was a Syed Zadi [from the Prophet’s lineage]. They had lots of murids [devotees]. They were pious and nice people. They were grateful to us because we did not disclose this affair to anyone. [Did she come back happily?] Yes, in fact she never disclosed to anybody what actually happened. There must be many women like her. She was nearly 20. [How did the family allow the abducted girls to come back?] One of my relatives adopted abducted/ missing kids and brought up them and gave them everything. She took over two missing girls and brought up them like her own kids. Many people adopted kids to make them their servants. Some women never came back in Pakistan. One of my relatives was in the police. His family was in India. During the partition-related-killing his wife jumped into the well with two daughters to save honour...They preferred death rather than

humiliation. Many women recovered and settled and many others lost everything. Many children lost their houses. Some were adopted by good people and others were made servants by some bad individuals. [Why do people not talk about the sufferings of that time?] Sixty years have passed and people have forgotten many things. Many have already passed away and others are too old now...Now people have settled.”

24. Writer Afzal Tauseef

“Besides abduction and rape, there was another tragic element of that situation. Those who remained safe from abduction and rape were exploited by their own people. On this aspect, a collection of my stories Aman Wailay Milan Gay is very relevant. It has been translated in Gurmukhi. A story from that collection perfectly explains this tragedy. It is about the girls who remained safe and had been sent to the countries they belong to. When these helpless girls reach Lahore, the welfare centre or the camps that were supposed to give them shelter started playing the role of a brothel. Irony reaches its zenith when the girls protest saying that they were better off when with the enemies. Anyway, this is a subtle and a serious issue and once you go deep you can see the true face of this society.”

25. Farkhanda Lodi

“As you see our respectable culture does not allow us to speak about such things. That is why she never discusses this issue [referring to abduction] ... She is weak, helpless and vulnerable. She has been forced to remain weak. It is the training; she gets this from her parents, culture and the social environment that develop in her a pitiable pathetic soul. Our system and society do not allow her to progress. So she is in pain, for me her life is a constant misery.”

1947 Partition Archive (needs to be credited and referenced properly, I have contacted the archive on how to do this)

26. Dr. Bapsi Sidhwa

Dr. Bapsi Sidhwa was born in Karachi in 1938 and raised in Lahore. As a young woman, walking with her gardener, she came upon a gunnysack from which a dead man rolled out, his stomach carved open, a brutal memory of a wasted life. During Partition itself, she watched the communities burn from afar, and remembers people bringing their belongings to be stored in Lahore before the city was handed to Pakistan, belongings that were never collected.

She recalls servants' houses turning into women's recovery camps, where Muslim women worked to collect the kidnapped women of their community. Interfaith respect

had been instilled in her from childhood, religion "sacred to them as ours was sacred to us", yet that respect collapsed as the violence spread. She describes trains arriving in darkness, silently, full of dead bodies, with the young women missing, presumably taken. People were tied to jeeps and torn apart. Pregnant women had their stomachs slit. There was no respect left for women's bodies at all.

She shares a story a man once told her at a reading, about his own family: his 16-year-old sister went missing during Partition, and when the men prepared to search for her, their mother stopped them, saying the girl had surely been touched by Muslims and could no longer be considered their daughter, "Don't you dare anybody go, she has been touched by musallah and she is no longer our daughter." Dr. Sidhwa says she was more shaken that the words came from the mother than if they'd come from the men. Women in recovery camps, she notes, often weren't accepted back by their own families even after rescue; they were given sewing machines and left to rebuild alone, a process of rehabilitation that stretched on for three or four years.

In her book, *Partition Dialogues*, she writes: "It is the women who bear the brunt of violence that accompanies these disputes... Victories are celebrated on the bodies of women... it is not they per se who are the targets but the men to whom they belong."

27. Meenakshi Bhat

Meenakshi Bhat was eight or nine years old at Partition, living in the princely state of Wankaner, Gujarat, where her father served as Chief Medical Officer. She recalls first hearing of the violence through trainloads of dead bodies arriving in the region, her voice dropping as she describes it even now.

Her clearest memory is of two Sindhi women, in their early thirties, who came to her father for treatment after fleeing Karachi. Their breasts and noses had been cut off. She was about ten at the time, and says she can still see them in front of her eyes. In a whisper, pausing between words, she recalls what the women told her father: that in front of their own eyes, their daughters had been raped, their husbands brutally killed, and that they themselves had also been raped and mutilated. Government shelters took the women in afterward. She reflects that the two women had, by the time she met them, made a kind of peace with what happened, "they would talk as if it happened to someone else", and recalls them saying plainly, "Hindus also did horrible things to Muslims," adding, "how are we to complain?"

Her own town of Wankaner saw no violence, and its Muslim residents stayed on undisturbed. But elsewhere in her family, an aunt married into a Punjabi family in Peshawar fled with her three children and smuggled gold bricks out in a car trunk after being widowed. Refugee camps for Sindhi women were set up in Rajkot, in what had

been British residences; she didn't see this herself, but heard how people had to feign death among the bodies to survive.

Her message, looking back, is to forgive: "How can you bring peace if you don't forgive them."

28. Janat Bibi

Janat Bibi was thirteen at Partition, living with her family in Sarawan, near Ferozepur. When the violence began, her family fled toward Kot Kapura and then set out for Pakistan. After crossing Muktsar, their caravan was attacked, men, women, and children killed. Her mother vanished in that attack and was never found.

She and her sister were among the women taken by the attackers. What happened to her during her captivity isn't recorded directly, though other testimonies from the same period make clear what such abductions usually meant. Her sister was returned within a couple of months; Janat Bibi herself was recovered by the military two years later, after being held first in a camp in Delhi and then in one in Jalandhar, where officials worked to trace women back to their families. A postman intercepted a letter naming her location and alerted her husband and father, who came for her in Lahore. Her husband had remarried in her absence, but she was still taken back into the family. She has never wished to return to her village.

29. Sarla Dutta

Sarla Dutta was thirteen when her family tried to escape Mirpur on foot. Her father was killed in the attack, and she was separated from her mother and taken by a man named Kaalu, along with several other girls, to be married to his son. She was forcibly converted and made to work in his household for seven months.

A friendship with a tax collector's daughter gave her a chance at escape — the girl agreed to help in exchange for Sarla's gold bangles. When soldiers came searching the house for abducted girls, Kaalu ordered her to hide inside a seed drum; instead, she pushed her hand out and called for help so she'd be found. She then walked with a five-hundred-person column of refugees to the Datyal camp, where she waited a year before being reunited with her family. Kaalu came once to ask her to return with him; she refused.

30. Dr. Roshni Rustomji

Dr. Roshni Rustomji Kerns grew up Parsi in Karachi, in a family and community she remembers as close-knit across religious lines, her great-grandfather was known for helping anyone who came to him, "he respected all religions." That memory of coexistence is set against what Partition later broke apart: she says it hurt her deeply along religious lines, and recalls being warned, after marrying an Anglo-American, to "be careful because people are not kind to the children of mixed marriages." Even so, her grandmother accepted her later relationship with a Muslim man without hesitation, asking of divided families more broadly, "why can't we go, we're all the same people."

She reflects that Karachi before Partition was "a good place to grow up as a child. We were all together", a unity that the years after Partition, and the racial and religious sorting that came with them, steadily undid.

31. Dadan Jethwani

Dadan Jethwani left Khaipur, in Sindh, with her husband's family in March, following her parents, who had gone ahead in January. They traveled by train to Karachi and then by ship to Bombay, carrying only what they could, "how could we take so much?", not knowing whether they would ever return.

She explains plainly why they left: attackers were cutting off women's breasts and kidnapping them in trucks, "bhot be hotti thi, ye seeni kafe katke, garhi barke challe jati the" [this happened a lot; they would cut off breasts like this and carry them off in trucks]. Many women killed themselves and their children rather than be taken, she says, her voice dropping as she describes it, they would jump into wells. She didn't witness these horrors directly on her own journey, only heard of them, and says of the violence more broadly, with a kind of resigned laugh, "it happened to everyone", there was nothing anyone could do about it.

structure of archive on sexual violence

Translational

Intro/home page

1947 sexual violence

Testimonies

Thematic analysis

Contact us

Sexual violence in other conflicts

–

1. Home

One-paragraph description of the project

Short statement explaining why these memories are being collected

Featured story/testimony

Link to Explore Stories

A brief note on ethics, consent and content warnings

2. About the Archive

What the project is

Why it was created

Scope: Partition, 1947, sexual violence and its aftermath

Who is collecting the material

Methodology/oral-history approach

Acknowledgement of limitations

3. Stories/Testimonies; the heart of the archive

Each person gets an individual page/post:

Name/pseudonym

Birthplace/location

Age in 1947

Community/background (if they wish to disclose): caste, religion, town

Their story

Summary testimony or edited transcript: a short paragraph

The aftermath/impact

What happened afterwards; marriage, displacement, silence, family relationships, migration, etc.

Memory and meaning

How the experience was remembered or understood later in life

Photograph/object/document, where available

Source, recording information

Interview date, interviewer, language, consent status

4. Themes: optional

A way of allowing readers to encounter the stories comparatively:

Abduction

Sexual violence

Displacement

Marriage

Pregnancy/children

Silence and secrecy

Shame and honour

Family memory

Recovery/survival

Memory across generations

Return/non-return

Objects and photographs

You don't need many categories initially. WordPress tags can do most of this.

5. Places

An extremely useful section for Partition:

Lahore | Amritsar | Delhi | Rawalpindi | Gujranwala | Multan | etc.

Each story can be tagged by places before, during and after Partition.

6. Objects/Photographs

This could make the archive much more emotionally powerful.

For example:

Photograph

Letter
Jewellery
Clothing
Family document
Refugee/identity document
Household object
Newspaper clipping

Each could have its own short contextual description.

7. The Afterlife

Perhaps later on consider making this a distinct section because it fits your "scar/wound" idea.

Instead of asking only what happened in 1947, this section asks:

What remained?

It could contain stories about:

silence
nightmares/fear
family secrecy
marriages
children born after violence
changing memories
intergenerational transmission
things survivors never discussed
things families discovered only after their death

This could become the archive's distinctive contribution.

8. Resources/Context

A small section providing:

historical timeline of Partition
existing scholarship
relevant archives
oral-history methodology
further reading

Keep this separate from the testimonies so that historian's interpretation doesn't overwhelm the survivor's voice.

9. Share a Story

A submission page explaining:

who can submit

what can be submitted

anonymity/pseudonyms

consent

how interviews are conducted

whether submissions can be withdrawn

contact information

Sources

Sources

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).

Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*

<https://womensmediacenter.com/women-under-siege/rape-accounts-still-surface-from-in-dias-partition-65-years-on>

[Rameshwari Nehru Papers, 1st installment, File no. 103, NMML, New Delhi.](#)

[report compiled by Sardar Gurbachan Singh Talib in 1947 and published in 1950 by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee](#)

<https://mittalsouthasiainstitute.harvard.edu/partition-home/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b090rrl0>

[Archives of Sexual Violence: Some Testimonies from the Partition of India | Law and History Review | Cambridge Core](#)

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/law-and-history-review/article/archives-of-sexual-violence-some-testimonies-from-the-partition-of-india/D28A8CE435F180EF96DB21A7A84DB3AF#fn14>

Abducted and Widowed Women
Questions of Sexuality and Citizenship
During Partition
Urvashi Butalia

Borders & Boundaries
WOMEN IN INDIA'S PARTITION
Ritu Menon
&
Kamla Bhasin

The 1947 Archive - Berkeley, California

New structure

New structure (please keep all my wording the same, this is a historical source so it should have as much detail as possible)

All the relevant information should be in this document so nothing needs to be changed

Intro / home page (as is listed in the document)

- Project description
- Importance
- about us

Conflict Overview (as is listed in the document)

- As is listed in this document

Testimonies (as is listed in the document)

- please include all testimonies as they are, with reference to their sources
- If possible; to create an interactive map that lists where each of these events took place, in a section separate from the testimonies

Thematic overview (as is listed in the document)

- Feminist perspectives on sexual violence
- Please keep all wording as it is and include the citations with foot notes

Resources/Context (as is listed in the document)

A small section providing:

historical timeline of Partition

existing scholarship including the sources used in this project

relevant archives

oral-history methodology

further reading

Share a Story

A submission page explaining:

who can submit

what can be submitted

anonymity/pseudonyms

consent

how interviews are conducted

whether submissions can be withdrawn

contact information