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Remembered Borders: Oral Testimony and the Legacy of Partition in India

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Abstract

- Examines oral testimonies and memories of Partition.
- Focuses on lived experiences of violence, migration, and trauma.
- Uses oral history methodology and testimonies from the 1947 Partition Archive.
- Explores memory, identity, and postcolonial belonging.



Introduction

- Partition of India in 1947 caused mass migration and communal violence.
- Approximately 15 million people displaced.
- Official histories often ignore ordinary voices.
- Oral testimonies recover human experiences and emotional realities.



Historical Background

- Colonial divide-and-rule policies intensified communal identities.
- Muslim League's Lahore Resolution (1940) demanded Pakistan.
- Mountbatten Plan implemented hurried Partition in August 1947.
- Punjab and Bengal witnessed severe violence and displacement.

The Times of India
LARGEST SALE in the world...
MUMBAI: FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 1947
PRICE TWO ANNAS

BIRTH OF INDIA'S FREEDOM



NATION WAKES TO NEW LIFE
Mr. Nehru Calls For Big Effort From People
"INCESSANT STRIVING TASK OF FUTURE"
Assembly Members Take Solemn Pledge
WILD SCENES OF JUBILATION IN DELHI

NEW CABINET OF INDIA



STATE VISIT TO KARACHI

FRENZIED ENTHUSIASM IN BOMBAY
Crowds In Festive Mood

The national day was marked with the fervent display of the "Swadeshi" flag and the raising of the Indian flag in the city of Bombay. The people of Bombay greeted the news of independence with scenes of jubilation and frenzied rejoicing.

"Victims of this India, you are now free," said the Prime Minister, "and it is the duty of every citizen to strive for the good of the country."

The Governor of Bombay, Sir John Peel, delivered a message of goodwill to the people of Bombay.

"MAY BOMBAY PROSPER"
Governor's Message
GOOD WISHES TO FREE INDIA

Oral History as Methodology

- Oral history prioritizes lived experiences and personal recollections.
- Research based on interviews collected through the 1947 Partition Archive (2018–2026).
- Captures marginalized voices, emotions, and trauma.
- Memory is subjective yet historically valuable.



Memory, Trauma, and Silence

- Trauma appears through fragmented memories and silences.
- Survivors recall burning villages, refugee trains, and family separation.
- Women's testimonies reveal hidden gendered violence.
- Silence itself becomes a form of memory.



Migration and Displacement

- Millions migrated across new borders during Partition.
- Refugees often believed displacement would be temporary.
- Refugee camps became spaces of survival and rebuilding.
- Migration reshaped identities, occupations, and social structures.



Gendered Experiences of the Partition of India in 1947

- Women faced abduction, rape, forced marriage, and violence.
- Patriarchal notions of honor shaped experiences.
- Women also displayed resilience and agency.
- Oral histories foreground women's voices and experiences.



Collective Memory and Generational Transmission

- Partition memories continue across generations.
- Stories of loss, resilience, and migration shape family identity.
- Nostalgia for pre-Partition coexistence is common.
- Intergenerational memory influences contemporary perceptions.



Politics of Memory

- ◉ Nationalist narratives often simplify Partition experiences.
- ◉ Oral testimonies present diverse and contradictory memories.
- ◉ Stories of intercommunal solidarity challenge communal narratives.
- ◉ Digital archives preserve memories for future generations.



Postcolonial Identity and Remembered Borders

- Borders are psychological and cultural, not just territorial.
- Survivors remain emotionally connected to ancestral homes.
- Partition memories shape nationalism and citizenship debates.
- Oral testimony can encourage empathy and reconciliation.



Conclusion

- Partition remains an unfinished historical legacy.
- Oral testimony reveals emotional and human dimensions of history.
- Memory shapes identity, belonging, and collective consciousness.
- Oral history preserves and reinterprets lived experiences.



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**Thank you very
Much**