

Between Fiction and Reality: Reading the Silences in Partition History

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Abstract : This paper focuses on studying the literary reactions of selected Muslim women writers to the event of Partition of India in the north western region. It aims to explore how Muslim women experienced the Partition and how that experience was articulated through their writing. There is a serious dearth of research on the experience of Muslim women who had to witness the momentous event of the subcontinent. Since scholars have often questioned the silence around the historiography related to the experiences of Muslim women, this paper aims to explore if literature could provide insights that may be less readily available in other modes of narration. Using literature as an archival source, it aims to delve into the arenas of history that have been cloistered and closed. Muslim women have been silent about their experiences of Partition which at the cost of essentializing could be attributed to patriarchal constraints, and taboos, on speaking of intimate matters. These silences have consigned the question of their experience to a realm of anonymity. The lack of ethnographic research has in a way been compensated in the realm of literature, mainly poetry and fiction. Besides reportage, literature remains an important source of social history about Partition and how Muslim women lived through it. Where traditional history fails to record moments of rupture and dislocation, literature serves the crucial purpose. The central premise in this paper is that there is a need to revise the history of partition owing to the gaps in historiography. It looks into if literature can serve as a ground for developing new approaches to history since the question of the representation always confronts us--between what a text represents and how it represents it since imagination of the writer plays a great role in the construction of any text. With this approach as an entry point, this paper aims to unpack the questions of representation, the coalescing of history /literature and the gendered nature of partition history. It concludes that the gaps in the narratives of Partition and the memory of Partition can be addressed by way of using literary as a source to fill in the cracks and fissures.

Keywords : gender, history, literature, partition

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