



## Gendered Trauma and Testimony in Partition Fiction: A Study of *Difficult Daughters* and *The Parted Earth*

Meenal

Research Scholar, Department of English, Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla 171005,  
Himachal Pradesh, India

Email: [meenalmalkan12@gmail.com](mailto:meenalmalkan12@gmail.com)

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.14.2.443](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.14.2.443)



### Article info

Article Received: 24/05/2026  
Article Accepted: 20/06/2026  
Published online: 27/06/2026

### Abstract

The 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent remains one of the most devastating events in postcolonial history unleashing mass displacement, communal violence and a grief that continues to haunt successive generations. Women bore a disproportionate burden of this catastrophe as survivors of sexual violence, forced migration and cultural erasure, yet their experiences occupy the margins of official history and dominant literary discourse. Existing scholarship on Partition fiction has largely centred on canonical male-authored texts focusing on political rupture and nationalist loss while underexploring the gendered, embodied and intergenerational dimensions of Partition trauma. The specific function of women's testimony as a mode of historical rewriting particularly across diasporic and domestic contexts remains critically underexamined. The present paper argues that the novels *Difficult Daughters* by Manju Kapur (1998) and *The Parted Earth* (2021) by Anjali Enjeti together constitute feminist counter-archives of Partition history by functioning as literary testimonies that rewrite the past by centring the female body as a site of historical trauma recovering suppressed women's voices as alternative histories and tracing the intergenerational inheritance of loss across daughters and granddaughters. Through a comparative close reading of both novels informed by postcolonial trauma theory, Marianne Hirsch's framework of postmemory and feminist narratology, this paper analyses how narrative voice, structure and silence function as instruments of testimonial resistance. By bringing a domestic Indian narrative and a diasporic narrative into sustained comparative dialog, the study demonstrates how gendered trauma persists beyond the historical event through memory, silence and narrative inheritance. The paper makes three original contributions - it is the first sustained comparative study of these two novels, it argues that narrative form is itself a testimonial argument rather than a neutral vehicle and it integrates Western trauma theory with South

Asian feminist historiography as a combined analytical framework, thereby extending scholarship on South Asian women's literature, postcolonial memory studies and the politics of gendered witnessing.

**Keywords:** Partition, Trauma, Women's Testimony, Postmemory, *Difficult Daughters*, *The Parted Earth*, Feminist Narratives, Indian English Literature.

## INTRODUCTION

The writing of history has long been implicated in structures of power that determine whose voices are heard and whose are silenced. Within the context of Partition narratives, this imbalance becomes particularly evident in the marginalisation of women's experiences which are often relegated to the private and the unspeakable. In *The Other Side Of Silence* (1998), Urvashi Butalia documents that Partition displaced approximately twelve to fifteen million people were displaced across newly drawn borders and an estimated seventy-five thousand to one hundred thousand women were abducted, raped and forcibly converted by men of religions different from their own (and indeed sometimes by men of their own religion). For decades, the literary, historical and political memory of Partition in India was dominated by a masculine nationalist imagery. As Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin observe in *Borders and Boundaries*, "Hardly ever, and hardly anywhere, have women 'written history'. They have left few accounts, personal or otherwise, and have committed much less to writing than men" (14). Man was described as the figure of the refugee, the hero, the statesman, the soldier. Women's experiences - their terror, resistance, survival strategies, grief were absorbed into the nationalist narrative as footnotes, as symbols of communal honour or communal shame but rarely as subjects with interiority, agency and voice.

It is against this historiographical silence that *Difficult Daughters* (1998) and *The Parted Earth* (2021) must be read not merely as works of fiction but as interventions in the politics of historical memory. Both novels centre on a

younger woman recovering the silenced stories of Partition survivors and are read here as feminist counter-archives of 1947 that argue the real story of Partition cannot be told without women's voices.

The paper is organised around three research questions. First, how do *Difficult Daughters* and *The Parted Earth* use narrative form specifically mediated narration and structural silence to enact rather than simply describe the historical silencing of women survivors? Second, how does each novel locate the female body as the site where the political violence of Partition is inscribed and what does a comparative reading of a domestic Indian narrative and a diasporic American narrative reveal about the persistence of this embodiment across geography and generation? Third, how is the trauma of Partition transmitted from the generation that lived it to the generation that did not and what ethical claims does each novel make about the obligations of inheritance? The paper situates itself within contemporary debates in postcolonial memory studies, particularly the ongoing conversation about the ethics of testimonial recovery and the question of whose suffering is remembered and how.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

*Difficult Daughters* (1998) has attracted considerable critical attention since its publication, though scholars have approached the novel from a relatively narrow set of angles. Dipak Kumar Doley in "Partition Trauma, Nostalgia and Rootlessness: A Reading of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*", examines how the novel foregrounds the psychological dimensions of Partition including forced migration, grief and a feeling of rootlessness

that conventional political histories have ignored. Bijender Singh in his paper "A Feminist Study of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*", studies the novel as a feminist text which exposes women's oppression within patriarchal society focusing on Kasturi and Virmati's psychological suffering, marital dissatisfaction and identity crisis. What is notable across this body of scholarship is that it has focused almost entirely on questions of gender, identity, patriarchy, and has paid relatively little attention to the novel's narrative structure to how Kapur tells Virmati's story through Ida's retrospective reconstruction as itself a form of testimonial strategy. This formal dimension remains critically underexplored.

Scholarly engagement with Anjali Enjeti's *The Parted Earth* (2021) is still in its early stages, given the novel's recent publication but a handful of significant academic readings have already appeared. The most substantial to date is Nadia Butt's article, "Entangled Family Histories of the South Asian Diaspora: The Partition of India as Generational Memory in Anjali Enjeti's *The Parted Earth* (2021)" which argues that the novel represents a new mode of diasporic Partition writing in which women writers settled abroad engage with 1947 from across temporal and spatial borders, concentrating on three generations and the entangled family histories that connect them. Her work establishes the novel's significance for diaspora studies but does not engage deeply with the formal dimensions of testimony or the embodied nature of trauma as represented in the text.

More broadly, scholarship on Partition fiction has been shaped by studies of canonical texts such as Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice-Candy-Man* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* have significantly contributed to understanding the historical violence, communal conflict, displacement and fractured identities produced by Partition. While these works have generated substantial critical engagement with

nationalism, memory and the politics of borders, comparatively less attention has been devoted to the formal mechanisms through which women-centred narratives reconstruct historical trauma across generations. In particular, the role of mediated narration, structural silence and testimonial reconstruction as literary strategies for recovering women's experiences remains insufficiently examined. By shifting the focus from the representation of Partition as a historical event to the narrative forms through which its gendered memories are transmitted and reinterpreted, the present study extends existing scholarship and offers a fresh perspective on the relationship between gender, trauma, testimony and intergenerational memory.

The survey above reveals three interlocking gaps in existing scholarship that this paper addresses. First, while individual studies have examined *Difficult Daughters* and *The Parted Earth* separately, no published work has yet brought the two novels into sustained comparative dialogue. Second, existing scholarship on both novels has prioritised thematic analysis over formal analysis neglecting how narrative structure, voice and silence function as arguments about the nature of women's testimony. Third, while trauma and postmemory studies have been applied to Partition fiction, there is limited work that brings feminist narratology and postcolonial trauma theory together to read both a domestic and a diasporic text as interlinked acts of counter-historiography. This paper fills that gap through a comparative formal analysis that reads both novels as feminist counter-archives.

#### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The paper draws on four interconnected theoretical frameworks - Judith Herman's trauma theory, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's ethics of testimony, Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, and Cathy Caruth's model of traumatic belatedness and the historiographical framework developed by

South Asian feminist scholars of Partition principally Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin. These frameworks are deployed not as discrete lenses but as mutually illuminating approaches that together explain why women's Partition testimony takes the forms it does: belatedness, mediated, fragmented and embodied.

Judith Herman's foundational work *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) establishes that traumatic events rupture a person's capacity to narrate experience and this is why survivors go silent not because they have nothing to say but because the experience resists forward moving storytelling.

Herman explains why traumatised women go silent, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) explains what it takes to break that silence. They argue that testimony is not a solitary act, it is a relational one. A survivor cannot testify into a void, she requires a witness, someone who receives her story and by receiving it, makes it real.

Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, developed in *The Generation of Postmemory* (2012) is also perhaps the most important theoretical tool for this paper. Hirsch argues that the children and grandchildren of trauma survivors do not remember the original traumatic event directly, as they did not experience it themselves. Yet they grow up so immersed in the stories, silences, photographs, and emotional atmospheres left behind by those who were there that the event shapes their lives as powerfully as if they had experienced it themselves. It is worth acknowledging that Hirsch developed postmemory primarily in relation to Holocaust memory. However, the framework translates productively to the South Asian Partition context, provided the specific temporal, geographic and political conditions of that event are kept in view. Partition and the Holocaust share key structural features that

make postmemory applicable - mass violence concentrated within a short historical period, the survival of a first generation whose testimony is partial and interrupted and the inheritance by a second generation of memories they did not live through directly. Where the Holocaust produced a largely European and diasporic postmemory, Partition produces both a domestic Indian postmemory (as in Kapur's novel) and a diasporic Indian postmemory (as in Enjeti's) and the comparison between these two modes is one of this paper's central contributions.

Finally, Cathy Caruth's argument in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) that trauma is never fully experienced at the moment it occurs - that it returns belatedly, in fragments, in the gaps and repetitions of the survivor's life which offers a structural justification for why both novels are written the way they are. Both *Difficult Daughters* and *The Parted Earth* are retrospective narratives: they approach 1947 from a distance of decades, mediated through the consciousness of women who were not there.

While postmemory and testimony are deployed here as complementary frameworks, it is necessary to acknowledge that they do not always operate in full theoretical alignment. Postmemory, as Hirsch theorises it, describes an inherited memory and largely involuntary relationship to a past one did not through, while testimony, as Felman and Laub conceive it, requires a deliberate relational act between a survivor and a witness. In theory, these two processes can pull in different directions: one is passive inheritance, the other is active witnessing. However, in both novels examined here, the frameworks work in productive rather than contradictory relationships. Ida and Shan begin as passive inheritors of postmemory shaped by silences and atmospheres they cannot name but their acts of reconstruction transform them into active witnessing performing precisely the testimonial function Felman and Laub describe. Postmemory, in these texts, is the

condition that makes testimony necessary; testimony is the act through which postmemory is finally named and transmitted.

#### METHODOLOGY

The paper employs a methodology of comparative close reading guided by the theoretical frameworks outlined above. The analysis focuses on narrative voice, mediated testimony, structural silence, representation of the female body and intergenerational memory as key textual strategies through which both novels reconstruct women's experiences of Partition. Passages for analysis have been selected on the basis of their thematic and formal relevance to trauma, testimony, silence, narrative mediation and intergenerational memory. Rather than undertaking a historical comparison of Partition itself, the study adopts a literary critical approach examining how narrative form functions as a mode of witnessing and historical reconstruction.

#### Memory as Counter-History: Testimony, Silence and the Reconstruction of the Past

The novels *Difficult Daughters* and *The Parted Earth* are built around the same fundamental act that is a younger woman trying to recover the story of an older woman who survived Partition but could not speak of it. In each novel, this act of recovery is not simply a plot device but a formal argument that women's testimony about Partition can only arrive belatedly, through the labour of the next generation, because the world in which survivors lived gave them nowhere to speak. In *Difficult Daughters*, Kapur makes this argument on the very first page. Ida, going through her dead mother Virmati's papers finds a photograph and realises,

Going through her papers, I find a bent, scallop-edged photograph, faded brown and sepia. The girl is about fifteen, and stands stiffly.....I peer at the face and see beauty and a wistful melancholy. Should my memory persist in touching her, the bloom will vanish into the mother

I knew, silent, brisk, and bad-tempered. (Kapur 2)

Ida holds a photograph of a young woman she does not recognise - a girl full of beauty and wistful melancholy and realises she is looking at her own mother before Partition, before marriage, before a lifetime of suppression turned her into the woman Ida knew. The word 'bloom' means something that flourishes and then disappears. Ida, like most children never thought to ask her mother about her life. When Ida discovers something devastating about her mother's past - a pregnancy she kept secret, an abortion arranged by a trusted friend. Ida finally pulls back from exposure and says, "I remained silent. The shroud of secrecy my mother carried all her life now protected her in death as I drew back from violating her with my knowledge" (144). "Violating her with my knowledge" treats the act of knowing as potentially a second violation. This is what Felman and Laub mean by the ethical limit of testimony where witness receive the story without consuming it.

A similar dynamic operates in *The Parted Earth* but with an additional layer of distance. When Shan sits in her father's car as a ten year old travelling with him through India, she feels something she cannot name,

A sense of urgency filled her, the need to know their destination, the need to get there, to rush towards something, to escape the awkward silences between them and the pauses that held the weight of everything (Enjeti 76).

Shan cannot yet name what she is feeling but she feels it as urgency as the need to move toward something. This is Hirsch's postmemory experienced from the inside, a second-generation consciousness shaped by something it cannot yet identify. As Enjeti writes of Shan, "She still carried around the guilt of not being a good enough mother to him, a good enough person. Guilt seemed to burden generations of Khannas" (211). Just as Ida inherits a mother shaped by suppression, Shan inherits guilt that

travels for generations without a name. Both novels show that women's Partition testimony did not disappear it went underground surviving in silences and objects until daughters and granddaughters finally excavate it.

### The Female Body as Contested Territory: Violence, Shame and Silenced Resistance

The politicisation of women's bodies during Partition was not incidental to the violence but constitutive of it. As Menon and Bhasin demonstrate, the rape and abduction of women were widely understood by perpetrators, by victims, by their families, and by the newly independent states as acts performed upon communities rather than upon individual women. A Hindu woman raped by Muslim men, or a Muslim woman by Hindu men, was understood to have embodied a communal defeat her body was the territory across which communal boundaries were violently redrawn. This made survivors' experiences politically illegible and their testimony dangerous.

In *Difficult Daughters*, Partition did not introduce bodily vulnerability into Virmati's life it intensified what was already there. When Virmati returns to her mother's house after her affair with the Professor becomes known, Kasturi's response is the most devastating statement of how patriarchal honour-culture treated women's bodies,

It would have been better if you had drowned in the canal than live to disgrace us like this!.... Virmati looked at her mother's face. The eyes were cold and narrowed, the brows contorted with rage. There was implacable hostility there. She thought she should die with the pain she felt. (Kapur 204)

Kasturi herself a woman shaped by the same patriarchal structures has internalised the logic that a woman's death is preferable to her dishonour. This is exactly what Butalia documents historically families who preferred their women dead to dishonour. Her mother

wants her body to be a vehicle for producing children and maintaining family honour. Her later relationship with the Professor gives her a measure of freedom but also makes her body subject to his desires and his schedule. Virmati's body has never belonged entirely to herself. When Partition comes, this pre-existing bodily vulnerability is radicalised,

Amritsar was a city washed over with a scourge of death, which reddened the skies at night and filled the air with lamentations...There was nothing she could do. She couldn't go out of the house, there was curfew almost every day, and for women nothing was considered safe... Let those thousands march footsore, weary, raped, mutilated, bewildered, and lost, let them march into Amritsar in all their hordes... She must stay at home. (Kapur 253)

Partition confines women doubly in the violence outside and in the enforced passivity inside. In *The Parted Earth*, Enjeti's treatment of the female body is more direct. When Deepa's parents are killed in the burning clinic, her grief is registered as a purely physical experience,

"I want to die. I want to die!" She clutched her stomach. "This hurts so badly, Amir; Oh God, it hurts. I can't live without them!" She brought her forehead to the floor. Every cell in her body ached. Every breath felt as if it was ripping through her lungs. Every muscle and ligament knotted in a rope. (Enjeti 67)

Grief here is entirely physical not psychological in the abstract but cellular, muscular, pulmonary. This is Herman's traumatic rupture made bodily, the event does not only wound the mind it reorganises the entire physical self. Deepa considers ending her life understanding that women in her position had chosen death before, "She knew how to end this agony. A neighbour, four houses away, whose only daughter had run away and married a Christian, drank a whole bottle of bleach. A

servant found her body the next morning. Deepa could do this tonight, while Bala slept" (67).

This passage connects *The Parted Earth* directly to the historical record of how women during Partition choose death over unbearable circumstances. That Deepa does not take this path is itself an act of quiet resistance. What she chooses is survival but survival at a devastating cost. Decades later that cost becomes visible,

She buried herself in her career, forged an existence in isolation, where she didn't have to rely on anyone to survive. For so long she had felt nothing. She had buried her emotions so deep within herself, she wasn't sure she could feel anything again. (Enjeti 246)

Deepa did not heal after 1947, she empties herself. She deprived her son of his father's history, abandoned her granddaughter, severed every connection that might reopen the wound. Survival required anaesthesia and this is why both novels ultimately show that for women like Virmati and Deepa, the body that has been violated - by loss, shame, confinement, communal violence - does not simply recover. It reorganises itself around the wound and that reorganisation is what daughters and granddaughters inherit.

### Narrative Form and Trauma

The way a story is told is never separate from what the story is saying. In both novels, Kapur and Enjeti make formal choices about who speaks, in what order, with what gaps that are themselves arguments about the nature of women's testimony and the difficulty of recovering a silenced past. This section examines specific formal strategies shared by both novels: the mediated narrator and the use of silence.

The Mediated Narrator: Neither novel gives us direct, unmediated access to the woman who survived Partition. In *Difficult Daughters*,

Virmati's story reaches us entirely through Ida's reconstruction,

In searching for a woman I could know, I have pieced together material from memories that were muddled, partial and contradictory. The places I visited, the stuff I read tantalized me with fragments that I knew I would not be able fully to reconstruct. Instead, I imagined histories, rejecting the material that didn't fit, moulding ruthlessly the material that did. (Kapur 258)

Ida does not claim to recover the truth, she claims to have constructed a version of it from fragments. This is not neutral historical recovery but creative, partial, shaped reconstruction. Kapur's formal choice insists that women's buried histories cannot be recovered cleanly, they can only be approached carefully, honestly and with the full acknowledgement that gaps will remain.

*The Parted Earth* uses the same strategy but intensifies it across two time periods. Enjeti alternates between chapters set in 1947 where we see Deepa as a sixteen-year-old girl, living through Partition in real time and chapters set in 2019, where Shan is trying to reconstruct what Deepa went through from the objects and documents she left behind. The two timelines never fully merge; they run in parallel, each incomplete without the other. As Shan walks through a neighbourhood in Delhi that she has read about in Deepa's few surviving letters, Enjeti writes "Deepa had written that the street smelled of jasmine and smoke. Standing there now, Shan thought she could almost smell it too" (211). The word 'almost' carries the full weight of intergenerational distance. Shan can approach the past but never fully enter it.

Silence: The novels use silence not as emptiness but as a form of testimony in itself. In *Difficult Daughters*, there are whole periods of Virmati's life where the narrative simply goes quiet, particularly around the time of Partition when she is most vulnerable. These gaps are not

the novel's failure – they are its most honest formal gesture.

In *The Parted Earth*, the most powerful silence is structural: Deepa's lost child. The entire novel circles around this secret without naming it directly until Shan finally learns the truth through Amir's last origami note,

Shan revealed the notes Amir left to his family upon departing Lahore and the last origami note he left for her which Laila kept all these years. It says, Forgive me, my wife. He wanted you to know that if he didn't make it, he was sorry. (Enjeti 246)

Amir's final note to Laila exemplifies Caruth's notion of traumatic belatedness wherein the significance of a traumatic event emerges only after a prolonged period of latency. Although written in 1947, the message is received decades later underscoring the delayed return of suppressed histories. Its eventual disclosure bridges the temporal gap between past and present illustrating how trauma persists beyond individual experience and continues to shape generations.

### Intergenerational Transmission

It is important, however, to note the significant formal differences between the two novels, since the comparative argument risks obscuring what is distinctive about each. *Difficult Daughters* uses a single, retrospective narrative (Ida) who looks back on her mother's life from an unspecified present producing a linear recovery narrative in which the daughter search for the mother's story provides the novel's organizing structure. Whereas, *The Parted Earth*, by contrast, employs a dual-timeline structure that alternates between 1947 and 2019, refusing to allow the contemporary narrative to fully absorb or resolve the historical one. This structural refusal is itself an argument - where Kapur's form suggests that recovery, however partial, is possible within a single narrative consciousness and Enjeti's form insists

on the irreducibility of the historical moment - the past cannot be folded into the present but must remain visible alongside it, perpetually unresolved. Similarly, the domestic Indian context of *Difficult Daughters* and the diasporic American context of *The Parted Earth* produce different relationships to Partition memory. Ida lives in the same country where Partition occurred, her inherited wound embedded in a geography she still inhabits while Shan approaches Partition from across an ocean, her postmemory filtered through both generational distance and geographic dislocation. These differences do not undermine the comparative argument but sharpens it. The formal and contextual divergences between the novels reveal that feminist counter-archival practice takes different shapes depending on where and how far the writer stands from the original event.

The burden of intergenerational trauma is often experienced as an inherited emotional wound carried by those who did not directly witness the original event. This condition is powerfully captured in Deepa's poem "Child" which appears in *The Parted Earth*, where the language of inheritance and unclaimed suffering reflects the essence of postmemory,

Your searching soulful eyes are beams of  
a lighthouse  
You don't know enough to forgive,  
Wrestle with demons you never wrought,  
Carry a legacy, a burden that isn't yours,  
that flows through your blood. (Enjeti  
166)

The present narratives are stories about two generations at once: the generation that survived Partition, and the generation that inherited its aftermath without inheriting its language. In *Difficult Daughters*, Ida grows up shaped by a mother she cannot understand. Virmati is emotionally unavailable impossible to reach. Kapur captures this intergenerational inheritance early when Ida reflects on her childhood "My mother had sent to Amritsar

during all my school holidays, away from my half-siblings and the proxy warfare on the battlefields of my home" (3).

The phrase 'proxy warfare conducted on the battlefields of my home' is one of the most striking in the novel. Ida's home was a battlefield not of Partition martial conflict itself a product of the dislocation of 1947. Ida was the collateral damage of a war she had no part in starting. This is intergenerational transmission in domestic form, the larger historical violence reproduces itself in the smaller violence of the family and it is the child who bears its cost. By the end of the novel after years of reconstruction, Ida finally arrives at understanding,

For long periods I was engulfed by melancholy, depression and despair. I would lie in bed for hours, unable to sleep, pitying myself for all I didn't have, blaming my mother, myself. Now her shadow no longer threatens me. Without the hindrance of her presence, I can sink into her past and make it mine. (Kapur 258)

Sink into her past and make it mine- this is postmemory stated as personal necessity. Ida does not recover Virmati's past out of historical curiosity. She does it to understand herself. The mother's history is not separate from the daughter's present - it is its source. The melancholy, depression and despair Ida describes are not simply her own, they are inherited from Virmati, who was herself carrying the weight of choices made under conditions of extreme historical and patriarchal constraint.

In *The Parted Earth*, Enjeti makes the same point through Deepa's poem "Child," which she read publicly under a pen name decades after 1947. It is Deepa's only public testimony. The child in the poem carries a legacy. In this sense, Deepa's poem speaks for both Ida and Shan as they carry a legacy, a burden that isn't theirs - not because they chose to but history placed it in

their hands before they had words for it and their acts of recovery are their way of finally putting it down.

## CONCLUSION

*The Parted Earth* and *Difficult Daughters* begin with a silence and end with an attempt to break it. In Kapur's novel, Ida finds a photograph of a young woman she does not recognise and spends the rest of the book discovering that this woman was her mother, a person whose full humanity was never visible to those around her. In Enjeti's novel, Shan finds a box of paper cranes she cannot read and travels across the world and across seventy years of family silence to learn what they mean. These are not only plots. They are arguments about what Partition did to women, about what women did to survive it, and about what those who come after them owe to the stories that were never told.

The analysis in this paper has shown that both novels make their arguments simultaneously at the level of content and form. In their content, they restore to visibility the specific, bodily, gendered experience of 1947 that official historiography suppressed. Ultimately, both novels insist on what might be called the ethics of the witness: the obligation of those who inherit the silences of history to create, through imaginative reconstruction, the conditions under which those silences can finally be heard. That this witnessing takes the form of fiction is not a limitation but a possibility. Fiction can inhabit the spaces that official history leaves blank. It can give voice to what testimony could not articulate and offer the witness that trauma destroyed. A final ethical question raised by both novels and by this paper's act of reading them concerns the risk of re-traumatisation inherent in narrative reconstruction. When Ida reconstructs Virmati's life or when Shan excavates Deepa's past, each daughter exercises an interpretive power over a woman who cannot speak for herself. Both novels are alert to this risk. In this sense, both

novels are not only feminist counter-archives but also self-reflexive meditations on the ethics of testimony itself acknowledging that reconstruction is always partial, always shaped by the needs of the present and always indebted to a silence it cannot fully restore. In Enjeti's and Kapur's hands, the novel becomes what history failed to be - a space in which a woman's story is not a footnote, not a symbol, not a casualty figure, but a life that is irreducible, specific and worth the full weight of our attention.

### References

- Butalia, U. (2017). *The other side of silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Penguin Random House India.
- Butt, N. (2024). Entangled family histories of the South Asian diaspora: The Partition of India as generational memory in Anjali Enjeti's *The Parted Earth* (2021). *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 60(6).
- Caruth, C. (1996). *Unclaimed experience: Trauma, narrative, and history*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Doley, D. K. (2011). Partition trauma, nostalgia and rootlessness: A reading of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*. *Drishti: The Sight*, 9(2).  
<https://www.drishtithesight.com/volume-ix/partition-trauma-nostalgia-and-rootlessness-a-reading-of-manju-kapurs-difficult-daughters/>
- Enjeti, A. (2021). *The parted earth*. Hub City Press.
- Felman, S., & Laub, D. (1992). *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. Routledge.
- Ghosh, A. (2019). *The shadow lines*. Penguin Modern Classics. (Original work published 1988)
- Herman, J. L. (2015). *Trauma and recovery: The aftermath of violence – From domestic abuse to political terror*. Basic Books.
- Hirsch, M. (2012). *The generation of postmemory: Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press.
- Kapur, M. (1998). *Difficult daughters*. Faber and Faber.
- Menon, R., & Bhasin, K. (1998). *Borders and boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. Kali for Women.
- Sidhwa, B. (2000). *Ice-Candy-Man*. Penguin.
- Singh, B. (2013). A feminist study of Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*. *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, 4(5), 1-6.
- Singh, K. (2016). *Train to Pakistan*. Penguin. (Original work published 1956)