

The Displaced Woman

Narratives from Survivors of the Partition of Bengal in 1947

Memory and age are usually inversely proportional. Time can be a monumental opponent, often in favour of erasing details till a sharp mental image is reduced to a blurry, edgeless memoir of what was. This paper was conceptualised in 2017, 60 years after the Partition of India in 1947 to document the narratives of women who found themselves on the wrong side of the line; and had to abandon life as they knew it on the other side of the border diving West Bengal and East Pakistan. It was a race against time to record memories of the last generation of survivors who have personal experiences with the largest mass displacement in the world. The objective was to contribute to the effort of acknowledging and accounting for displacement induced trauma, not limited to sexual violence. This paper broadly categorizes women's journeys across the border into 'sheltered' and 'unsheltered' migration, and looks into the implications of both on their rehabilitation, social class and access to life opportunities. Since it is an Oral History research endeavour, it retains the fluidity of the narratives, including the respondents' lives before, during and after the Partition-induced displacement.